

# MISSION<sup>TM</sup> FRONTIERS

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A MAGAZINE OF THE U.S. CENTER FOR WORLD MISSION

## BREAKING THE SILENCE

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**22** WHY SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE TRANSLATIONS  
ARE ESSENTIAL IN REACHING THE DEAF

**/ 06** THE DEAF: AN UNREACHED  
PEOPLE UNLIKE ANY OTHER

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An Unreached People Unlike Any Other

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# OUR MANDATE: TO SEE ALL BELIEVERS EQUIPPED TO DISCIPLE OTHERS, INCLUDING THE DEAF.



RICK WOOD  
/ EDITOR, MISSION  
FRONTIERS

Every person on earth has the right to know and understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our job as the Church to work in the power of the Holy Spirit with all the wisdom and insight that God can give us to make this access a reality for every person. The Deaf are no exception to this.

The Deaf deserve to have access to the gospel like anyone else and so far they have been left behind. Even in gospel-rich America, only 2% of the Deaf have come to faith in Jesus. They are a hidden, unreached people in the midst of all others. The *Ethnologue*, ([www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)) lists 130 sign languages but as it says in the article on page 22, “researchers estimate the actual number of sign languages may exceed 400. However, no sign language anywhere in the world has a complete Bible, leaving the Deaf as the most Bibleless group in any population.” While the Deaf are not a single people group, no other group in the world of similar size lives under such “Scripture poverty.” This issue of MF is about changing this unacceptable situation and equipping the Deaf to make disciples of the Deaf so that all the Deaf have access to the gospel.

Simply having a sign language translator in our “hearing” church services will not work. Sermons are geared to people who have grown up hearing, reading, and understanding spoken languages well. Simply translating spoken languages into sign language will not convey the truths of Scripture in the heart language of the Deaf. It will also certainly not equip the Deaf to take the message of the gospel to other Deaf people and their communities. They need the Bible in their own sign languages.

It will take concerted and tenacious effort to overcome the communication barriers that have kept the Deaf isolated from the gospel as well as from those within their own families and communities. We are talking about potentially hundreds of millions of people who are currently cut off from the gospel.

Solid figures are hard to come by. The Deaf are often difficult to find because they are hidden away in

families who feel shame at having a Deaf child and few hearing people know their sign language well enough to communicate with them. But there is renewed hope for changing these circumstances.

Twenty-five years ago we featured ministry to Deaf people in *Mission Frontiers*. Since then there has been a growing number of concerned Christian leaders who have been working to reach the Deaf with the gospel and employing the latest technology to do so. It is now conceivable that with dedicated effort we can see all the Deaf have access to the Bible in a sign language they can understand. It is a definable task. It will only take time, talent, resources and commitment in order to see complete Bibles in each of the hundreds of sign languages that will need a translation.

But a sign language translation in every language that needs one is only the first step toward training and equipping the Deaf to reach the Deaf. Equipping the Deaf to reach the Deaf must be our ultimate goal. Because hearing people cannot fully understand what it is to be Deaf and how this affects the way the Deaf learn and process information, the Deaf will always be the best people to reach other Deaf people with the gospel in order to achieve a growing disciple-making movement among the Deaf. Remember our ultimate goal in every people is the development of disciple-making and Church-Planting Movements that will provide access to the gospel to every person. This is also what we must work towards in reaching the Deaf.

## AFRICA COMMITS ITSELF TO MAKING DISCIPLE-MAKERS—SO SHOULD WE!

Once in a while I run across something that gives me real hope for the future of world evangelization. Ghana 2013 and its “Challenge” is one such thing. The report on Ghana 2013 starts on page 33 and the Ghana 2013 Challenge follows it. It is clear to me from their Challenge that they “get it” when it comes to world evangelization. Let’s take a close look at the section of the Ghana 2013 Challenge on Disciple Making that states:

“We acknowledge our mandate as the church of Jesus Christ to disciple all nations, teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded. We recognize that *the primary purpose of the church is to be a forum for discipleship* (emphasis mine)

and the exercise of spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. We confess that we have left the church woefully undisciplined and unequipped for the work of the ministry. We further acknowledge that many of our leaders have not received the discipleship they needed or still need. We call upon the Church to equip the next generation of leaders by providing a solid discipleship foundation through mentorship. We acknowledge that the biblical model of discipleship is based on living life together, not just preaching and teaching, but authentic living through coaching, mentoring and demonstrating. *We covenant before God to make discipleship a priority within the Church, to equip believers with godly mentors, and to see every believer empowered to disciple others in the same way.*” (emphasis mine)

These African leaders have stated in succinct fashion the mandate that Jesus has given to every church and every believer and which I work to communicate in every issue of *Mission Frontiers*. The job of the Church is to train and equip disciple-makers who will then disciple others and to do so in every people! As it says above, *preaching and teaching are not enough*. Much more is required than passive listening. Equipping disciple-makers involves “*authentic living through coaching, mentoring and demonstrating*” where the required skills are mastered through repeated practice and active involvement in making disciples. Discipleship is an intentional life of relationships in which all of us are called to be involved. We must not continue to leave the work of

ministry to the professional pastor or missionary alone.

These African leaders have covenanted together before God to accomplish this mission of making disciples and “*to see every believer empowered to disciple others.*” This is a commitment

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that every biblical church and believer *should* be willing to make and I encourage all of us to do so. *Our churches must become “training centers” to send out a new wave of disciple-makers and church planters to every people.* This is what the leaders of Africa have committed their churches to become in the Ghana 2013 Challenge and I applaud them for it.

These African leaders also acknowledge that, “*we have left the church woefully*

*undisciplined and unequipped for the work of the ministry.*” They are not alone in their failure. This is a common condition in many churches all around the world. But we do not have to continue in this failure. We can change and there are successful biblical models of discipleship that are fostering movements to Jesus all over the world that we can adopt and adapt as needed. But we must ask ourselves: Are we willing to be as honest as these African leaders have been and admit our ongoing failure to equip all of God’s people for the work of ministry? Are we willing to repent and move in a new direction? Are we willing to face the fact that we must do more than just preach and teach? Your answer and mine in response to these questions will go a long way in determining whether every person on earth gains access to the gospel or not.

There are not enough professional pastors or missionaries to bring access to the gospel to every person. The only way that access can be provided to every person is for most believers to be trained and equipped as disciple makers who go on to train and equip other disciple makers and plant reproducing churches. We have to unleash the enormous potential of the Body of Christ that we have left undisciplined and unequipped. Only when the millions of potential disciple-makers who are sitting on the sidelines are trained and released into every people will every person have access to the gospel. 

+ FEATURE

# THE DEAF

AN UNREACHED PEOPLE UNLIKE ANY OTHER



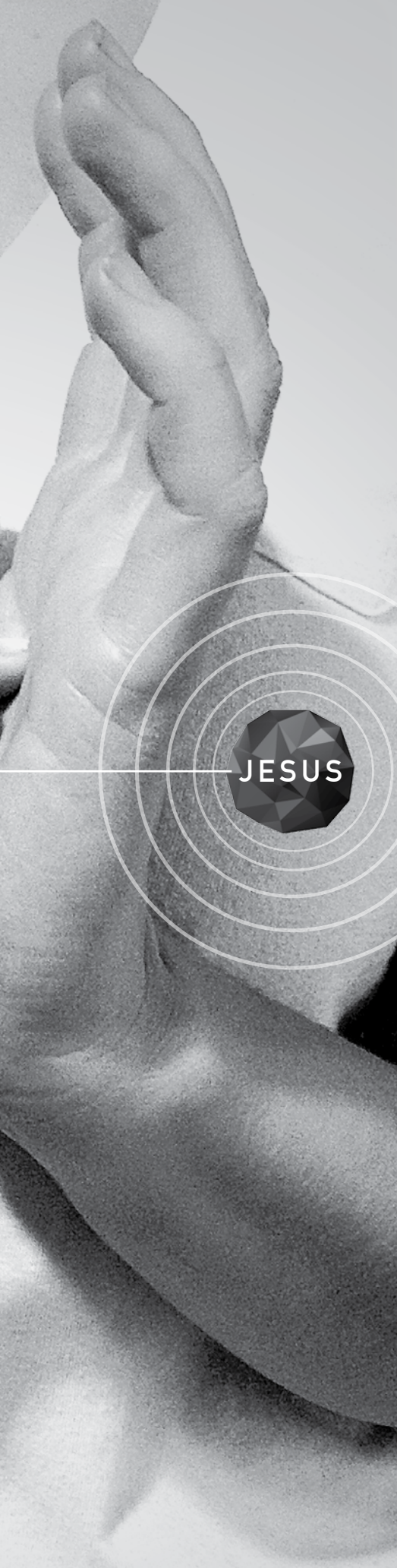
## CHAD ENTINGER

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Chad can be reached at [chadentinger@deafmissions.com](mailto:chadentinger@deafmissions.com).







I often tell people that there are advantages to being Deaf. With my hearing aid, I have “selective hearing.” I can turn my hearing aid on, but I can turn it off, too! How well do you think I sleep at night? Great! I take my hearing aid off so I don’t hear anything when I sleep. And Deaf people have an advantage with sign language—we can talk about other people and they don’t know it!

While there are advantages to being Deaf, the sad reality is that many Deaf people do not know they have a tremendous disadvantage—they do not know Jesus as their Lord and personal Savior. It has been reported that out of an estimated 250 to 300 million Deaf people in the world, only 2% of them are Christians. That means 98% of Deaf people will miss out on the blessing of eternal life with Jesus in heaven. Deaf people are among the largest unreached people groups in the world.

You may be wondering, “Why is it that so many Deaf people do not know Jesus?” Here’s a story that may help you understand, and within this story you will see some of the obstacles to Deaf people learning about Jesus.

Years ago, I witnessed to a Deaf man, Chuck\*, who was not a Christian. While visiting with Chuck, he shared that his parents always brought him to church, but he never understood what was going on. Apparently, he did not have an interpreter and no one in the church communicated with him in sign language. His impression from the church, while growing up, was that the preacher’s main job was to make money from church. Why did he think this way? All he saw, and clearly understood, was the offering plate going around and people putting their money in there. Then, the offering plate would be given to the preacher in front of the congregation and he had a big smile on his face as he talked. He was probably praying for God’s blessing upon the offering, but the Deaf man did not understand this, as he couldn’t hear. Because of his negative experiences growing up in the church, he wanted nothing to do with Jesus and his church.

This is an all too common experience for Deaf people. Deaf people are often abandoned, neglected and isolated, even within the church. Outside of the church they experience the same in their families and work places. In some countries where there is a lack of social and government services, parents abandon their Deaf children because they don’t know what to do and where to go for help. Some parents also see Deafness as a curse to get rid of. This explains why there are many Deaf orphans. Deaf people are often looked down upon, too. In many countries, Deaf people do not have equal rights. For example, in some countries Deaf people are not allowed to drive. When I was in the Philippines years ago, I could only drive if I had a hearing person in the passenger seat.

Nine out of ten Deaf children are born to hearing parents. In the United States of America, only 23% of parents with Deaf children learn to communicate through sign language. The percentage is probably much less in many other

countries. Family, friends and churches often do not learn sign language skillfully enough to clearly communicate God's Word to Deaf people. Again, like Chuck, many Deaf people have felt isolated within their own families and churches. We need a better way to reach the Deaf.

I have shared another challenge in reaching Deaf people in my personal narrative in *Deaf Diaspora* by Bob Ayres. The Deaf community is a scattered population. Deaf people are not concentrated in one specific geographic area; they are scattered and live all over the world. I have asked hearing children to name different countries around the world. Answers have included China, Austria, Afghanistan and Russia, among others. I remember one four-year-old boy answered, 'Texas!' (Yes, Texas isn't a country, but it sure is big enough to be its own country!) My point in asking children to name different countries is that Deaf people live in each of these countries. Hence ministry to this scattered population is extremely difficult. It would not be like having a Chinese ministry and going to China to reach Chinese people.

Exacerbating the challenge is that spoken and written languages, such as English, are often a second language for Deaf people. Therefore they find it difficult to read and understand the Bible in spoken and written languages used by a majority of churches. Deaf people want, and need, God's Word in a language that they can see and understand, in their first and heart language—sign language.

A desire to overcome the challenges outlined above is why there are churches, ministry organizations and people active in ministering among Deaf people. God is on the move, working through many to overcome these communication, language and geographic barriers to bring Deaf people to him.

### THE ULTIMATE GOAL: THE DEAF REACHING THE DEAF

All of us have the God-given opportunity and blessing of making disciples who disciple others. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." We see this come to fruition in the Book of Acts when his disciples made disciples who made disciples. God's kingdom multiplied.

With the Deaf being a widely dispersed unreached people group, traditional mission approaches do not work best. As is the case with any other unreached people group, the Deaf are uniquely gifted to evangelize and disciple their own people. One of the best approaches is the development of movements of "disciples reproducing





THE BIBLE, GOD'S WORD AND ETERNAL LIFE-SAVING GOSPEL MESSAGE, IN SIGN LANGUAGE, IS THE GREATEST RESOURCE FOR DEAF DISCIPLES WHO EVANGELIZE AND DISCIPLE OTHERS. DEAF PEOPLE ALSO NEED TO BE TRAINED ON HOW TO UTILIZE THESE TYPES OF RESOURCES.

