

A Perspective on Perspectives

By GARY PETERSON

Gary Peterson serves with Wycliffe Bible Translators on a team of “specialty networkers” doing targeted recruitment for specific high-priority needs for Wycliffe Global Partners. Their goal is to provide Scripture to those still without a Bible in their heart language.

I grew up in a very mission-minded home. My mom even considered full-time missions. Missionaries visited our home all the time, and I loved their stories. I attended very mission-minded churches. Weeklong mission conferences were the norm; we’d attend as many of the meetings as we could. Again, I loved the stories—these missionaries were amazing people who lived amazing lives. I also graduated from a very mission-minded Bible college. Some professors were former missionaries. You could tell because they always had the best stories, and we all had to take mission classes.

But I wasn’t going to be a missionary. I felt I had another call. I was going to be a youth pastor, which I did in several churches. Let someone else do the “missions thing.”

As part of my preparation for youth ministry, I had three goals: (1) work at a Christian camp, which I did for a summer; (2) see the mission field for myself so I could learn if what I believed was a result of being an American or because I was a Christian. (I did that for two summers in Central America. I returned from my second summer with dysentery *and* the mission bug. I got over dysentery but not the mission bug); (3) see the United States, which I finally did after becoming an overseas missionary.

I joined Wycliffe Bible Translators for a two-year assignment. I came in as a mobilizer (church relations staff) with the intention of going into translation when I completed my linguistic training. But God had other plans. I’ve mainly worked as a mobilizer ever since (42 years!).

It was 22 years into my career when I was asked to teach a Perspectives class. I knew of the course, having been offered scholarships to take it over the years, but I could never put 15 weeks together. So, I let the opportunities slide. Yet, how could I teach missions not having taken it? My wife and I prayed about it and soon learned there was an “intensive” taught at the US Center for World Mission in Pasadena. Where would I get the money to attend? A supporter of ours, out of the blue, made it possible, and off I went.

I thought I knew just about everything about missions and what the Bible says about it. So did others taking the course with me. We had to have at least nine lessons completed before it started, including the reading. It seemed daunting at first, but wow, I couldn’t get enough! I often found myself reading way beyond what was required. The class included Fuller seminary students as well as lay people, pastors, and missionaries. What I learned during that course was revolutionary to me and my role in Wycliffe. I discovered many things totally new to me. Some things were reinforced; other things had to be unlearned. Throughout the course, I kept hearing from other participants like me who felt it was mind-blowing!

Perspectives helped me to see the big picture of what God has done, is doing now, and will do in the future. It has flavored every talk and conversation on missions I’ve had since, and I read the Bible with new eyes.

I’ve had the privilege of being an instructor for nearly 60 classes. Each time I teach, I study the lesson again as if it were the first time, and I continually get something new from it. 