



GOD

WITH US.



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CHANGING THE WAY WE TRAIN PASTORS AND PLANT CHURCHES AMONG THE UNREACHED

I'll never forget the day I watched my mission professor weep as he told of his first years among the unreached. He explained how billions who have no access to the gospel would remain broken unless more in this generation would respond in obedience and go. With tears streaming down his face, he looked around the room and asked why so few were willing to leave the comforts of this land to serve the unreached. I drove home weeping and praying, resolved that no comfort in this life would ever be exchanged for following Christ to the ends of the earth.

After serving churches and completing seminary, I accepted the call as a professor, teaching biblical and theological studies to pastors and missionaries on seminary and Bible college campuses. As a theological educator, I watched how worldview and culture shaped theology and ministry.

As I traveled with churches and students, my eyes were opened to the vast world of oral cultures, peoples who communicate entirely through speech, song, drama, epic, poetry, and other forms of oral genre. I learned that of the entire global population (now over 7 billion), only 1.3 billion prefer to learn through literate means.

As I spent time between semesters with missionaries among the unreached, I remembered the tears from my first mission course, only I wondered—once reached, how could new followers of Jesus grow without access to the Scriptures? How could pastors be trained among cultures where literacy is not practiced, let alone preferred?

What could theological education look like among oral cultures? How could pastors learn if they have no access to biblical tools in their language; how could they be taught in a way that an oral learner could listen, understand, and apply the teaching to ministry in oral communities?

How could pastors without library and Book grow in faith, plant more churches, and reach the lost of their lands?

Theological education is incarnational. Just as Jesus revealed himself in human flesh, theological education for the Church could dwell among the locals, proclaiming truth

through local culture, custom, language, and principle—and all without a single printed page.

After serving Christ through theological education for over a decade, I answered His call and followed Christ to the ends of the earth—to the billions without useful access to, or preference for, the printed page. I followed Him to the billions who live among oral cultures.

Today, I serve leaders among the poorest, hardest to reach people groups on earth, who live with limited access to the written Scriptures. From the seminary classroom to mud huts in the tribal interior, I train pastors in fourth-world cultures in leadership development and community transformation—all with no books.

Through worldview analysis, communication strategies, and contextualization, we co-labor with local partners to train pastors and plant churches that reproduce disciples using local oral content, recorded and distributed by oral culture leaders.

Today, our partnerships spread the Word of God throughout unreached oral communities around the world, penetrating darkness with the Light of the world.

God is changing communities by giving pastors and churches access to the Word of God through local gatherings of leaders who spread spiritual and physical Good News in culturally appropriate ways. Let me share a recent example of transformation in Africa.

GOD HAS A NAME

Hours away from the nearest community, this small tribe of unreached and unengaged people had been considered outcasts, separated by a tribal rift that alienated them from family and friends. Four months before, this tribe had never heard the name of Jesus—they believed in one great god, but they had no idea He had a Name. Men, women, and children prayed to the heavens and shared a common hope that some day someone would come and tell them how God would deliver them from their suffering and pain.

Several years back, in a neighboring tribe, a young man named Thuo heard the Word from God for the first time in his own language. In our program, an indigenous movement of messengers shared life-saving health and humanitarian content alongside of the Great Story of God and how He worked among the nations. Through our pastor training partnership, Thuo's life, family and village were changed forever. Jesus had transformed his community.

One day this summer, Thuo became burdened. He knew the tribe “next door” shared the same heart language. He knew they shared the same lineage. He knew they came from the same father. He understood the reasons the tribe had been excommunicated. What he couldn't comprehend was why no one had made the short walk over to explain that things had changed.

Then, one day Thuo awakened to realize that his neighbors had not been changed. Their children were dying from preventable disease. They had not seen. They had not heard. In a word, he saw they were lost, and he knew he had the Word that could set them free.


When he arrived, he explained his desire for them to see and hear what God had done to heal his tribe. He patiently described the new health they had enjoyed from the news they had heard. Principles on herd management, disease prevention, and new health and hygiene practices changed life in their village. He told them stories of planting crops and harvesting grain. He showed the results of

how this news had changed their lives. Then, they heard the songs of creation. He told them the epic Story of God and the covenants. He told them about the prophets. And finally, they heard the story of the Promised One.

Four months ago, the tribe next door had no hope. Four months ago, they sang and danced to a god with no name. Four months ago, one brave soul walked across a boundary established by racism, hatred and scorn. Then, love replaced contempt; boldness replaced complacency.

Today, they gather together under a tree in a new church plant to hear songs and share narratives of how He spoke and the stars and planets took their shape. They tell one another the stories of how God chose Adam and Noah and Abraham and Joseph and the fathers. Most of all, they tell their children of how God chose them. Today, they worship the Creator, and He knows them all by name.

God transformed Thuo's community by changing the way we deliver the Word. Thuo didn't need to move to the city, or leave his village, but the Word came to him in a language he understood.

God is changing lives by changing the way we think about training pastors. Today, Thuo leads a movement of church planters across barren unreached villages with the Word of God in a language each listener can hear and understand. He trains pastors among oral cultures by delivering Life—one spoken word at a time. 

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