## CHURCH

disciples" led by Deaf people among the Deaf around the world. Hearing people can be catalysts and supporters in making this happen, as we need both Deaf and hearing people working together to reach Deaf people.

It has been estimated that there are 400 to 500 different sign languages around the world. The Bible has not been translated into most of these sign languages. There is a huge and critical need for more Deaf people to get involved in this kind of work so that one of Deaf people's barriers—language access—can be removed. The Bible, God's Word and eternal life-saving gospel message, in sign language, is the greatest resource for Deaf disciples who evangelize and disciple others.

Deaf people also need to be trained on how to utilize these types of resources. That's why there are discipleship-training programs specifically for Deaf people, including the Deaf Missions Training Center. Through this training program, Deaf people are being trained and equipped with the Bible in American Sign Language, among other resources, to become more effective in evangelizing and reproducing Deaf disciples who will then disciple others, too. Students are being mentored and taught by Deaf instructors. They are seeing firsthand how Deaf and hearing people work together in a ministry environment. Rancho Sordo Mudo in Mexico has a disciple-training program, too, where Deaf Mexicans are being trained so they can go out and effectively disciple Deaf people

throughout Mexico. Deaf Opportunity OutReach (DOOR) is doing the same in Africa and India.

Deaf and hearing people can support this kind of movement by praying faithfully, getting Deaf people involved in Bible translation work, sending Deaf people to these unique training

experiences and with financial gifts.

## BRING THEM TO JESUS

The Gospel writer, Mark, tells the story of Jesus healing a Deaf man in Mark 7:31-35 (NIV).

*Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was Deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.*

*After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.*

What does this passage teach us? This passage teaches us to bring Deaf people to Jesus! There is a particular phrase in this passage that stands out to me. It's in verse 32, "There some people brought to him [Jesus] a man who was Deaf and could hardly talk..." There some people brought to Jesus a man who was Deaf. It doesn't matter who these unnamed, unsung missionaries were, what truly matters is what they did. They brought the Deaf man to Jesus. I personally believe that when Jesus said, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"), the man was not only physically healed, he was spiritually healed. He had met Jesus and now knew him.

## SO, HOW DO WE BRING DEAF PEOPLE TO JESUS?

First, *communicate* with Deaf people. As mentioned above, Deaf people are a scattered people group and we do not all live in one geographic location. So, you might meet a Deaf person that those of us involved in Deaf ministry

may never meet. You might meet a Deaf person where you work, or perhaps your friend's brother is Deaf. Maybe a neighbor down the street is Deaf, or could it be someone you'll come across at a restaurant. This Deaf person may not know Jesus. I want to encourage and challenge you to step out of your comfort zone and find ways to communicate. Be creative. You could try using whatever sign language you know. Write back and forth using paper and pen or type back and forth on your laptop or phone. Or use gestures. When you communicate with Deaf people, be genuine and sincere. Don't show pity but approach with a loving and respectful attitude. Spend time with them and build relationships. As the Holy Spirit leads, share the gospel of Jesus with them.

Second, *connect* the Deaf people you meet with churches and ministries serving Deaf people. Look for a church in your area that ministers among Deaf people, whether a Deaf church or church with a Deaf ministry. Some Deaf ministry organizations, including Deaf Missions, offer resources especially for Deaf people and their families. On Deaf Missions website ([www.Deafmissions.com](http://www.Deafmissions.com)) there are online videos available for Deaf people to view. These videos include sermons and daily devotions for Deaf people of all ages and Bible stories for Deaf children in sign language (some have voice-overs/subtitles). Deaf Video Communications' website ([www.Deafvideo.com](http://www.Deafvideo.com)) offers hundreds of online Bible videos in sign language, too.

Various organizations and people are working faithfully and diligently to translate the Bible into the native languages of Deaf people throughout the world. In the United States, Deaf Missions has been translating the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into American Sign Language (ASL). Since this work began in the early 1980s, the entire New Testament and portions of the Old Testament have been completed and are now available to Deaf people in ASL, their first and preferred language. Through the partnership of Deaf Missions and Deaf Bible Ministry and rapid advances of technology, people can now download this version (ASLV) of the Bible onto their iPhones, iPads and Androids. Since this was made possible in November, 2012, more than 100,000 people have downloaded the ASLV onto their portable media devices!

Different ministries, including Deaf Missions, Silent Blessings, Deaf Opportunity OutReach (DOOR) and DeafTeen Quest (DTQ), conduct programs and conferences to train and equip Deaf and hearing people to become more effective in Deaf ministry. Furthermore, many sponsor camps and mission trips reaching out to Deaf people throughout the world.

## GOSPEL




Third, *contribute* to churches and ministry organizations serving Deaf people with your prayers and finances. Like gasoline for an automobile, God can use your prayers and finances to enable those of us working on the front-line of Deaf ministry to become more effective in bringing Deaf people to Jesus and discipling them.

You might meet one Deaf person in your lifetime. Jesus talked about the importance of one in Luke 15. This entire chapter shares three of Jesus' parables that all have the same theme—the shepherd who found his lost sheep, the woman who found her lost coin and the father whose lost son came back home—all rejoiced over one!

One time I had the tremendous joy and honor of sharing Jesus with a Deaf woman, Katie\*. She shared that she had read the Bible in English but was frustrated because she had a hard time understanding God's Word. Furthermore, she recounted her negative experiences of growing up in the church. Her parents had taken her to church every Sunday morning. But similar to Chuck, she didn't get much out of the church. People there did not know sign language skillfully enough to communicate God's Word to her. She felt lonely and isolated.

After listening to her story of growing up in the church, I knew right there and then that she needed God's Word in her first and native language, American Sign Language. She was shown different verses from Deaf Missions' ASLV Bible on a television screen. Her eyes literally lit up as she watched the verses that communicated God's plan of salvation. The Word of God "spoke" clearly to her in her heart language, a language she could understand. As a result, she committed her life to Jesus, repented and was baptized in Christ.

Katie now has an advantage—through the Word of God in her native language she can now look forward to eternity in heaven with Jesus. There are millions out there with a terrible disadvantage. What will we do to reach them? 

*\*Names changed intentionally.*



# REACHING THE DEAF

## AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE



REV. RICK MCCLAIN,  
D. MIN

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Dr. McClain began his pastoral ministry in 1984 and has pastored both hearing and deaf churches in five different states. Beginning in 2006, he has been teaching for Deaf Online University, and a variety of other organizations (Deaf Teen Quest, Deaf Missions, Tri-State Deaf School of Theology, etc.) with an objective to teach and train deaf leaders for service in ministry. Dr. McClain can be reached at: [rev.rick.mcclain@gmail.com](mailto:rev.rick.mcclain@gmail.com), and 443-397-9487, VP.

The videophone lit up in my office years ago and displayed an unknown number. At the other end of the conversation was a video relay interpreter helping to facilitate a conversation with the Senior Pastor of a large metropolitan church that was interested in beginning a ministry with the Deaf. “We want to begin a ministry with the Deaf community, here in our town. I am calling to investigate the feasibility of such a ministry. Would you be interested in being a part of this conversation?” After dispensing with the pleasantries, I asked the pastor a question, “Why do you want to begin this ministry?” His response was, “Well, to be honest, I really don’t know. A member in our church has a Deaf relative and asked me to consider a proposal to begin a ministry with the Deaf. I am now beginning the investigation—getting all of the facts, putting my feet in the water before I jump in the pool!” I asked if he had any connections with the Deaf community, friends, family, or otherwise, and he responded, “No, not really. But if this is what God wants us to embark upon, I’m *willing to do whatever it takes*<sup>1</sup> to do his will.”<sup>2</sup>

You may have thought about a deaf ministry in a similar manner. Someone may have come to you and asked, “Pastor, I have a burden for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Can we consider a ministry for them, here?” What steps, concerns should you have and what direction should you go with this? This may be at the forefront of each pastor’s mind as they attempt to make proper and prudent decisions regarding the practicality of beginning any type of ministry. And it should be. But there is a different element involved in working with the Deaf community that is not present in the establishment of any other ministry—determining to work with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is not simply a language issue. It is more of a relational issue.

In my discussions, I usually share that there are five different approaches to beginning a ministry with the Deaf. There are obvious pros and cons inherent with each approach as represented by the chart below:

The chart teaches and promotes a *progression of ministry* from an integrated approach to Deaf church. As you move down the scale there is a progression that moves from a higher percentage of hearing involvement to a higher percentage of Deaf involvement the more the ministry is Deaf-centered. The reason being is that in the initial phase of every ministry, a deaf person is *introduced* to the church, its purpose, process, and

### DEFINITIONS OF VARIOUS DEAF MINISTRIES<sup>3</sup>

Ministry Type	Description	Main Focus	Strength	Weakness
Integrated (Interpreted)	A ministry in which the Deaf and hearing worship together.	Providing Services for the Deaf. Seeks to incorporate Deaf into hearing worship, and Church Life.	Hearing led, Church operated ministry. Music, preaching is provided on a weekly basis. Minimal funding requirements.	In this model, the Deaf are either not involved, or the ministry seems to be impersonal to the Deaf and insensitive to Deaf community values.
Separate (Incorporated)	A Ministry in which the Deaf have a separate Sunday School class, and perhaps a separate Wednesday evening class conducted in their language. Worship is with the hearing Church.	To provide a substantial ministry that meets the needs of the Deaf for Biblical and discipleship living.	The Deaf have an opportunity to have their social and spiritual needs met in their own language. Minimal funding requirements.	Moving into the hearing services, the average Deaf person will feel a huge disconnect between their world and the world of the hearing Church.
Segregated	A ministry where the Deaf have their own facilities, classes, and worship experiences within the structure of the hearing church. There is a quarterly combined worship with the hearing church.	Providing opportunities for the Deaf to grow, teach, impact, and disciple within their community in their own language. Connection with the hearing Church is maintained for training, discipleship, and implementation of ministry. No separate board activity, but there is a Deaf Ministry Committee established.	This is a Deaf-led ministry, but with substantial hearing involvement. The Deaf are being encouraged to assume responsibility for their ministry.	Increased funding requirements. Much training is required to reach this level. Hearing participation is still evident, and even encouraged. Danger of reverting back to hearing "control" is present.
Deaf Ministry	A Ministry where the Deaf are meeting independent of the hearing church. A facility may be provided, but responsibility is not entirely on the shoulders of the Deaf ministry for leadership, etc.	Teaching the Deaf to become more active involved in the missional aspect of reaching the deaf with the gospel. A separate board is developed, but responsible to the administration of the hearing Church.	This is a Deaf-led ministry, but with decreasing hearing involvement. The Deaf are being encouraged to assume all responsibility (financial, leadership, etc.) for their ministry.	Funding requirements are shared. Extra caution must be given to the supervision and communication of events, budging, and affairs of ministry in order to ensure some independence, and shared responsibility.



Deaf Church (Independent)	A Ministry where the Deaf are meeting independent of the hearing church. A facility may be provided, but responsibility is entirely on the shoulders of the Deaf ministry for leadership, etc.	The Deaf are more active involved in the missional aspect of reaching other Deaf with the gospel. A separate board is developed, but is not responsible to the administration of the hearing Church.	This is a Deaf-led ministry, but with evident hearing involvement. The Deaf assume all responsibility (financial, leadership, etc.) for their ministry.	Funding requirements are solely on the shoulders of the Deaf ministry, and are even more limited than a small “country church.”
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its potential. The *purpose of the ministry* is to introduce the deaf person not only to the church, but also to Jesus Christ. As the deaf person moves forward in their spiritual journey there's a greater assimilation into the church and empowerment for ministry. This assimilation fosters an increasing awareness of maturity, and confidence in the call of God upon their lives in ministry. The most important statistic for consideration is *not* the number of Deaf people in ministry, or the funding that is required for sustaining the ministry. The most

important consideration is the number of deaf people *involved in active, relational ministry*.<sup>4</sup>

This implies an assumption of responsibility by the Deaf for ministry and an increased willingness to be open for training and implementation within the church.

An interpreted ministry must not be viewed as the only option, nor is having a fully organized Deaf church to be the only goal. One must be aware of the importance of ministry within the specifics of the Deaf culture—a culture that is complete with its own language, behavior, and perspective of music and the arts. One must consider the resources available for the church, as well as within the community. The Deaf culture is defined and influenced by the people that make up the culture. One must also consider the personality of the Deaf community to whom they minister.

The nuances of the Deaf culture are different. Young Deaf people grow up, graduate from high school, go to college and rarely return home again. Young Deaf couples have hearing children, and when the kids are grown and gone, so are their ties to the hearing world.. What makes the difference between success and failure? Simply, it is summed up in one concept; relational ministry. The

stronger your integrity in the relationships you (or your leaders) have in the Deaf community, the stronger your trust will be in and from the community. This will move on to strengthening your impact on the lives of the Deaf, displaying the strength of your leadership, and deepening life experiences within the church.

