

WHITEFIELDS

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Humility is the Key

Pursuing missional relationships with the same mindset as Christ – in the era of Zoom, Venmo and Western Union.

Planting in Good Soil

A couple in Pakwach sows gospel hope into fertile soil, fertile minds and fertile hearts.

Taking the First Step

Eleven years ago, a missionary takes his first step beyond his home culture.

Taste and See

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When some people envision a Christian missionary, they may picture someone teaching a lesson, administering a program, or giving out aid—in essence, taking the powerful position in a giving relationship. Others may imagine a more nefarious image, such as a crusader, colonialist or a conquistador. Yet a key part of the work of the Christian is to emulate Christ in His weakness. We are to learn from those we teach, listen more than we speak, receive as much as we give, and be mindful to walk alongside instead of always taking the lead. Along the way, we can find ourselves laying aside our pre-conceived ideas, assimilating into the cultures of those we serve, sharing in difficult circumstances, and lovingly surrendering our rights. In doing so, we pray that Christ will be seen, Christ will be tasted, and Christ will be glorified.

Chris Chu
November 2021



Photo by Atul Pandey on Unsplash

Humility

IS THE KEY

John Wang is the International Director of Gospel Operation International

I consider myself to be a product of a divinely-led global migration movement. I immigrated to Latin America as a child, and after graduating from university, I pursued graduate studies in North America. Afterwards, I raised my family in the United States. Life experiences from Asia, Latin America, and North America have opened doors for me to different cultures and social experiences. I have come to value the richness of different ethnic cultures and different cultural expressions of Christianity. The vast and diverse world that God has created and the manifold expressions of Christian worship across the cultural spectrum have

tempered my thoughts on global missions, and remind me of my own relative insignificance.

Teachers Who Need to be Taught

Global missions work has had to adapt to the in-person restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Missionaries were not allowed to teach in person, seminary students were not able to learn in classrooms, and Christians could not gather in sanctuaries for worship. The Christian world embraced the use of video-conferencing for communication, teaching and worship. Video conferencing technology became indispensable for training, and courses could be conveniently and efficiently

prepared for teaching students in a distant locale. In the words of the Psalmist, it felt like we were “going from strength to strength.”

Even so, we ought to remember the need for contextualization when teaching students in a different situation than our own. People live in socio-cultural contexts. The core of faith may remain unchanged across cultures, languages and borders, but the experience, understanding, and application of Christian faith may differ enormously from community to community. Cross-cultural Christian teaching needs to undergo the process of contextualization. Technology may make it easy to teach across

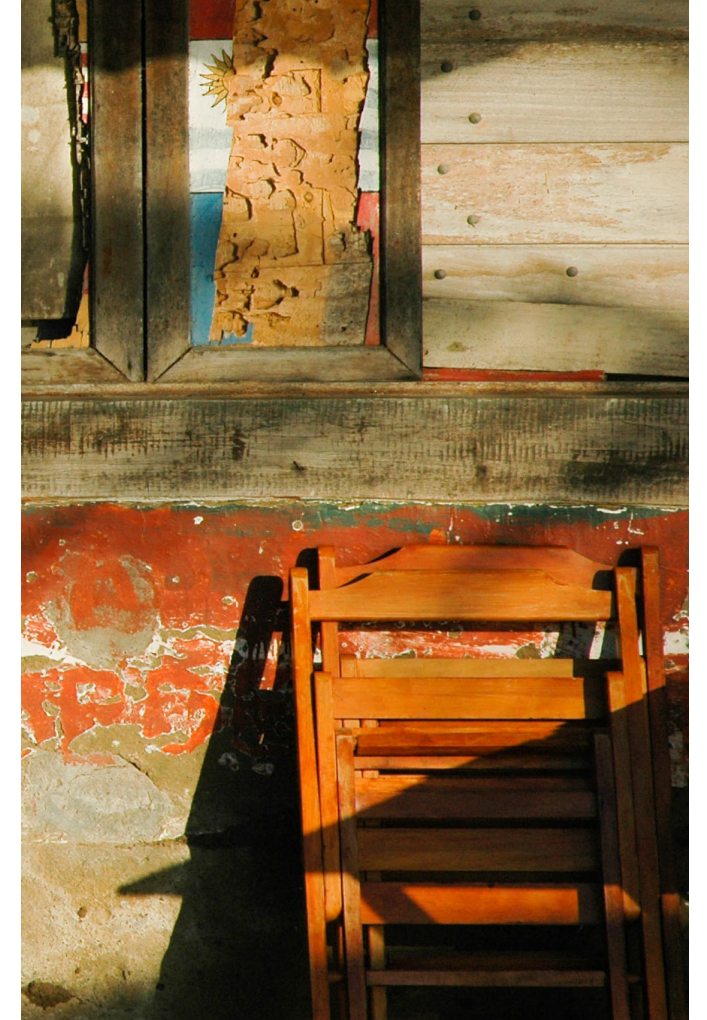


vast distances, but is the teacher humble enough to admit that she may have much to learn in her understanding of the socio-cultural context of her students?

