

# OWNERSHIP—IT'S WHAT MAKES MINISTRY HAPPEN.



by Rick Wood  
Editor of *MF*

**W**hat is the one thing that is most deadly to the spread of the gospel to every tribe and tongue? Many would say the lack of money, manpower or vision. I believe it can be safely argued that *dependency* and the passivity it breeds is the most deadly problem for the spread of the gospel. Whether it is dependence upon foreign missionaries and foreign funds or even our own dependence upon the pastor of our local church, dependency is a ministry killer. It burns out the people and ministries that people are dependent upon and it prevents God's people from realizing their full potential in fulfilling the mission that God has given to each one of us to make disciples. We have talked about this problem for years in *MF* with columns by Glenn Schwartz and others. See our latest column by Chris Little starting on page 42.

Dependency prevents the one thing that is essential to all ministry success—ownership—ownership of the gospel and the Great Commission call to disciple all peoples. As we go to reach people for Christ, if we do not engender in those we reach an ownership of the

process of ministry and discipleship, then they will not reproduce their faith in the lives of others. The God-designed organic reproductive nature of the gospel is snuffed out when dependency is created and ownership of ministry is not developed.

We are ordained by God to be a kingdom of priests, not to be dependent on just a few priests or pastors or missionaries to do the work of ministry for us as we passively sit and listen. We are all called to spread the gospel to others. The vital essence of every Church-Planting Movement growing around the world is that people quickly take personal ownership and responsibility for the work of ministry. By definition dependency cannot exist in a Church-Planting Movement. The missionaries who are catalyzing these movements are not doing the ministry for people but are equipping them to do it themselves.

The biggest mistake that missionaries have often made is staying too long and doing too much for the people they seek to reach. In their landmark, must-read book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself*, authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert state forcefully, "Never do for others what they can or should do for themselves." Like others studying this problem, these authors have learned that dependency keeps

people from lifting themselves out of poverty or taking full ownership for the work of ministry. There is tremendous power released when average believers are empowered to take ownership of the ministry of the church. The power of ownership is now beginning to be released in peoples around the world through new technologies and methods of Bible translation.

## Setting the Scriptures Free

In this issue of *MF* we feature the tremendous power of God's people to speed the completion of desperately needed Bible translations when average Jesus followers are empowered to take *ownership* in the process of Bible translation. The spread of digital technology along with crowdsourcing Bible translation methods within a people opens the door of hope that we could actually see a Bible translation in the language of every people group that needs one in just the next 10 years. It is being referred to as Bible Translation 3.0 and it is explained in our lead article starting on page 6. This convergence of digital technology and crowdsourcing in Bible translation has earth shaking potential because the word of God is the essential element in the growth of the church within every people. Likewise, the current lack of Scriptures in many peoples is hindering the spread of the church and the gospel.

The truth is that the process of Bible translation in the recent past has taken too long and has cost too much. As a result, thousands of people groups still lack a New Testament translation in their language and many of the language groups that do have a translation desperately need it revised. A little known fact to many outside of Bible translation circles is that too many New Testament translations sit on the shelves, largely unused, after their completion. One reason is that the very people who are meant to use the translation were not actively involved enough in its development. The translation was done *for them*, but not really *with them*. The people became dependent upon outsiders for their translation and a lack of ownership of that translation was the result. In their minds, they did not create it, it doesn't really read the way they speak, so it is not really theirs.

But indigenous churches around the world that lack adequate Scriptures in their languages are starting to take matters into their own hands—empowered by new digital tools like MAST (see page 18) and Sovee (see the article on page 23). They are refusing to be dependent upon outsiders to find the time to get around to them and are taking ownership of the translation process.

In most cases where a Bible translation does exist, the church that uses it does not have control over it. They do not own the translation of the Scriptures in their own language. Someone else does. The results of this can be disastrous. Here is just one of the tragic stories that results when indigenous churches do not have ownership of their own language's Bible translation. See the sidebar on page 15 for more of these tragic and unacceptable stories.

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“For many years, a people group in Africa has had a huge demand for a second print run of the translation of the Bible in their language. The Bible society that owns the Bible in that language has not been able to pay for the minimum run but they have not permitted the use of lower-cost options like print-on-demand. Churches are now, once again, reading in the national language and doing on-the-fly oral translations, just as though the Bible had never been translated in the first place.”

This people group was dependent on an outside organization in order to do ministry. That dependency was keeping them from the Word of God in their own language. They did not have ownership of the process of translating the Bible in their language and they did not have ownership of the final product. As a result they could not use it or revise it. They were cut off from the Word in their own language because of that dependency. Unfortunately, this is not a unique situation.

You can understand why church leaders around the world are eager to use the new digital translation technologies that hold such great promise for providing them with the Scriptures and involving them in the translation process at the same time. It is time for us who care

about getting the Scriptures into the hands of every people group to start recognizing and tearing down the barriers to Bible access as soon as possible. It can be done and it must be done, now, within the next 10 years.

### Taking Some Time to Recover

On July 1st, I was working on this issue of *MF* when a lightning bolt hit my house and started a fire. We all got out safely but the fire and the fire fighters did significant damage to the roof and attic area of my house. The repair and recovery efforts are going to take a significant amount of my time over the next couple months so I have arranged for a guest editor to fill in for me for the next issue of *MF*. I anticipate that I will return for the Jan.-Feb. 2016 issue of *MF*. See you back here then. 

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