The Senior Pastor that called me that day? He began his ministry with the Deaf on a progressive experience, with a simple introduction to the Deaf community in the life of this young deaf man with whom he became a close friend.

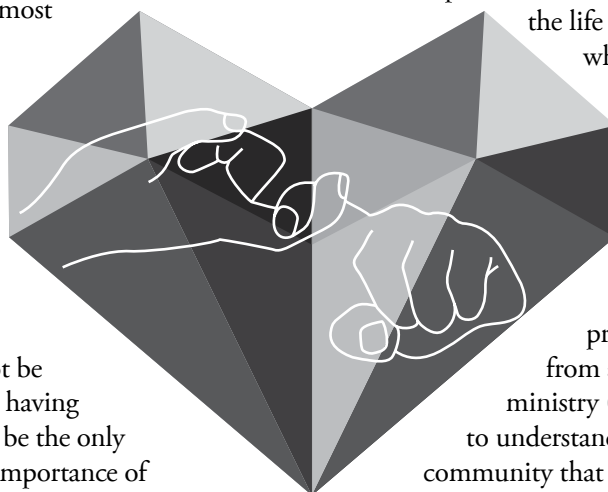
He learned his language, and he became a part of his world. As the young man grew up, he also grew in his faith—in his ability to live and share his faith with others. The ministry

progressed, one person at a time,

from an interpreted ministry to a Deaf ministry (not a Deaf church) as he began to understand the specific needs of the Deaf community that were not being met through his preaching (because of language differences, cultural differences, etc.). The Senior Pastor adapts his schedule to work with both the Deaf and hearing. Occasionally, he preaches

for the Deaf in their services.

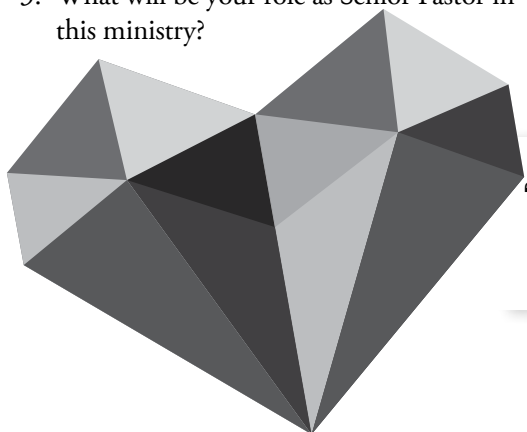
The Deaf community knows he is an unusual pastor. They know he cares for them; he makes himself available for them, and supports them. They know they have someone that serves them not as a service provider, but someone that works and lives alongside them, understands their needs and their struggles. In short, he has become a servant of his community and, as Paul admonishes, “... become [Deaf]...to all the [Deaf] in order that [he] might win some.”<sup>5</sup> His *greatest joy* is seeing the Deaf serving and training other Deaf for the work of ministry.



## FRIENDSHIP

Here are some of the questions one must ask in beginning a ministry with the Deaf:

1. Why are you beginning this ministry? Is this a burden of the Lord upon your heart, or is this simply to fill a community need?
2. What type of ministry are you envisioning? What type is best for our community? Why?
3. What will be your role as Senior Pastor in this ministry?




“... BECOME [DEAF]...TO ALL THE [DEAF] IN ORDER THAT [HE] MIGHT WIN SOME.”

4. What is the response of the people in your church/Board for this ministry?
5. What kind of financial commitment will you make for this ministry?
6. Who will be in direct supervision of the ministry? How will you delegate responsibility for the ministry?
7. What resources do you have within the church for this ministry?
8. What connections do you have with the Deaf community? Are you aware of the various resources within the Deaf community for this ministry? Are there other ministries/churches in the area that have a Deaf ministry? What will be their response to your start-up? How will you handle negativity/lack of support for your start-up?
9. What road map will you devise that will allow the Deaf to assume leadership of the ministry? How will you develop training and discipleship for this purpose?
10. How will you sustain the ministry in purpose and in existence?

11. What will the Deaf ministry look like in 5 years? 10 Years?

As Scripture teaches, we must be willing to count the cost before we begin any ministry endeavor.<sup>6</sup> Scripture also promises that whatever God has called us to do, he is faithful in empowering us to complete.<sup>7</sup>

Come ... let's proceed into the Deaf world and make disciples of them, teaching them to observe all things he has commanded us, and let us remember ... in the low moments of our lives, he is always there with us—through it all!<sup>8</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Emphasis, mine.

<sup>2</sup> I have been asked NOT to disclose the name, or location of the pastor and the church in this story. His story is complete with struggles, mistakes and successes. While he is unusual and unique, his methods and the passion he has for the deaf is not. He believes he is simply following the Master whom he serves. He currently serves as a pastor of a large-sized hearing church, and consistently has an average of 20–25 deaf people in his services. He reports that when the deaf have their own services, the average jumps to 35–40. This type of setting is not typical within deaf culture.

<sup>3</sup> Gratitude is given to Dr. Donnie Wiltshire, Coordinator of Deaf Ministries with the North Carolina Baptist Convention of the Deaf. This chart was originally given in a class lecture, “Teaching and Leading the Deaf.” I have modified this chart for the purpose of this article. If there are questions, please contact me at rev.rick.mcclain@gmail.com.

<sup>4</sup> This is the premise and foundation of Youth for Christ/Deaf Teen Quest desire to impact the deaf community in a relational ministry context. Gratitude, however, for this perspective must be given to Dr. John Maxwell who stated that the church operates on the concept that “20 percent of the people are doing 80 percent of the work of the church. Our goal is to increase the percentage of the people doing the work of ministry, and thereby sharing the ministry workload better. Evangelism then will be more evident.”

<sup>5</sup> This is a loose interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9:19.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 14:28

<sup>7</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

<sup>8</sup> A paraphrase of Matthew 28:19-20



# DEAFBIBLE

## WORKING UNTIL ALL THE DEAF HAVE SEEN



### J.R. BUCKLEW

J.R. Bucklew is a C.O.D.A. (Child of Deaf Adults).

Growing up in the Deaf world and being involved in Deaf ministry is when he felt the call to move to Africa. J.R. helped in establishing a Deaf church and worked to help several organizations develop a focus and program for the Deaf in Ethiopia. He currently is the Director of Deaf Bible (creators of the Deaf Bible App) a ministry founded by Faith Comes By Hearing. Please visit [www.DeafBible.com](http://www.DeafBible.com) for more information about how you can be involved. You may contact the author at [jrbucklew@DeafBible.com](mailto:jrbucklew@DeafBible.com) or by phone at 505.338.6885

As a C.O.D.A. (Child of Deaf Adults), I grew up stuck between two worlds. There was the visual, 3D, Deaf world that my parents lived in, and then there was the loud, labeled, text-based, audible world that others lived in. I was not deaf, but being the first born in my home, I grew up in the world of my parents and my heart language was Sign.

Being hearing, I was, of course, expected to live and function in that world as well. I often found myself in awkward situations, having to interpret for my parents. With the pressures of translating conversations, phone calls, and many other things, I eventually became angry with the Deaf world, and simply wanted one world to live in.

It wasn't until I was a little older that I realized why God had put me in such a situation. I came to understand that the Deaf are one of the largest unreached and unengaged people groups in the world! However, they have long been pushed aside and ignored by the hearing world. The problem wasn't merely that there was very little being done among the Deaf—it was that the efforts being made weren't working. The hearing church had unknowingly tried to force the Deaf into an unfamiliar culture that they couldn't truly be a part of.

The primary problem, at least as I saw it, was the false assumption that the same evangelism and discipleship tools that worked for a hearing audience would also work for the Deaf.

Let me take a moment here to deal with a common misconception. American Sign Language (for example) is not simply English put into hand motions. It is an entirely different language; as different from English as any other foreign tongue. Therefore, it is not a word-for-word rendering of English, but a unique system of gestures and expressions, with their own language rules, that communicate ideas or concepts (often apart from individual words). So, when we expect Deaf people to read words written in English, it is literally a second language to them. In fact, many Deaf have never learned to process information using individual words, since they think, pray, dream, and communicate in concepts rather than words. Even the Deaf who can read often refer to written text as a “flat” language—as opposed to the highly visual, creative, three-dimensional language in which they communicate.

Try as they may, most churches (even those with sign language interpreters) are filled with hearers, and everything that takes place in church services is programmed for hearers. The music, the preaching, and even the fellowship are based on a culture that moves and reacts to sound. This makes it nearly impossible for a deaf person to understand or respond—let alone interact with others. As with any other unreached people group, the best way to overcome these cultural barriers is through a truly

indigenous movement using truly indigenous tools.

We shouldn't let this concept surprise us, as it was first given to us by the apostle Paul, who said, "For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings"

MY DEAF FRIENDS WERE BLOWN AWAY BY THESE VIDEOS AND WOULD SIT GLUED TO THEM FOR HOURS—JUST AS OTHER INDIGENOUS GROUPS DO WHEN EXPERIENCING THE WORD OF GOD IN THEIR HEART LANGUAGE FOR THE FIRST TIME. THESE TRANSLATIONS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME THE LANGUAGE BARRIER.



(1 Corinthians 9:19–23). So to the Deaf, we must become as the Deaf, in order to win the Deaf.

Because of this, ministries that have focused their work among Deaf people have developed brand new visual tools using sign language. An excellent example is the American Sign Language New Testament translation produced by Deaf Missions, which has been widely distributed to the Deaf through VHS and DVD.

As a missionary among the Deaf in Ethiopia, I used to carry a video recording of this translation to rural villages and show them to Deaf audiences. Later, I was overjoyed to receive a DVD (produced by DOOR International) with recordings of 32 portions of Scripture translated into Ethiopian Sign Language. These portions were chosen and arranged in such a way that salvation was explained to a Deaf culture. My Deaf friends were blown away by these videos and would sit glued to them for hours—just as other indigenous groups do when experiencing the Word of God in their heart language for the first time.

These translations made it possible to overcome the language barrier.

However, I was also aware of an even greater barrier—the social stigma often attached to the Deaf. Tragically, in many parts of the world, deaf people are considered to be stupid, slow-learning, or even demon-possessed. As a result, they are often hidden by their parents, denied access to school, and completely cut-off from society. Others are abandoned and become homeless, with all the issues inherent to that life—begging, drug addiction, prostitution, and so forth—simply because they are born Deaf!

In such places, the Deaf are literally hidden from sight. So then how can you make Sign Language Bible translations available to people you can't even locate?

These were some of the issues that I was



I KNEW THAT IN OUR INCREASINGLY CONNECTED WORLD, MANY DEAF PEOPLE (EVEN IN VERY REMOTE AREAS) HAVE SMARTPHONES, VIDEO-PHONES, AND/OR ACCESS TO COMPUTERS. FOR THE FIRST TIME, I SAW THAT MODERN TECHNOLOGY WAS MAKING A WAY FOR THE DEAF TO “SEE” NO MATTER WHERE THEY WERE.

wrestling with as I found myself (by divine coincidence) at an event hosted by an Audio Bible ministry called Faith Comes By Hearing. In the midst of all the conversations and presentations about audio recordings of Scripture, a presenter shared the vision for reaching deaf people all over the world through a smartphone app that would allow access to the various Sign Language Bible translations available. My mind began to race as I thought about the possibilities and potential reach.

I knew that in our increasingly connected world, many Deaf people (even in very remote areas) have smartphones, video-phones, and/or access to computers. For the first time, I saw that modern technology was making a way for the Deaf to “see” no matter where they were.

Sensing a “God” connection, I went on staff at Faith Comes By Hearing to help establish the ministry of Deaf Bible. Since then, God has done even more than I could have imagined. In November 2012, the Deaf Bible app was launched; it has already been downloaded over 100,000 times all over the world and user feedback has been overwhelmingly favorable.

Deaf Bible wants to come alongside translation partners who are working to translate Scripture into the various

sign  
languages  
of the world  
and give  
viable means

Whatever the mechanism—Deaf Bible mobile app, Internet, video-phones, solar-powered tablets, SD cards, or DVDs—the goal is to make the Bible available to the Deaf, in their heart sign language, through any means they can gain access to it. This is the vision of Deaf Bible: to work “until all the Deaf have seen.”

I recently attended a Deaf potluck. In the building’s entrance was a table with a paper labeled, “Write your name, address, and information.” A deaf man named Ian approached me to ask what the paper said. After I explained it to him in sign, we began a conversation and I noticed that he had a mobile phone. I encouraged him to download the Deaf Bible App and begin to watch the Bible. A few months later, I saw Ian again. He eagerly

these partners a  
of Scripture distribution.



approached me as soon as he saw me and began to sign excitedly. To my amazement, he was telling me a portion of the book of Romans that he had memorized!

For the first time in his life, God's Word came alive to Ian as he accessed it in his heart language. And he was able to access it through a device that he was already carrying around in his pocket!