Servants, Not Patrons

Globalization and travel restrictions have made it necessary to send money across long distances. Laborers who work in foreign countries need a mechanism to send money to their families back home, and almost every church nowadays needs to provide a way for their congregations to give their offering online. PayPal, Zelle, Western Union and MoneyGram have all become indispensable and convenient. Many churches have come to believe that it is simple, convenient and expedient to send money to missions projects. Perhaps later, they may consider sending people to serve on the mission field. Some call this "partnership," where Christians "here" send money to the field, and local churches on the field "over there" invest their manpower. Some may even think that this is a wonderful mission strategy.

Unfortunately, the history of Christian missions is haunted by the spectres of dependence and power imbalance. How can we avoid a kind of relationship between mission partners where one party is seen (or sees themselves) as "employers" or "patrons" who provide financial



support? Can we instead loyally serve our partners on the field? We need to learn to respect the decisions, wisdom, leadership, and ministry passion of our partners on the field. Humility is the key. If we insist on sending money to missions projects because we don't want to send people, we may unknowingly move away from the Biblical missionary model that bears witness to the humility of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:6-8, who made himself nothing to become flesh like us.

Humility in Missions

When video teaching is flooding every corner of the missionary world, can we humbly admit that we have much to learn about the context of the intended target? Can we change our posture from, "Let me teach you!" to "Can you teach me?" or "May

we learn together?" It is good to offer our finances to support God's global mission, but can we also come to the Lord humbly and confess that we haven't always been willing to offer ourselves? So often, we have been unwilling to carry the burden of the Lord's calling, opting instead to pursue comfort and ease. As I consider the vastness of God's universe and the virus that moves invisibly around us, I can't help but think about my own insignificance, where I am reminded that humbly walking alongside people is still the best way to follow Christ in living out His incarnation.

The famous Latin American theologian C. René Padilla passed away on April 27th, 2021. The Lausanne Congress website honored his memory by republishing

his address to the Lausanne Congress in 1974. There, he denounced the "arrogant triumphalism" that had filled many European and American missionary circles. His words call us to account today. As we advocate for missions to the ends of the earth, do we see that we are not just teachers, but also learners who sit under the teaching of our students? Can we not only posture ourselves as providers of service and help, but also humbly recognize our own lack, and receive help and service? We all need to work together, respect each other, and walk the path of mission together. Those of us who are devoted to the work of global missions would do well to heed Padilla's reminder to lay down our misguided racial, national, economic, academic, and cultural superiority, and humbly work alongside others.

Interview with Mark and Yvonne Lau, missionaries with Gospel Operation Africa, an affiliate of Gospel Operation International.

Abridged and edited from a translation by Calvin Kwok.

Calling to Missions

Mark: My name is Mark Lau. I am a missionary in Uganda, and [my wife and I] are from Hong Kong.

Yvonne: Yes, My name is Yvonne. I am [Mark's] wife, and I am also a missionary.

M: Before I became a missionary, my job was to install security systems in Hong Kong.

Y: And for me, I was an administrative assistant before I became a missionary. In 2014, I came to Uganda to serve for the first time.

M: We have been serving in a place called Pakwach in the north of Uganda. God gave me a vision to serve Africans, and eventually led us to Uganda. After some time, we found the village of Pakwach and decided to stay here to serve.

Y: We first came to Uganda on a short-term mission trip, and decided to become a long-term missionary afterwards. From 2014 to 2015, we spent a year in Uganda to find out if we could really adapt to life in Uganda, and to seek God's confirmation.

Four Ministry Areas

M: The first way we serve is through training local pastors. Uganda is a special place where you can see churches in almost every village. Small villages may have one church, while larger villages may have three to four churches. The primary need here is not for people to hear the gospel for the first time, but for Biblical teaching and training. That's why we've prioritized pastoral training over everything else.

Y: Many local pastors are faithful. Often they received a clear ministry calling from God, experienced God's help in extraordinary ways (like miraculous healing), and are willing to commit their lives to serve Him, even though they haven't read the entire Bible or have been trained in theology. Some may not even be aware that there are separate Old Testament and a New Testament in the Bible. We created a training program for local pastors to learn about the Bible and basic theology. Otherwise, they might teach a wrong gospel, or even start a cult.