You could say that the very Word of God became Deaf so that the Deaf would understand and that their hearts would be won over.

It has been such a joy and privilege to come alongside Deaf Missions, SIL, DOOR International, and other translation partners, to see this become a reality. We have a shared vision to get portions of Scripture translated and distributed for 75% of the world's Deaf by 2025.



I KNOW

Each sign language translation that we can make available, via multiple technologies, has the potential to touch

millions of Deaf people just like my friend Ian—people who have been overlooked by the church for far too long. We foresee a day when groups of the Deaf will gather around screens (large or small) to corporately “see” the Word of God in their heart language. These groups would discuss what they’re learning and create brand new Deaf churches using truly indigenous forms of preaching, worship, and fellowship; ultimately reaching out to others in the Deaf community and even becoming missionaries to other Deaf cultures. In short, we envision multiplying movements all over the world of Deaf people making disciples of other Deaf people and Deaf churches planting more Deaf churches so an ever-growing number of Deaf people are coming to know, love, and serve our Savior. MF

# WHY SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE TRANSLATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL IN REACHING THE DEAF

## BRIGHT LITTLE

Bright Little (pseudonym) was born Deaf, and received a better education than many Deaf people in her country. She works for Spring Team (pseudonym) in Southeast Asia. Bright Little is one of the consultants in training (CiT) and supports several sign language Bible translation teams in Asia. Bright Little is currently serving on the Asia Pacific Sign Language Development Association (APSDA) board. To contact the author send your emails to: [office@apsda-deaf.org](mailto:office@apsda-deaf.org).

The APSDA office will forward any messages to the author.

About 29 years ago, I came to know Jesus and accepted him as my Lord and Savior. Since then, I have been attending the church that I currently attend. It is an English-speaking church which has a ministry to the Deaf. At the beginning, there were only five to eight Deaf members. Today, there are about 40 of us, including those who are not highly educated.

Like the hearing members, we each own a written Bible in English. Some of us are able to read well, others can only read at a certain level, but cannot understand well the meaning of the message. Others cannot read at all. Those who need help have asked me to read selected Bible verses and sign to them. On Sundays, sermons are interpreted into sign language. Even with that, they still ask me to explain what the message is about. It has been a struggle since the beginning.

This is a common difficulty faced in churches with Deaf ministries in my country. When I first started attending church, I would never have thought it would be nice to own a Bible in sign language, my own heart language. A few years ago, I happened to watch a DVD containing New Testament passages in American Sign Language, yet I did not take it to heart. Some time in 2011, I was asked to assist one translation consultant in a sign language Bible translation workshop in a Southeast Asian country. Through the workshop, I came to understand the importance of a sign language Bible translation project for every Deaf community in the Asia-Pacific area.

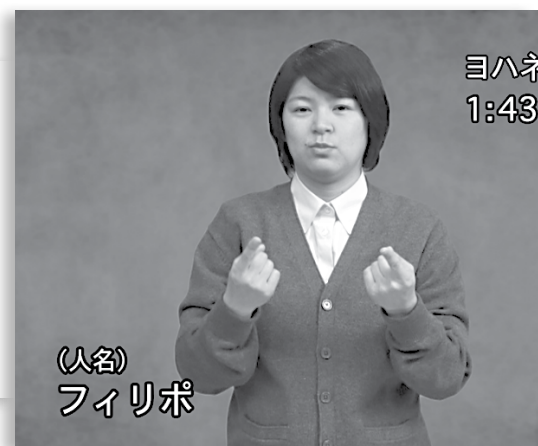
At the same time, the need to own a Bible in sign language, our heart language, was so urgent that we, the project team, decided to set up a translation project in our home country. Currently, we are working on translating the first set of Chronological Bible Stories (CBS) “Know God How,” and hoping to move on to do the second and third sets (“Follow God How” and “Serve God How”). After the completion of CBS, we plan to work on a full Bible text translation. We know it is a long term project with many challenges, but with God’s grace, we believe we will produce a Bible in our very own heart language.

I believe that there is a similar urgency for every country in the Asia-Pacific area. At present, a few countries have set up sign language Bible translation projects. Some of the groups are translating CBS while others are working on verse-by-verse translations. One of them is working on sign language pictorial Bible stories. In many Asian countries, both Deaf and hearing people are still not aware of the importance of sign language Bible translations. The Deaf who understand its importance are not able to

set up a project due to several factors. One major difficulty we have faced is the lack of funding. Many Deaf are either workers with low wages or unemployed. They are not able to contribute money. In addition, we face the lack of public understanding and support. The public, especially hearing people, do not understand why Deaf people need a Bible in sign language. People who were born Deaf or became Deaf at a very young age have been learning language via a visual mode. They struggle to learn any spoken or written language which depends heavily on audibility.

expressed, “Why does a hearing person always lead the Bible class? I wish I could lead the Bible class but I am illiterate. There is nothing I can do.” When given responsibility to lead a prayer, Mary (pseudonym), another Deaf member, would express, “Not me. Not me. I don’t know how to pray. I don’t understand these words of prayer.” I believe with the Bible in sign language, the Deaf will be able to learn God’s Word, grow in their biblical knowledge, and lead study groups without depending on hearing people. Deaf will learn that the Holy Bible is for everyone, not just the hearing.

PEOPLE WHO WERE BORN DEAF OR BECAME DEAF AT VERY YOUNG AGE HAVE BEEN LEARNING LANGUAGE VIA A VISUAL MODE. THEY STRUGGLE TO LEARN ANY SPOKEN OR WRITTEN LANGUAGE WHICH DEPENDS HEAVILY ON AUDIBILITY.



There are several reasons for the importance of having a sign language Bible translation project in every country. First, it is often misunderstood that sign language is universal. Actually, sign language is not universal. For example, the sign “father” in American Sign Language may be understood as “chicken” in Korean Sign Language or “very-big” in Myanmar Sign Language. “Woman” in Japanese Sign Language has the same handshape as “bad” in Malaysian Sign Language. Nevertheless, with simple basic gestures, I can communicate with Deaf from other countries at a superficial level, not deep conversation topics. Recalling a meeting I had attended in Japan, I was at a loss and needed an interpreter. Therefore, a Bible in sign language produced in one country can only be fully and easily understood and well-comprehended by Deaf in that country alone.

Second, a Sign Language Bible produced in one country can promote a sense of belonging and independence among Deaf Christians. When the Deaf have their own Bible in their heart language, they can “read” (watch) it daily by themselves and understand it. They do not need to wait for other people to explain or interpret for them. They can also have their own Bible study classes without having to depend on hearing people. I remember, once in a Bible class, John (pseudonym), a member of the Deaf ministry at church,

Third, many Deaf in the Asia-Pacific countries have yet to know Jesus and believe in Him. Both hearing and the Deaf can work together in evangelism but the Deaf need to take responsibility because the Deaf have some advantages in reaching out to other Deaf. We, Deaf, understand each other because we use sign language to communicate and it is easier for us to share the Good News in sign language among the Deaf communities. A friend, Matthew (pseudonym), questioned his own ability to share the gospel, “I am not sure if I can share the Good News with Deaf lost souls. I don’t know how to read Bible verses. How can I explain it to others?” Mark (pseudonym), has also expressed, “I have a hard time understanding Bible verses in English. Even if I give these printed tracts to other Deaf, they won’t read these tracts.” It is important that Deaf can study the Bible in sign language and comprehend the message, then they will be able to share with others. They will grow in the knowledge of God and will eventually be able to lead, and become pastors or evangelists to take the gospel to the Deaf communities.

Fourth, a Sign Language Bible produced in one country will demonstrate that the sign language used in that country is a true language for the Deaf. It has its own language structure and grammar. A Bible in sign language, I believe, will prove





ONLY LATER IN LIFE, I LEARNED THAT SIGN LANGUAGE IS A TRUE LANGUAGE WITH ITS DISTINCT LINGUISTIC SYSTEM. IT HAS THE SAME KIND OF EXPRESSIVE POWER AS A SPOKEN LANGUAGE.


that God's Word is able to be shared in sign languages, not just in spoken and written languages. In the past, like other Deaf, I used to think sign language was broken English because I thought sign language we used daily was based on English, but did not follow English structure and grammar. In addition, Deaf as well as hearing tend to assume that sign language is just for daily communication. Only later in life, I learned that sign language is a true language with its distinct linguistic system. It has the same kind of expressive power as a spoken language. I believe that the availability of sign language Bibles in different media applications and modern technology will prove that sign languages used by the Deaf communities are true languages.

They are not based on any spoken or written languages. Hearing people will learn and accept sign languages as true languages for the Deaf. I hope one day all Deaf will express what Mariam (pseudonym) did, "Great! Now I can understand what God says spiritually. Sign language helps me a lot in understanding spiritual things."



Fifth, setting up a translation project would create professional job opportunities for the Deaf. The

highest level of education that most Deaf would have obtained would be the completion of secondary school or vocational school. In some countries, there is a substantial number of Deaf who have never gone to school. In general, few Deaf make it to tertiary education. So, the Deaf usually work as blue-collar workers or office assistants. However, a sign language Bible translation project team is formed of Deaf translators, Deaf videographers, Deaf video editors, Deaf artists, Deaf annotators, Deaf translation consultants, and so forth. Those jobs are semi-professional jobs. Deaf people will feel worthy of contributing their talents / skills to a huge project, which will benefit the Deaf communities and their societies at large. In some countries, community development may be needed for those Deaf adults who have never been to school or in the remote villages which do not have schools for the Deaf. Services and support such as teaching sign language and basic living skills, building schools and basic amenities, and other things help develop a community in need. It also means that providing community services will create professional job opportunities for the Deaf. In other words, setting up a sign language Bible translation project would empower Deaf people in many ways.

On behalf of APSDA (Asia Pacific Sign Language Development Association), I seek your prayer, moral and financial support in our efforts to promote sign language Bible translations in the Asia Pacific region. 

# EQUIPPING THE DEAF, TRANSFORMING LIVES

## REACHING THE DEAF IN ASIA PACIFIC THROUGH SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE TRANSLATION



APSDA, is an International Deaf-led, faith-based organization to promote sign language Bible translation and development of sign language and Deaf Community in Asia Pacific.

Since its beginning in 2011, APSDA is committed to serving and empowering Deaf people throughout Asia Pacific. APSDA is comprised of 15 member organizations and was incorporated as a General Incorporated Association in September 2012 in Japan.

[www.apsda-deaf.org](http://www.apsda-deaf.org)  
[office@apsda-deaf.org](mailto:office@apsda-deaf.org)

**T**hough Eiji was born and raised in Japan and still lives there, Japanese is a foreign language to him. He began attending church when he was a student and now he is a pastor, but still finds it difficult when he reads the Japanese Bible to prepare Sunday sermons or a Bible study. Eiji is Deaf. He has never heard Japanese—or any language. He has learned to read it, but the language he learned primarily is Japanese Sign Language, a language he can see. When he reads the Japanese Bible, his sense is that he only understands it superficially. The Word does not deeply touch his heart...

His hope and prayer is to have the Bible in Sign Language, the first language of the Deaf. He wants to read the Bible by himself without depending on hearing people or Deaf people whose reading abilities surpass his own. And it's not just Eiji. Deaf Christians around the world are praying for this as well—without a Bible, how can they reach the Deaf people who have never heard or seen God's Word?

Today, many Bible translation initiatives are happening all over the world, all aimed at giving people the opportunity to understand God's Word in their own heart language. However, there's one group of languages that has been left out from this movement; sign languages.

The World Federation of the Deaf reports that there are more than 70 million Deaf people in the world and the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities acknowledges that sign languages are real languages and that Deaf people have the right to use sign languages as their languages. The *Ethnologue* (a web-based publication that contains statistics for 7,105 languages and dialects) lists more than 130 sign languages and researchers estimate the actual number of sign languages may exceed 400. However, no sign language anywhere in the world has a complete Bible, leaving the Deaf as the most Bibleless group in any population. Even in a country like the United States, where Christianity is still a majority religion, only 2% of the Deaf community are Christian because Deaf people are left in "Scripture Poverty."

But change is coming. And Deaf people are leading the way. In November 2011, Deaf Christian leaders from 12 countries gathered in Korea and established the Asia Pacific Sign Language Development Association, APSDA, to promote Sign Language Bible Translation (SLBT) and the development of sign languages and the Deaf community in Asia Pacific with a vision "to help Deaf people understand they are valued and loved by God and to affirm their dignity."

## THE BIRTH OF APSDA

The first seeds for APSDA started being sown back in the 1990's. Noting the work of the American Sign Language (ASL) Bible project in the US, Eiji was among those with a vision to see something similar in Japan. After several meetings with leaders representing Deaf churches and ministries, Japan Deaf Evangel Mission (J-DEM/ViBi) was established in 1993. Along with the movement in Japan, the Auslan (Australian Sign Language) Bible Project was set up in Australia in 1997. In 1999, Eiji visited Australia to experience how sign language Bible translation works. He continued to share the vision and talked about sign language Bible translation at various opportunities including



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with the Asia Deaf Christian Fellowship and found that there are many Deaf Christians in Asia Pacific who share the same vision. They started to discuss how they could support each other and to work together to accomplish this vision. In 2009, the Asia Sign Language Translation Association, ASTA, was established with only Asian countries involved. In November 2011, when Australia and New Zealand joined the movement, the Asia Pacific Sign Language Development Association, APSDA was officially established and Eiji was elected as the first President.

## ACTIVITIES OF APSDA

### 1. Monthly online board meetings

APSDA is governed by board members who represent member associations and all the board members are Deaf. They hold monthly online board meetings to discuss important issues in Sign Language using a video conference system. Although each country's sign language is different, as is true of spoken languages, board members can still communicate without interpreters using international signs, a kind of pidgin sign language, which is not as conventionalized or complex as natural sign languages.

During the meetings, we often face technical difficulties, as Internet access in some countries is slow. However, we are thankful that God has prepared the circumstances so

that we can hold online meetings when board members live in seven different countries. If APSDA had been established 10 years ago, there would have been no way to run APSDA, an international organization, in this way. "For everything there is an appointed time, even a time for every affair under the heaven."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1) We are confident that God is telling us, "Now is the time."

### 2. New sign language Bible translation projects

Although APSDA has only been in existence for a few years, we are already making a difference. New SLBT groups have been established and new projects were started.

In November 2011, one Deaf pastor from Indonesia attended the establishment meeting of APSDA. At that time, there was no SLBT project in Indonesia Sign Language (ISL). ISL was generally considered to be inferior to spoken languages. Oral communication systems, such as lip reading and speech practice, were often used by Deaf people in Indonesia. After talking with other Deaf Christians at the meeting, he was inspired and felt a strong need to translate the Bible into ISL. Upon returning to Indonesia, he started to reach out to Deaf Christians and established the Indonesian Sign Language Bible Society (ISLBS) in March 2012. It received a Notary Certificate in December 2012 as ISLBS Foundation.

When the APSDA board meeting was held in the Philippines in January 2013, a Filipino pastor volunteered to support the meeting. He was motivated and inspired by this opportunity, and he decided to hold a meeting



with other Deaf pastors from different churches to discuss the subject of SLBT in the Philippines. This group has now grown into the Philippines Deaf Sign Language Association, PDSLA. Currently, PDSLA is preparing to be incorporated in 2014 and will focus on translation, linguistics and research, community and language development, deaf culture and training.

SLBT projects have started in other Asia Pacific countries as well. APSDA sends board members and other members to those countries to support them, holding meetings with different churches and gathering them together to start new groups for SLBT. APSDA respects the ownership of Deaf ministry in SLBT work in each country but is willing to share vision and experience with them.

### 3. Translation workshop

As already explained, Sign Language is not universal. Like spoken languages, signed languages are different from country to country, and even within the same country there are mutually unintelligible signed languages.

However there are some groups of sign languages, which have been developed under the influence of geographic features and/or historical background. In general, APSDA works with at least three different language groups: East Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Within those groups individual sign languages share similarities but are not mutually understandable on a deep level. APSDA holds translation workshops so that SLBT groups in the region or in the same sign language group can learn from each other and share experiences.

Translation workshops for the Korea, Taiwan and Japan group were held in November 2011 and August 2013, in Korea and Taiwan respectively. In April 2013, Taiwan Sign Language Bible Development Association was formed in Taiwan and Korea Christian Sign Language Research Institute was established in October 2013. Although APSDA only played a small part compared to the many in Taiwan and Korea who have worked tirelessly for this goal, we are delighted to hear such good news and see the developments in these countries.

APSDA plans to hold translation workshops in the South East Asia region and the Pacific region. We believe by sharing experiences and expertise as well as failures, we can improve both the quality and the speed of translation work.

### 4. Training for Deaf Translation Consultant

Translation consultants are an important part of translating the Bible into any language. Because of the

lack of Deaf translation consultants, Sign Language Bible translation has been done with hearing translation consultants. We think this kind of collaboration is an asset for APSDA but we also strongly feel the need to train Deaf translation consultants.


APSDA has already created a program design for training of Deaf translation consultants. Our immediate challenge is to complete the training program as a critical step toward increased ownership by Deaf people.

### THE FUTURE OF APSDA

Although APSDA has contributed to the various translation projects in Asia and the Pacific, a great deal more work remains to be done. In many cases, Sign Language Bible Translation is not enough. Some countries do not recognize their Deaf community's sign language as a true language, and others don't even have schools for the Deaf. In such cases, we will need to work on Sign Language linguistics research, or on education for Deaf people. In countries where the rights of Deaf people are violated, we will need to advocate for their rights and support the empowerment of the Deaf community.

APSDA cannot achieve these goals by itself. We already have good partnerships with other Deaf SLBT groups and hearing organizations such as the United Bible Societies (UBS) and SIL, as well as with Wycliffe organizations and local Bible Societies in various countries. It is important to work to expand the scope of our partnerships to include other Deaf organizations, hearing organizations and individuals who share our vision.

At one of the translation workshops, we were delighted to hear from people of hearing organizations that SLBT contributed to deepening their understanding of the Bible. SLBT forces the Bible out of two dimensions and into the three dimensional realm of visual languages, which results in a fundamental change in perspectives. You need to think about what the "temple" looked like or in what way the people "cried" before you are able to translate them into sign languages. There are many things that we can learn from hearing people or written Bibles. However, our work can also contribute to other Bible translation work as well.

We believe that in the Kingdom of God everyone has a role and is a part of Christ. Some member associations have many years of experience and some have barely gotten started, but we can pray for and learn from each other, so that Deaf and hearing people can work together in unity in the body of Christ in the same vision to build God's kingdom. 

# BLESSED TO BLESS OTHERS

## DEAF BIBLE TRANSLATORS AS TRAINERS IN LATIN AMERICA



### GWENDOLYN DAVIES

Gwendolyn Davies is a hearing linguist who serves with SIL International, and is completing an internship with the Colombian Sign Language Bible Translation Project.

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### ARISLEHIDY PRIETO SORIANO

Arislehidy Prieto Soriano is a Deaf translator serving with the Colombia Sign Language Bible Translation Project. She is also Training Coordinator for sign language translation teams in the Americas.

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The sign language Bible translation movement in Latin America is taking root in a growing number of countries. And it is getting a big boost throughout the region thanks to the training efforts of the Colombian Sign Language Bible Translation Project. William Mora, a Deaf pastor in Colombia, who serves with the Project, articulated the team's vision. "The goal of our translation work is to help the many Colombian Deaf people who don't understand the Bible in Spanish and others that can read it some in Spanish but they can only read words and don't capture the meaning of the phrases," he signed. "As a result they often give up, put the Bible aside and don't attempt to read the Bible anymore. It is so important to be able to have the Bible in Colombian Sign Language because the Deaf are able to see the translation videos and they understand them well. Because they understand the message, they are able to receive Jesus as their Savior and to understand what Jesus did for us on the cross."

### COLOMBIA: A HUB FOR TRANSLATION EFFORTS IN THE REGION

Like a wheel with many spokes, this same vision is shared by translators across the Americas, and the Colombian Sign Language Translation Project in Bogotá, Colombia is becoming a hub for translation training in the region. In 2002 SIL International chose the Colombia Project to be a pilot project that would help other sign language translation teams in the Americas. The Project has just celebrated 15 years of Bible translation work, and with the resources they have received, the team has produced more Scriptures than any other Deaf community in Latin America. Publications released on DVD include: 12 New Testament books, a signed dictionary of biblical terms, the book of Ruth, more than half of Genesis, and a collection of Bible stories for Deaf children. They are also just completing Romans and are only the second team in the world to translate that book into a sign language.

In September of 2009, the Colombia Project and SIL International co-sponsored an Americas-wide conference on sign language translation in Bogotá. This gathering proved to be a tipping point for the development of sign language Bible translation work in the region, as participants representing 14 sign languages prayed together and networked about translation efforts. New teams eagerly soaked in information from Deaf translators who presented samples of published Scriptures and taught about translation principles and processes. One participant from El Salvador made an emotional plea for training, as participants shared dreams of cooperative efforts in the region. The call was for Deaf to train Deaf, using sign language. At the close of the conference, Bob Van Zyl, Americas Regional Director for SIL International's Global Sign Languages Team, reported: "Some of the members of the Colombian

team are consulting with other teams. So the networking is beginning.”

## DEAF TRAINING DEAF

Currently, The Project staff commit up to half of their time to training newer sign language translation teams throughout the Americas. In 2012 and 2013 various members of The Project made capacity building visits to seven countries in Latin America. Arislehidy Prieto, translator and training coordinator, worked with churches seeking to restart translation work in Costa Rica. John Jaider, Project administrator, helped teams with project planning in Chile, Mexico, Brazil and Honduras. Julian Salinas, video editor, helped with final filming of some Scripture passages in Cuba and El Salvador. Other teams are using illustrations created by graphic artist Ruben Guerrero. Translator Ginna Muñoz has provided feedback to the team in Cuba by video chat, providing suggestions for improving their drafts.

The Project has also provided more in-depth training courses. In 2012, SIL International sponsored a two-

week Southern Cone training course in Chile that taught foundational translation principles to teams from Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Three experienced Deaf translators served as teaching staff, and Prieto served as coordinator for the course. The teams got to put into practice the principles they were learning by translating and filming the story of Jesus’ encounter with Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10.

Learning to disengage from the word order of Spanish was a key learning experience for some participants. “We freed them to disconnect from Spanish by using pictures instead,” one of the Deaf trainers remarked. They learned to use drawings to “storyboard” drafts, and for use as memory aids in filming. The workshop leaders also helped participants to understand the ways in which translating from a spoken (print) language to a sign language is different from translating between two spoken languages. “It was helpful to get the explanation of the Hearing way of translation vs. the Deaf way of translation,” said a participant from Chile. “For example, that you can switch

verse or sign order to make it clear.”

In July 2013 the Colombia team held a follow-up training in Bogotá for some members of the Paraguay Sign Language translation team. For five weeks they received intensive hands-on training in translation, drafting, editing, filming, and computer illustration. This time they translated portions of the life of Abraham from Genesis 12-14. Colombia Project staff quickly learned relevant signs and expressions in Paraguay Sign Language in order to communicate more clearly with the Paraguay team. The Paraguay team also had brought 15 previously drafted New Testament stories to be checked in order to see that they communicated

LEARNING TO DISENGAGE FROM THE WORD ORDER OF SPANISH WAS A KEY LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR SOME PARTICIPANTS. “WE FREED THEM TO DISCONNECT FROM SPANISH BY USING PICTURES INSTEAD”

the original meanings clearly and accurately. Prieto—a Deaf consultant-in-training—participated with Van Zyl—an experienced translation consultant who has worked with indigenous languages and now consults with sign language translation teams—in checking these passages. One Paraguay Sign Language team member commented, “It was enriching to see that the Deaf can train other Deaf to help advance a translation project.”

## PARTNERING WITH DEAF CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

Partnership with Deaf churches and ministries is crucial to getting the sign language Scriptures distributed to churches and individuals. A cooperative effort between the Colombia Project and a Deaf ministry that serves in two regions of Colombia is working to translate into Colombian Sign Language (LSC) a set of signed Scripture stories that are used by the organization supporting that





ministry for evangelism and discipleship with Deaf people around the world. This set of Scripture stories consists of Bible passages that explain who Jesus is, how the church functions, and our responsibilities as Christians.

In February 2013 Prieto, Guerrero, and translator Carlos Nuñez of the Colombia Project traveled to Barranquilla, on the north coast of Colombia, to lead a translation principles workshop for 30 Deaf Christians who would be helping to produce the videos of these stories in LSC. “We offered them workshop experiences in which they studied some of the easier, shorter stories, thinking about how they could communicate the concepts in the stories in their sign language,” Prieto commented. “When the candidates to be signers for the video felt like they had practiced and memorized how they would communicate in LSC one of the stories fairly well, we filmed them signing the story.”

The team in Bogotá had already translated some of the Scripture books from which these passages are taken, and finished translating the remaining stories in the set. Three Deaf signers from the coast came to Bogotá to do the filming, and the LSC DVDs will be released in early 2014. Now the passages are available in video for other Deaf translation teams in the Americas as a resource for ideas on how to express them in their own sign languages.

“While we were on the coast, many of the Deaf in Barranquilla learned to sign the Bible stories very well and were very interested in participating in this process,” the team reported. “They are now very eager to teach the Deaf people who live far way in the little towns and villages of their state. In their teaching they plan to use the translated stories for ministry with the Deaf who come to their churches, so that many Deaf will know who Jesus is, how to develop Christ’s church, and how to participate in serving Christ.”


## ONGOING EFFORTS

Cooperative efforts are vital to strengthening translation efforts in the region. Future trainings are planned for teams from various other countries, along with a second Americas sign language Bible translation conference took place in Bogotá in October 2013. This time, Deaf coordinators from ten sign language translation projects, and three translation consultants-in-training from throughout the Americas, came together to share their translation experiences and encourage one another, to

plan expansion of sign language translation initiatives in Deaf communities over the next five years, and to receive training as leaders of the sign language translation movement in the region.