PLANTING IN GOOD SOIL

PAKWACH, UGANDA

M: Secondly, we offer training to the youth. When we started training pastors in Uganda, the people who attended would often be elders, but younger believers were missing their chance to learn. Therefore, we started offering separate classes to teach older and younger believers at the same time, with the hope that both groups would come to spiritual maturity simultaneously.

Our third area of ministry is community development, where we provide practical assistance for daily living. One thing we do is agricultural training. Interestingly, the people who came to our training were already farmers or fishermen. They might be more experienced than us in their occupations, but when we observed their farming methods, we realized that they lacked a holistic or systematic method to farm [resulting in lower yields at harvest.] Therefore, we used agricultural training as a way to build relationships so that we could become part of the community's daily life. We share the gospel as we teach farming methods.

Y: In addition to farming, we also host health seminars and workshops for topics like personal hygiene, gynecological health issues, and sex education.

Our fourth area of ministry is academic training and sponsorship. Originally, we wanted to offer pedagogical training to local teachers, but we didn't have enough missionary teammates who came from an education background.

We had also hoped to train a group of teachers to create their own curricula and resources, since books and educational materials are too expensive for students and teachers in village settings. Students often study without books and have to rely on what teachers write on blackboards in order to practice reading. Eventually, we'd like to develop our own set of teaching materials that we can provide to local teachers at discounted prices. We are still praying for God to open the door to make this happen.

Additionally, we have a tuition sponsorship program. Many families here are living in poverty, so most students can only finish elementary school, and cannot advance further in their education. We use our sponsorship program to resource the education of orphans and impoverished children.

Life on the Field

Y: We found many needs here in Pakwach, and I've been heavily burdened for the community ever since we arrived. However, God told me, "Worry not. I will give you every place you set your foot." Because of God's calling, we can bravely set foot onto the ground of Pakwach. Mark's own clear experience of God's calling gave him confidence to know that it was God who summoned him to stay in the village through difficult circumstances.



Photo by Andrew Lie

M: I still remember that when I first arrived in Pakwach, many youths came to me and asked, "Could you hire me for a job? Could you hire me for a job?" I hope to provide mentorship to the youth, so they can find their way out from what they are struggling with. They can find a way to live a better life, whether they are able to advance in their studies or not. Whenever I saw

them coming to me to beg for a job, my heart felt really heavy, and I know that God has called me to serve them.

Y: When we provide sponsorship to students, they would ask me, "Why do we have to study? I will be jobless even if I can finish my education. No matter how much I study, I will still be a farmer!" So I told them, "You will gain knowledge

through education, and knowledge will enlighten you. I have read your textbooks, [they contain] knowledge you can learn to improve the way you farm, the way you raise poultry, ways to feed your cattle without using harmful chemicals, and ways to make organic cattle feed. This knowledge can be used in your community and in your own livelihood. Education might allow you to pursue a different career instead of farming. However, farmers are needed everywhere. Without knowledge, you may be able to farm for your [own subsistence needs.] With knowledge, you may be able to [grow food] for others as well. If you can improve your farming methods, you can harvest well and improve your life.”

This is the hope we wish to provide to [the people of Pakwach], and we hope that they know that the hope does not originate from us. This hope comes from God. Only God can summon enough rain and sunshine for them to farm. Only God can provide them with good soil. I still remember the time a horticulture expert came to Pakwach. He stated, “I have never seen such good soil here in this place. It’s soil without rocks; if you want to grow plants, it is almost impossible to do so with soil that is filled with rocks. This land is optimal to farm.”

So we told our students that God loved them very much indeed. We said to them, “It is up to us to decide how to use the



Photos by Andrew Lie

"Pray that we would be sensitive to God's plan and obey His calling, and not worry when our plans don't work out, but receive His plan with grace."

blessing and resources God offers to us, to live well and respond to the calling He has for us. Each person has a different calling from God. Perhaps He calls you to bless the whole nation of Uganda through being a good farmer because you can grow food." This is one example of how we use farming and education to encourage the youth of Pakwach to not give up on their future, because I believe this community, and this era, needs young and able bodies like them.