In Deaf culture face-to-face interaction is essential to relationship building and mentoring, much like Jesus invested in one-on-one training of the disciples. It’s an “each one, teach one” approach that serves well in Deaf training initiatives. And in the sign language translation context, when Deaf train Deaf, it not only has practical value because of shared culture and language, but it also serves as a key for vision sharing and encouragement.

Van Zyl served as a mentor to the team of three Deaf trainers who taught that first workshop in Chile. “Each of the teams increased their knowledge and understanding of translation principles and their skills in carrying out the translation process,” he said. “They all left with greater enthusiasm and vision to continue in their translation process and a greater sense of being connected and supported by other teams and translators who have the same vision of giving God’s Word to the Deaf in their countries.”

It is this vision that makes it possible for people like Laura Larrea, a graphic artist in Colombia, to have access to the Bible in her heart signed language. “For many years I have been communicating in Colombian Sign Language but I didn’t know anything about the Bible or about Jesus,” she signs. She tried going to church, but there was no interpreter, so most of the time she fell asleep during the sermon. “About three years ago, I saw my friend Arislehidy signing in a Bible translation video in Colombian Sign Language. I was astounded and couldn’t stop watching the screen. So I bought the DVD, took it home and watched it. Wow! It was [part of] the Bible in Colombian Sign Language. It was the same message as in the Bible in Spanish but this video was in LSC. When I read the Bible in Spanish, there are many things I still don’t understand. However, when I see the Bible in video in LSC, the Holy Spirit teaches me so much more and I can keep God’s Word in my heart and learn it. With the Bible translation videos in LSC, I can be a stronger, more consistent Christian. Thank God for the signed language translation videos that the members of the Project are making. I now have the Bible in my signed language. I can use it to teach God’s Word to Deaf children, young people and adults. Thank you, God!” 

# DISCOVERING GOD'S CALL

[ A YOUNG DEAF MAN'S JOURNEY ]

REPORT NO. 105 SPRING 2013

**J**avier found his calling and purpose in God in a place he never expected to be. He found it while dirty with mud, exhausted after a long trip, and standing in a Kenyan village in the dark of night. He found it in the smiling faces of fourteen deaf orphans, as he was overwhelmed by their love and kindness.

Javier Reyes is a second-year student in the International Bible Training Center (IBTC) at Deaf Missions. He is the only Deaf person in his family. Growing up, going to church was not a positive experience. There were no interpreters, he was the only Deaf child there; he did not learn what the hearing children were learning.

Javier's mother enrolled him at Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) when he was in the third grade. It was at TSD that Javier started attending local church services that were either interpreted or taught in ASL. His knowledge and appreciation for God and for the Bible began to grow.

After graduating in 2004, and a period of falling away from faith, Javier noticed a booth advertising a Deaf ministry at a TSD homecoming event. He decided to go back to church that following Sunday, where he met Mark Lowenstein, a deaf preacher and former Deaf Missions staff member who helped start the IBTC.

At this point, Javier's fire and passion for the Lord was rekindled. He went to a church where he met Tim Smith (Big Bible Stories: Elijah) and continued to grow spiritually. After Tim came back from the Deaf Christian Leaders Conference at Deaf Missions, he told Javier that Deaf Missions was planning to start a new Bible training school to prepare workers for Deaf ministry. This piqued Javier's interest and moved to Council Bluffs to become one of the first students at the IBTC.

Inspired by Deaf Missions and the IBTC, he finally was able to be in an environment where there were many other deaf Christians and where the Bible teachers were fluent in ASL. The International Bible Training Center was a place where Javier could study the books of the Bible verse by


verse and in much more detail than he could at a normal church service. One of IBTC's requirements is to complete a summer internship. Javier decided to join a team of seven deaf and hearing people on a two-month mission trip to Kenya and Uganda last summer. The team focused on serving the needs of orphaned and abandoned deaf children at two different ministries.

After flying from New York City, and an eight-hour layover in Cairo, Javier and the team finally touched down in Nairobi, Kenya. He was overwhelmed by the initial encounter with the children. Even though they had nothing, they were still so happy. Javier admired them and

JAVIER KNOWS NOW THAT GOD WORKS IN AMAZING WAYS, AND THAT HE WILL LEAD THOSE WHO SEEK HIM AND TRY TO FIND THEIR PURPOSE IN LIFE, THEIR MISSION ON EARTH.

learned to listen to them. The children loved him, and he gave them love in return. He taught them the Bible, English and math. He played soccer with the orphans, and loved to bring them treats.

His experiences in Africa prompted immense spiritual growth, and Javier felt his relationship with God exploded to new levels. His vision for the future is to become a full-time missionary in Kenya. Javier wants to empower these deaf children with career skills they can use to obtain jobs and have a brighter future. He plans to serve a four-month internship in Kenya in 2014 to confirm if this is what God really wants him to do for the foreseeable future.

Javier knows now that God works in amazing ways, and he is grateful to Deaf Missions and the IBTC for being a place where he can study the Bible and find his calling. 



# THE RIVERBANKS OF A MOVEMENT

/ Steve Smith works with International Mission Board (SBC) globally to catalyze learning lessons from and training for biblical church planting movements. He is the author of the book *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources 2011). You can follow Steve's musings from his devotional thoughts and kingdom ministry on Twitter @kingreigncome and Kingdom Kernels on Facebook.

In the last issue, we looked at the importance of setting the DNA for a kingdom movement within minutes and hours of a new disciple's commitment to Christ. That brings up one of the greatest fears about Church-Planting Movements (CPMs): That heresy and immorality will emerge in the movement. Scripture makes it clear that problems will emerge in any ministry (e.g. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

The problems that develop in CPMs (heresy, immorality, or any other problem) are probably no greater than any other ministry context *by proportion*, but they appear greater since there are so many new believers, baptisms, discipleship groups, churches and leaders. In fact, in my observations, the problems may even be fewer in proportion due to the regular mentoring discipleship

occurring generation by generation.

All ministries have problems. This was a primary factor in Paul writing his churches addressing heresy, immorality and a host of other sins.

One characteristic of CPMs is that they are out of your personal control but stay within the control of the King. A basic premise of CPMs is to exercise proper influence to shape the movement, but not usurp the role of the Spirit to control and be the Teacher of the movement.

Giving up control, however, does not mean giving up influence. At the outset of discipleship in a movement, there are clear riverbanks (values) to set up that enable the raging rivers of CPM to stay within the banks of orthodoxy and morality. We need not fear heresy and immorality IF we have a plan for dealing with

them. If we do not, we should fear them greatly.

## THE RIVERBANKS OF A MOVEMENT: OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD ALONE AS AUTHORITY

Ultimately, you cannot control a CPM, or any other movement of God, as long as you want it to continue to grow as a movement of God. What you can do is nudge and shape it, and put parameters in place that enable you to call back believers and churches when they inevitably get off-track. These are the banks of the channels through which the movement will flow. The banks keep it in the channel of orthodoxy, orthopraxy and holiness.

The alternative is restrictive control of a movement, similar to the old brittle wineskins of Matthew 9:14-17. Jesus condemned the heavy burden of the rituals the Jewish leaders had imposed on the people of God; they were inflexible and slavish. In these wineskins, orthodoxy and morality are controlled through rules and our personal oversight, and eventually suppress kingdom growth.

In CPMs, what is essential is that you give emerging believers, churches and leaders a way to hear God speak in his Word (authority), a value to obey whatever he says (obedience) including a willingness to self-correct the movement no matter the consequences. Scriptural authority and obedience are the



twin riverbanks to keep the movement biblical.

## AUTHORITY: AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD ALONE

The Reformers' value of *Sola Scriptura* has been upheld by believers for hundreds of years. Yet, in practice, it is easy to move away from *Sola Scriptura* by creating competing functional authorities for new believers and churches. Theoretically, we say: "Scripture is their final authority." Practically, it is easy for the missionary, statements of faith, church traditions or "words from the Lord" to functionally usurp Scripture as the final authority.

Handing Bibles to new believers and telling them to study them does not make Scripture their final authority. Rather, you must instill a value that God's Word is their final authority. In CPMs or new church starts, you set the DNA for almost all of the new believers' understanding and practice. From day one you must demonstrate that it is Scripture that is authoritative for all of life.

Eventually, the movement may spread beyond your direct influence. What authority will they follow when questions or disputes arise? If you set them up to value the Word PLUS your opinion, what will happen when another teacher comes in (orthodox or false teacher) whose opinions contradict yours? How will you call them back when they get off track?

If you have not given them a value that Scripture is the final authority, you have no way to call them back when they err. It's your opinion versus anyone else's. If you have set up your word as an authority, then you are setting up the movement for failure.

## A BIBLICAL PRECEDENT: 1 CORINTHIANS 5

Even Paul, an Apostle of Christ, resisted setting up his opinion as the authority. Instead, he referred his churches back to the Scripture. From the beginning, heresy and immorality infiltrated the churches that Paul established. There was no way to avoid it. But Paul built into the churches a way to address it. One example is found in 1 Corinthians 5.

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In CPMs or new church starts, you set the DNA for almost all of the new believers' understanding and practice. From day one you must demonstrate that it is Scripture that is authoritative for all of life.

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"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. " (1 Cor 1:5, NASB)

Such a sin would lead us to discount the orthodoxy of a movement. Paul, as a realist however, recognized that the enemy would sow tares. He didn't let this shake his faith in moving forward.

The answer to the situation was to remove this offending person from their midst until he repented

(1 Cor 5:5). At this point, Paul could have used his authority as the spiritual father. The problem is that Paul would not always be there to answer each situation in the future. In addition it would set up the movement for divisiveness: his opinion against another person's opinion (e.g. 2 Cor 11:3-6)

Instead Paul pointed them to God's Word.

Remove the wicked man among yourselves. (1 Cor 5:11, NASB)

Paul referred to Deuteronomy 22 as the guide for this decision:

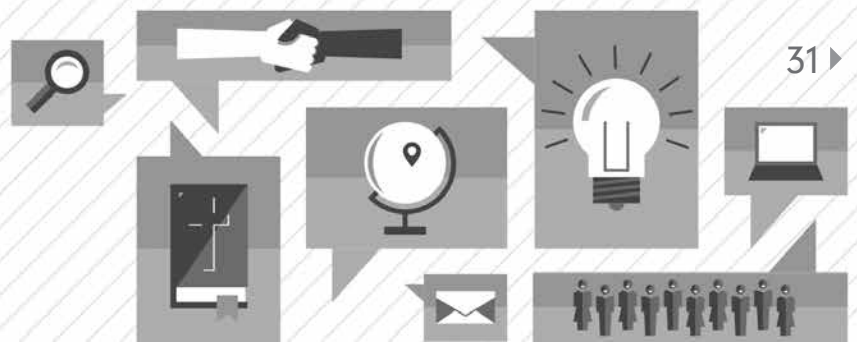
If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel.... A man shall not take his father's wife so that he will not uncover his father's skirt. (Deut 22:22,30 NASB)

How do you develop this value of Scripture alone as final authority? One of the best ways is to minimize directly answering important questions (your opinions) but rather refer the believers to the appropriate Scripture in which to meditate for a decision.

In healthy movements the default answer is: "What does the Bible say?" By repeatedly defaulting to this, the believers quickly realize that they must value the Bible as the final authority, not you the teacher, church planter or missionary.

To do this, healthy movements develop a simple method for believers to use to learn how to read or listen to the Bible and interpret it accurately. As disciples approach the Word with open hearts and a healthy hermeneutic, they will progressively grow in Biblical understanding becoming self-feeders.

This does not mean that you never



answer questions. But as you resist the temptation to answer their questions and give the group of believers a healthy method for interpreting Scripture, you will realize that the body of Christ has amazing ability to come up with biblical answers from the leadership of the Spirit. The self-correcting power of the body is amazing (Matt 18:20).

### **OBEDIENCE: VALUE TO OBEY WHATEVER THE WORD SAYS**

To make sure the movement stays within biblical riverbanks you must secondly build in a value to obey whatever the Word says.

In the 1 Corinthians 5 situation, Paul guided the Corinthians to obedience:

“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.” (2 Cor 2:9, NASB)

What a difficult step for them to take, yet they obeyed. Loving obedience was their basic value as followers of Jesus.

Only obedience-based discipleship will keep the CPM in the banks of orthodoxy and holiness. In CPMs, you frequently ask people to be obedient to the Scripture they study each week. Then you lovingly hold them accountable, and vice versa, for obedience in the next meeting. This reinforces obedience. Without it, disciples quickly develop a value to be a hearer of the Word, not a doer.

The enemy is working actively to deceive and create problems. But

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In CPMs, you frequently ask people to be obedient to the Scripture they study each week. Then you lovingly hold them accountable, and vice versa, for obedience in the next meeting.

This reinforces obedience. Without it, disciples quickly develop a value to be a hearer of the Word, not a doer.

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if obedience is the value, you have a way to call errant believers back. This is what happened in 1 Corinthians 5.

Obedience necessarily includes the discipline of the group to see the issue through. Like the Corinthians, disciples must believe it better to obey the Word and suffer any consequences for correction than to continue in sin.

### **A CASE STUDY: WIFE-BEATERS**

Several of us planned to spend one week training twelve local leaders that represented eighty Ina churches in a budding CPM in East Asia.

One basic ground-rule was: Try *not* to answer their questions, but rather ask, ‘What does the Bible say?’ This is so much easier in theory than in practice!

One afternoon, my pastor friend spent an hour teaching from Ephesians 5: Husbands love your wives. The application appeared to be crystal clear.

After his teaching, I asked if there were any questions. One 62-year old man in the back nervously raised his hand. “I would like to know if this means we have to stop beating our wives!?”

My pastor friend and I were appalled. How could he possibly dream there was room for wife-beating after such a clear teaching from the Word?

Back to our ground-rule: “What does the Bible say?” It was at this point that our faith in the power of the Holy Spirit was put to the test.

We carefully shared with the whole group:

If we pray, the Holy Spirit will be our Teacher. If we go to his Word, he will give us a clear answer about beating wives.

First, I want you to stop as a group and cry out to the Holy Spirit: “Holy Spirit, be our Teacher! We

want to rely on you! We need you to give us understanding!”

Together, in unison, we bowed our heads and cried out that prayer to God several times. When we were through praying, I said to the group: With the Holy Spirit as your Teacher, open your Bibles to Ephesians 5. Together read it and ask God to help you answer this question. When you have come to agreement, let us know.

The twelve huddled together and began talking rapidly in the Ina dialect, which the rest of us could not understand. Meanwhile, we huddled together in prayer. We cried out to God: “Lord, please let them get this right! We don’t need a movement of wife-beaters!” We had to trust that the Spirit of God in the group could overcome the confusion or objections of one or two people.

Meanwhile the commotion in the Ina group rose and fell and rose and fell. One person would get up and air an idea, then the others would admonish him. Then another would

voice an opinion and some would agree. Finally, after an interminable wait, one of the leaders stood up solemnly and pronounced, with import worthy of the Council of Chalcedon, their decision:

“After studying the Scripture, we have decided—to *STOP* beating our wives!”

We were incredibly relieved, but I thought: “What took so long?!”

A day or two later one of the twelve, an Ina man who was a close friend of mine, explained privately to me their discussion.


“We have a saying in the Ina language: ‘To be a real man, every day you must hit your wife.’”

Immediately I realized the gravity of the 62-year-old man’s question and the reason the answer took so long. His real question was not, “Do we have to stop beating our wives?” Rather, after a startling discovery of the holy standard of God’s ways and the clash with their own culture, the real question was:

Can I be a follower of Jesus and still be a real man in my culture?

Would we have stepped in if they arrived at a non-biblical answer? Of course. But if we had short-circuited the process by immediately giving them the answer, we would have missed God’s deeper lesson for them.

That day, and in many other scenarios like it later, God’s Word was reinforced as the final authority, not culture or any Bible teacher. A group of young believers trusted the Spirit to guide them in truth, and then heeded the admonition to obey whatever answer he gave them. The group took a collective deep breath and exercised the discipline to re-define manhood in their society despite the ridicule they would receive.

Pursue kingdom movements in your area. But don’t pray for rain to flood the land with rivers until you have determined to erect banks to guide the channels of the waters! Set this DNA within minutes and hours of the first breakthrough. 



# GHANA 2013 REPORT

## DAVID TAYLOR

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**A**round 500 church and mission leaders from over 45 countries gathered last Sept 25-28 for the Ghana 2013 Global Mission Consultation. Ghana 2013 was a regional follow-up gathering to the Tokyo 2010 Global Mission Consultation held in commemoration of Edinburgh 1910. The theme of the gathering was on the Great Commission mandate to “Disciple all peoples.” The Africa consultation kept the same dual emphasis of the Tokyo meeting, focusing on both the breadth and the depth of the Great Commission. The breadth dimension was represented by the Finish the Task network which highlighted the needs of Africa’s 383 remaining unengaged, unreached peoples. The depth dimension was represented by the national transformation tracks which looked at what it means to see nations disciplined through transforming business, education, the arts, government and health.

### FINISHING THE TASK

The African church now has over 180 million evangelical Christians in over 2000 reached people groups. Evangelicals in Africa are now poised to make a significant contribution to finishing the task in their own continent and around the world. As in Tokyo 2010, delegates at Ghana 2013 made specific commitments to reach the world’s unengaged, unreached people groups. Around 250 commitments were made to engage 130 unengaged, unreached people groups by the year 2020.

Ghana 2013 highlighted the reality that the African church’s role and commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission will become increasingly impactful in this century. Today, Africa represents 15% of the world’s population, but by the end of the century, almost one in three people in the world will be African. Even more significant, by the year 2100 over half the world’s evangelicals will be in Africa. For this reason, among others, the strength and vitality of the church in Africa will soon have a global impact. As if by Design, while this great demographic shift is taking place, many economies in Africa are now experiencing double-digit growth, which history tells us will help fuel the coming surge of missionary expansion from the continent.

### GHANA 2013 CHALLENGE

The delegates at Ghana 2013 issued a statement called the Ghana 2013 Challenge, which represented Africa’s response to the Tokyo 2010 Declaration. The Challenge included four areas which were of special concern to the African church: Servant-Leadership, Disciple-Making, Social Transformation and the Least-Reached. The challenge confronted areas of neglect and omission in the church in Africa and acknowledged the church’s role in discipling the next generation of leaders, as well as impacting every sphere of society and advancing the gospel in every unreached

people, “until the day comes when not a single person on earth is without access to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.” Those who wish to join with the African church in this commitment can sign the challenge online at [www.ghana2013.org/challenge.php](http://www.ghana2013.org/challenge.php).

## AFRICA MISSIONS ASSOCIATION

One of the history-making developments and fruits of Ghana 2013 was the formation of an Africa Missions Association. The purpose of the Africa Missions Association (AfMA) is to strengthen and create national mission associations in every country in Africa, and assist in the development of new and existing African sending structures. The association came about through the joint initiative of the Ghana Evangelical Missions Association and the Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association, together with leaders from nine other African nations. A fundamental purpose of mission associations is to establish agreed upon standards for mission sending and to hold members accountable to those commitments. This is one of the reasons these professional-level associations are so vitally

important to the emerging mission movements around the world (see [www.missionsafrica.net](http://www.missionsafrica.net) for more information).

Dr. Yong Cho, a representative of the Asia Missions Association at

Ghana 2013, and current director of the Global Network of Mission Structures, observed that the Africa Missions Association has been a dream fulfilled for African leaders after many decades of gentle nurturing and dialogue.



## VISION 2020

As a final objective of Ghana 2013, the countries represented at the consultation examined five components of national discipleship and developed or reaffirmed commitments toward specific objectives in these areas over the next seven years. The five components were identified as 1.) Reaching every unreached people group, 2.) Saturation Church Planting, 3.) Multiplying Disciple-Makers, 4.) Transforming Society, and 5.) Blessing the Nations.

## PASSING THE TORCH

The extra funds generated by Tokyo 2010 were used to seed Ghana 2013. In the same way, the delegates at the Ghana meeting took up an offering to pass the torch to the next regional consultation which will be in Lima, Peru in October of 2014. The meeting in Lima will aim to awaken the Latin American church to the increasing presence of Islam in Latin America and the opportunity this represents to impact the Muslim world with the gospel. Those interested in participating in this event can register at [www.lima2014.org](http://www.lima2014.org)



# GHANA 2013 CHALLENGE

## PREAMBLE

Almost two thousand years ago, our Lord Jesus Christ gave his church a mandate to disciple all nations. Today we are closer than ever to seeing this mandate fulfilled. We acknowledge, however, that as the gospel has gone wide, it has not always gone deep. Though we rejoice in the progress of the Church around the world, we lament that in many areas, Christian living is superficial, nominal and ineffectual. We further recognize that a weak church will not be able to advance very far in the final frontiers of the gospel, which are the most challenging before us. We therefore issue the following call, first to ourselves as leaders from all over Africa, and secondly to others around the world, whom we implore to join with us in this summons to full obedience to the cause of Christ.

## SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

We acknowledge that the weaknesses in our churches and societies are fundamentally a failure of leadership. We repent of self-centered leadership which misuses power to exploit others for personal gain. We acknowledge that all power is a trust from God to empower others, for which we will be held accountable to the highest authority. We call upon leaders everywhere, both within the church and society at large, to model their leadership after the ultimate leader, Jesus Christ, who said he came to serve others, not to be served. We call upon all those of influence in society to use their position for good, to uphold justice, to honor the truth, to defend the innocent and protect the vulnerable. We covenant before God to hold ourselves to the highest standards of righteousness, financial integrity, humility and sacrificial living.

## DISCIPLE-MAKING

We acknowledge our mandate as the Church of Jesus Christ to disciple all nations, teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded. We recognize that the primary purpose of the church is to be a forum for discipleship and the exercise of spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. We confess that we have left the church woefully undisciplined and unequipped for the work of the ministry. We further acknowledge that many of our leaders have not received the



discipleship they needed or still need. We call upon the Church to equip the next generation of leaders by providing a solid discipleship foundation through mentorship. We acknowledge that the biblical model of discipleship is based on living life together, not just preaching and teaching, but authentic living through coaching, mentoring and demonstrating. We covenant before God to make discipleship a priority within the Church, to equip believers with godly mentors, and to see every believer empowered to disciple others in the same way.

## SOCIAL-TRANSFORMATION

We acknowledge that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. As a person should reflect the life of Christ, so society should reflect God's kingdom. The true gospel will impact every sphere of society from government, to education, to business, to the arts. We acknowledge that social transformation is a process that happens first by changing lives through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, second by impacting worldviews through the teaching of God's Word, and third through the gradual alignment of cultural traditions and institutions with the values of the Kingdom of God. We confess that we have secularized our work and have often forgotten that every calling in life is sacred and an act of worship. We covenant before




God to be his witnesses in every sphere of society and to represent his kingdom with integrity in everything we do.

## THE LEAST-REACHED

We acknowledge our Lord's assignment to his Church to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom to all ethnic groups. We confess that we have neglected hundreds of people groups, though we have had the capacity to reach them with the love of Christ. We repent of this neglect, omission and disobedience and commit ourselves to sending workers to all the remaining unreached peoples in Africa and beyond. We call upon the church around the world to finish the task of reaching "every nation, tribe, people and language" with the gospel in our generation. We covenant before God to disciple every believer to obey the Great Commission, through his or her prayers, giving, sending and going, until the day comes when not a single person on earth is without access to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

## CALL TO ACTION

Finally, we commit ourselves to the ongoing work of evaluating and assessing the Church's progress in developing leaders, making disciples, transforming society and loving the unreached. We will be honest with our shortcomings and resolve to address them. We will refuse to remain in ignorance about the state of the Church and the Great Commission. We will be proactive in regularly surveying where we are and where we need to go in working together to address priority needs and challenges in the Church's mandate to disciple all nations. We call upon the church around the world to take up this challenge, to set aside our differences and re-align our priorities to accomplish the great work before us. Toward this end, we humbly beseech the intercession of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to carry on this mandate through the power of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of our Heavenly Father. To his Name be the highest praise, both now and forevermore. Amen. 



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# LOCAL AFRICAN RESOURCES FROM THE WEST IN AFRICA: INTER-WESTERNER RELATIONSHIP AS THE KEY TO 'LOCAL RESOURCES'



JIM HARRIES

/ Jim Harries (PhD, University of Birmingham, UK) is the chairman of the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission that organized mission conferences in the USA and UK September and November 2013 (see [vulnerablemission.org](http://vulnerablemission.org)). He lives in a rural village in East Africa while assisting a variety of churches through Bible teaching, primarily using indigenous African languages. Contact [jim@vulnerablemission.org](mailto:jim@vulnerablemission.org)

Africa is an aid-dependent continent! “Foreign aid [is] the predominant source of financial resources for much of the continent” (Moyo 2009:25).<sup>1</sup> How then to raise local resources?

Donors often work on certain principles. One is that they want to work directly with nationals. This can maximise misunderstandings; donors preoccupied with fundraising have little opportunity to understand indigenous contexts. Nationals have little understanding of donor contexts. The result is clashing views.

Some say we need middlemen or “brokers” who understand both the “native context” and the “donor context.” Brokers can bend the ears of donors. Unfortunately, he who in Africa can bend the ear of donors in effect takes the role of a donor. “Brokers” face the same

issues as do donors! Hence, it is hard for brokers to develop normal natural relationships with locals. This applies whether brokers are African or foreign.

King Midas was given a wonderful gift; everything he touched turned into gold. At least he thought this gift was wonderful. Then one day he greeted his beautiful, beloved daughter and she became a statue of gold!<sup>2</sup> There seems to be parallels between King Midas’ gift and donors on the mission or development-field today.