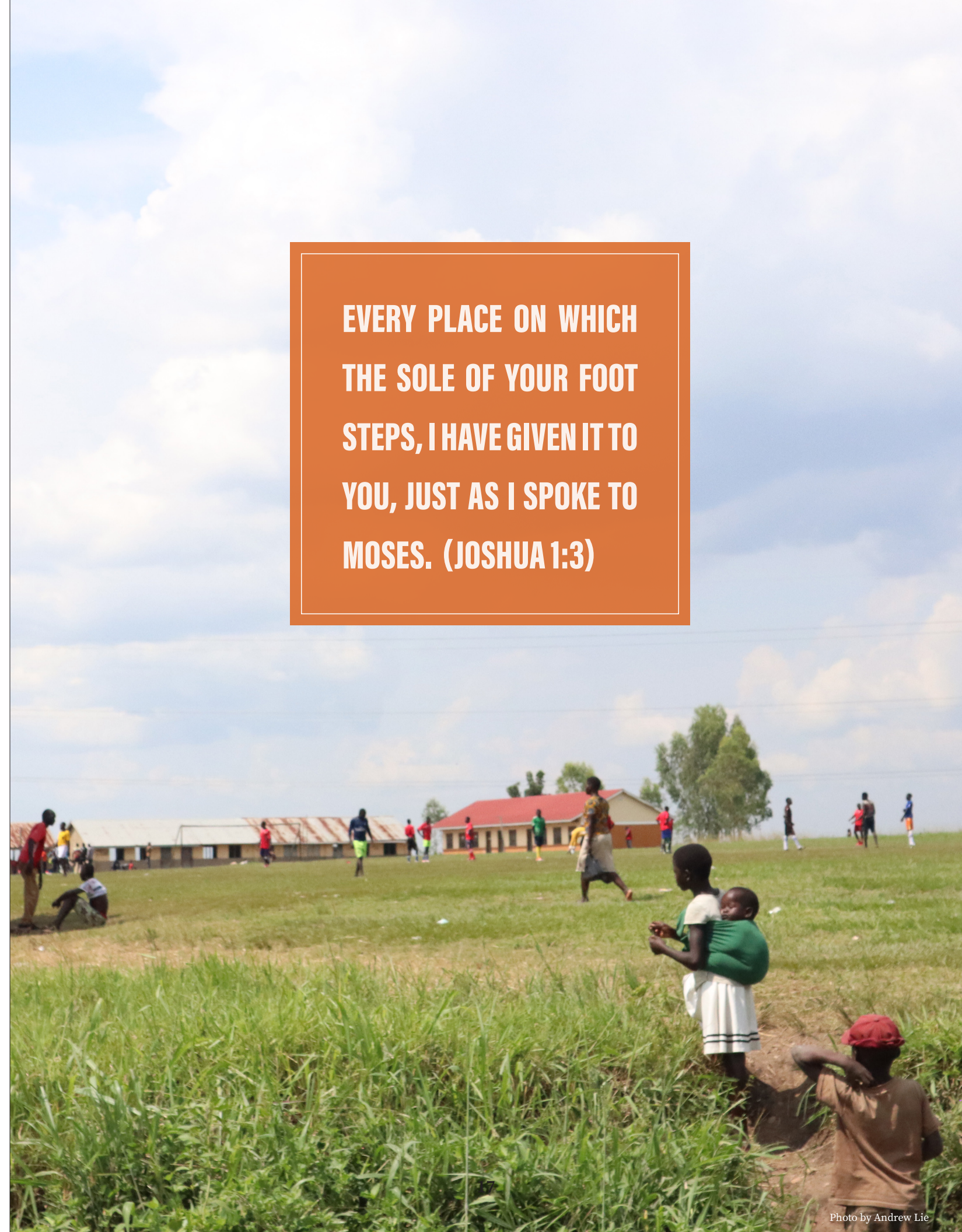
Prayer Requests

Y: We feel responsible to care for our parents. As you may see from our appearance, we are not so young, and our parents are even older. God has really blessed our parents in that they are still well even after several hospitalizations. Mark's mother has already reached

her 90s, and my father will soon be 90 years old as well. Praise the Lord, Mark's mother accepted Jesus as her personal savior and was baptized. I really hope that one day, the Holy Spirit would guide [my father] to accept God to be his own personal Savior.

Please also pray for our life here in Uganda. Sometimes, especially during the pandemic, we have health concerns about visiting different villages, so we are not able to minister as freely as we would like. Some villagers also get upset at outside visitors because of the pandemic. It's been difficult to minister as planned. So please pray for us, and we need to follow God's plan instead of our own. Pray that we would be sensitive to God's plan and obey His calling, and not worry when our plans don't work out, but receive His plan with grace.