Breaking out of the vicious cycle of donor identity requires attention to inter-Westerner relationships. Jean Johnson points us towards this in her book, *We are not the Hero* (2012).<sup>3</sup> Hero mentality is a problem for Westerners. Popular movies depict lone-ranger Westerners catalysing transformation

in poor communities around the world. As a result, smiling natives live happily-ever-after. The desire to be a hero, i.e. to want heaps of praise from “locals,” can make one suspicious of one’s fellow Westerner!

Baptist Dave went to an African village to dig a well. Pentecostal Steve was down the road planning the building of a school classroom. Dave’s people praising Dave (as people do) had him convinced that his was the best strategy and he was the “good” missionary, not like those others. Steve’s people did the same to him. As a result Dave and Steve doubted each other’s credibility. Each wanted to be the hero.

Missionaries not trusting each other spoils their testimony to nationals. It also means that Steve raises funds for Steve’s projects, and Dave raises funds for Dave’s


projects. Steve and Dave each look to their own donors. They will use their separate donor money for each to look after their own African staff who will work on their own side. Steve won't help Dave and Dave won't help Steve because each thinks he is better than the other, is in competition for donors, and wants the praise of Africans.

"Consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). A big question; if Steve runs out of money for building his classrooms, should Dave help him out? Usually, in my experience, he won't. The two are competing. If Steve's donors don't cough up enough money for him, Steve should go back and raise more. But what if

Dave did help Steve? Instead of helping him by giving him money, what if he helps him by sending one of his own local "team" to support him? Dave says to Steve, "Why don't I send one of my workers to help you? He could even assist you in getting some materials."

Steve keeps working on his project. But now, strangely, the African man sent by Dave to supply material and workers has authority. Steve can't control the supply that he needs. He helps out where he can. Being freed from trips back to the West to fundraise, Steve has time to learn the local language and engage in Bible teaching. The resources Steve is using for his building

project have become "local resources!" Steve is no longer a donor, and he has time to serve in the church.

A key to the use of local resources in Christian ministry by Westerners in places like Africa is the way that Westerners relate to one another. 

<sup>1</sup> Moyo, Dambisa, 2009. *Dead Aid: Why aid is not working and how there is another way for Africa*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books.

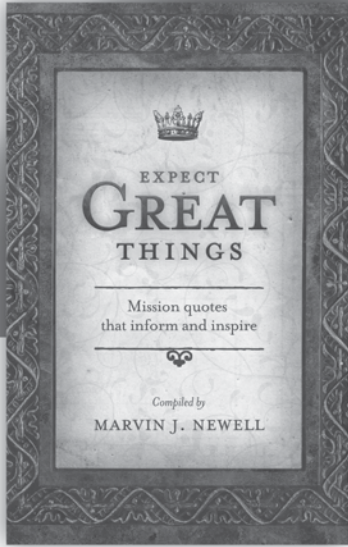
<sup>2</sup> [www.hipark.austin.isd.tenet.edu/mythology/midas.html](http://www.hipark.austin.isd.tenet.edu/mythology/midas.html) (accessed February 15, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, Jean, 2012. *We are not the Hero; a missionary's guide for sharing Christ, not a culture of dependency*. Oregon: Deep River Books.





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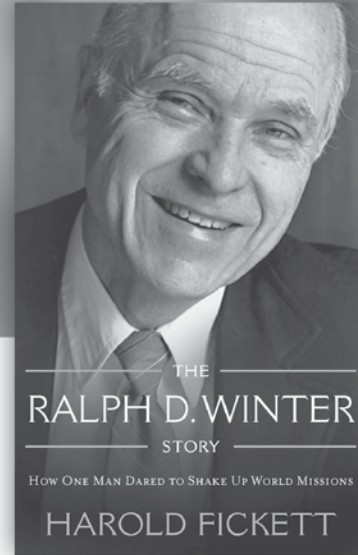
Marvin J. Newell

*Expect Great Things* is the most comprehensive collection of mission quotes, contemporary and classical, ever compiled in one book. Here you will find over 700 of the best mission quotes ever uttered by Great Commission Christians—250 different authors from Adoniram Judson to John Piper, from J. Hudson Taylor to David Platt. Read them for personal encouragement! Paste them on your website, blog, or other social media. Tweet them to a friend. Include them in sermons, speeches, newsletters, and lesson plans. Pass them on to others to encourage them along their way to Great Commission familiarity and commitment.

Marvin Newell is Senior Vice President of Missio Nexus, a network that connects evangelical mission agencies, churches and training centers across North America. Previously he served as a missionary to Indonesia, a mission administrator, a professor of missions, and director of a missions association.

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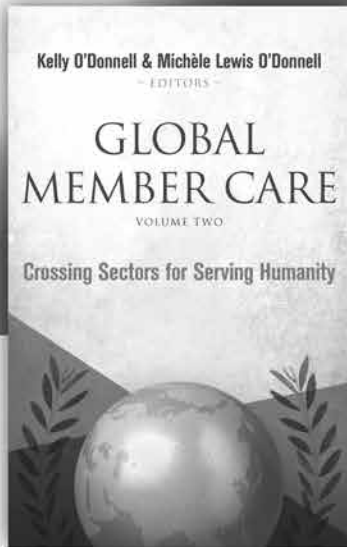
Harold Fickett is a critically acclaimed author of novels, biographies, and works of spirituality, including “The Holy Fool”, “The Living Christ,” and “Dancing with the Divine.” He was a co-founder of the journal “Image,” was president and editor-in-chief of “Catholic Exchange” and co-wrote “The Faith” with Charles Colson. He currently serves as managing editor USA of “Aletheia”, an international website for truth-seekers published in six languages.

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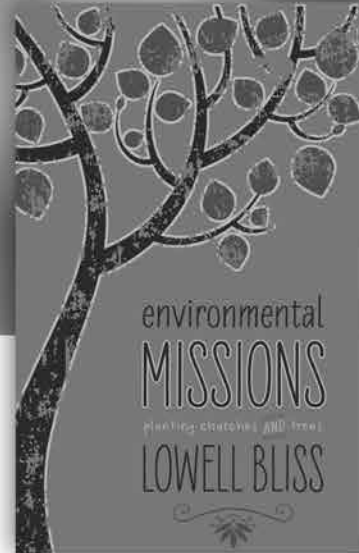
Kelly O'Donnell, Michele Lewis O'Donnell

*Global Member Care: Crossing Sectors for Serving Humanity*, the latest book from the O'Donnells, is part of an ongoing effort to help a diversity of colleagues keep current with a globalizing world and the global field of member care. This second volume in the Global Member Care series (the first volume *Global Member Care: The Pearls and Perils of Good Practice* was published in 2011) encourages readers to connect and contribute to various international sectors on behalf of mission/aid workers and humanity. The book's 35 chapters include a wealth of practical resources: guidelines, codes, resolutions, perspectives, principles, case examples, videos links, human rights instruments, and more. Get ready to venture into the heart of global issues and opportunities—from the trenches to the towers and everything in between!

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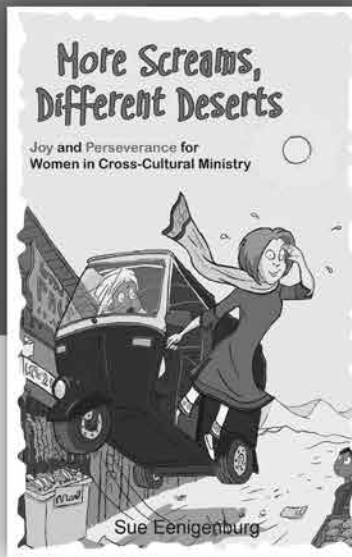
Lowell Bliss was a traditional church planting missionary in India when his best Hindu friend there died of malaria. This was just one of the events that led him to reexamine the politically charged term "environment," understanding it now as simply "that which surrounds those we love, those for whom Jesus died." In other words, the church is called to reach not only vulnerable people but the space in which they live and breathe. Pointing to the narrative of Scripture and the history of missions, Bliss shows us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole creation, that we must unite two traditionally separate endeavors to fulfill the entirety of God's commission, and that the challenge of the environmental crises of our day is also one of our greatest opportunities to reach the least reached with the love of Christ.

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# NEW RELEASES



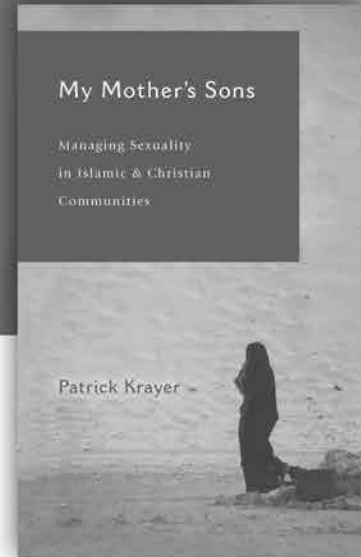
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*More Screams, Different Deserts* (sequel to *Screams in the Desert*) is another invitation to join Sue on her adventures in cross-cultural living and biblical studies that have helped her along the way. With twenty-seven years of experience in cross cultural ministry, Sue realizes that joy and perseverance are essential for thriving in life and ministry. Her stories and insights encourage women to look to Jesus, our only hope wherever we live. Stories, ranging from one corner of the world to another, include discovering a forgotten museum, protecting her children from chocolate, visiting a camel market, and meeting wild pigs on a nighttime walk. God has been her refuge, and his Word held her steady when all she really wanted to do was run away and hide. Questions and resources at the end of each chapter will help readers think through personal application and find additional help.

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## **My Mother's Sons** **Managing Sexuality in Islamic &** **Christian Communities**

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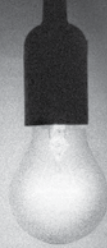
*My Mother's Sons* provides a thoughtful model for how Western Christian workers can respectfully negotiate sexual boundaries and norms in Muslim contexts. Westerners are inclined to impose their own culturally shaped notions of gender equality and justice on non-egalitarian communities, alienating the very people they are seeking to serve. The author draws on his own research among Pakistani Pashtuns, intercultural theory, and exegesis of Christian and Islamic sacred texts to show that it is possible to work for transformational change without offending those who live within a patriarchal system.

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# DECIDING WHEN TO CONFRONT



GREG PARSONS

/ GLOBAL DIRECTOR,  
U.S. CENTER FOR  
WORLD MISSION

I was just reading an email from a husband and wife who have been working for 8 years among an unreached group in Asia and, before that, among an animistic people in Africa for a couple of years. The opportunity to serve in two very different contexts gives them

an advantage over those who have only understood one culture deeply.

As a result, their observations and insights are stunning. This young couple in their thirties is seriously grappling with the realities of what happens when the gospel enters a people and the ramifications on the lives of those coming to faith.

When the gospel comes in, it affirms what light God has already given and it confronts the darkness. Reading about their struggles in that process reminds me of what Jesus said to Paul in Acts 26:17-18: “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” (NET Bible)

As I read their message, I sensed a “holy awe”—they really love the gospel and these people. This couple and other front line servants like them have the

amazing privilege of watching the gospel take root before their very eyes. But with that also comes the struggle. And, sometimes, they experience the pain of those who leave the faith or continue to wrestle with sinful patterns.

Since workers are outside of the culture, the local people do not expect them to act in certain ways or do certain things. On the other hand, they fully expect their own people to do the things they have always done. Failure to do so normally leads to problems or loss of blessing.

In response to their email, I asked them about the balance between encouraging new believers to remain faithful to their family and community while being faithful to God in it all. At times, that can be a tough call.

There comes a time—ideally after much reflection and prayer—to confront an anti-Biblical practice. Nevertheless, I would encourage a couple in this situation to work carefully with the new believers, directing them to study the Word together and letting the new believers decide when a practice should be confronted as well as when and how to address it. In other words, they (the new believers) need to pray and reflect also.


All too often, we feel we need to encourage action on the part of new believers. While we may not be animistic, we can add the baggage of our Christian culture all too easily. One Asian example is what is often referred to as “ancestor worship.” Of course,

IF it is really worship, it should be confronted. But if it is merely honoring parents, it could very well be a way to actually obey the Old Testament commandment with a promise:

“Honor your father and your mother, that you may live a long time in the land the Lord your God is giving to you.” (Exodus 20:12, NET Bible)

In one culture, the people were afraid that if they touched a hammer or nail (or any number of other things), they would be cursed in some way. That seems silly to us, and is likely the work of our Enemy to prevent that society from developing, keeping them poor and in inadequate housing. Of course, it is not a sin to touch (or refrain from touching) a hammer. In the case of such a practice in this culture, the impact of the gospel will likely break through a spiritual stronghold.

Often we call “sin” things that the Bible never defines that way. Knowing the difference can be hard when you are an outsider to a situation and some practices seem so wrong to us. Usually, we don’t know what they really think about what they are, or are not, doing. One person may be worshiping their dead parents. Another may merely be following a historic or family ritual.

As outsiders looking into any situation in another culture, we need to be faithful to the Word. The difficulty is figuring out how the scriptures apply to a specific local context and how they should be lived out. 



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