EVERY PLACE ON WHICH
THE SOLE OF YOUR FOOT
STEPS, I HAVE GIVEN IT TO
YOU, JUST AS I SPOKE TO
MOSES. (JOSHUA 1:3)



TAKING THE *FIRST STEP*

By "Isaac," a GOI missionary.

Translated, edited and abridged from the GOI Chinese Magazine, July-August 2010

The first step onto the mission field is like the first step away from home. It is a step away from oneself, outside of one's own limitations, outside of one's own vision, outside of one's own life, outside of one's own culture, outside of one's comfort zone. Whenever the word "missions" is mentioned, I feel both excited and unfamiliar. What excites me is that missions can fulfill the Lord's Great Commission, which has become the center and core motivation of my ministry. What is unfamiliar is that in the face of the great needs of the gospel, I feel like an outsider who has no practical experience on the mission field. But every

time I think of the Lord's command, call and promises, I feel that my struggles, worries, difficulties, and risks are alleviated by the Lord. I feel willing to obey the Lord's guidance, accept the challenges the Lord has given me, step outside the boundaries of what I can see, obey the Lord's command, respond to His call, and accept His promises.

Weakness

I have never wanted to admit that I am a person who lacks courage, but I admit that my faith is weak. Like Abraham, I began to encounter crises of faith as I obeyed God's call. These crises are what I must go through on the road of faith. A

Photo by Anne Nygard on Unsplash

missionary cannot always predict the challenges ahead, so she must learn the practical ways to overcome a faith crisis. Like Abraham in the Bible, I found myself affected by my environment. At the beginning of Abraham's story, God did not clearly disclose the details about the "Promised Land" before Abram (Abraham's former name) had to leave his hometown, family, and father's house. This was the first step of faith. Abram's faith was solid at first, and he would "build an altar" to the Lord as a marker wherever he went. But as the reader would learn, the "Promised Land" was not as ideal as



"The first step towards a life committed to global missions requires the faith to step into experiencing weakness."

first imagined. Soon after Abram arrived in the "Promised Land," the land encountered a famine. Abram felt that he had to go to Egypt to live there temporarily, revealing his inner weaknesses and doubts. (Gen. 12:10) Abram did not consult God before going to Egypt, he lied to save his own skin while he was there, and tellingly, he did not build an altar to the Lord in Egypt. Faith is not a journey of ideal detachment, but built on the real, lived-out reality of Christians. True faith comes as the result of experiencing weakness, because the reality of life will always affect the growth of faith. Like Abraham, Christians may experience harsh situations, loss and separation from family members, and the pain of childlessness. Yet we cannot avoid confronting the challenges and weaknesses of our confidence in God. Not only should we allow our weaknesses to be exposed, but we ought to cry out to God for help. The first step towards a life committed to global missions requires the faith to step into experiencing weakness.

Vision

According to the biblical records, Abraham did not begin his journey as a man of broad vision. Genesis tells us that Abraham did stupid and hurtful things out of his own short-sightedness, to the point of causing a family tragedy. Yet for seemingly no reason, God called Abram in Genesis 12 to a covenant of faith, inviting him to broaden his horizons. God gave Abram a glimpse of the promised blessing. Later, under God's guidance, Abram's vision became wider, "The LORD said to Abram . . . "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward." (Genesis 13:14) It is critical for a person to have a broad field of vision. When there are too many obstacles in sight, I cannot see the beauty behind the obstacles. God taught me through Abraham that one's vision needs to be continually shaped and improved by Him through the undergoing of trials. Faith is a form of "spiritual homework," and a long mental pilgrimage. God won't



Photo by Adrian Dascal on Unsplash

let me settle for only the things that seem attractive in my own sight, but calls me to step beyond what I can see and “look east, west, north and south.” I now find that I am no longer a person who limits his view of Christian life to simply receiving the grace of salvation. I’m no longer a person who only cares about his own needs in the world, nor a person who only cares only about his own local church but not the universal body of Christ. I’m no longer a person who preaches the gospel only to my own tribe and countrymen. I found that my vision was constantly being broadened by God. May we see the life of mission to the world, the needs of God’s family, the preciousness of the soul, the nations and peoples in God’s mind, the expansion of God’s own deeds, and the eternal glory of God’s kingdom.

Cross-Culture

Genesis 12:1 says, “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you.” I face the same challenge from the Lord today. I’m not a rich man, but like Abram, I have a stable livelihood. It’s not that I can’t wait any longer to go onto the cross-cultural mission field, but God is calling

me now. I want to commit myself to the Lord’s Great Commission. I must leave my current way of life, and not be satisfied with my current ministry or comfort zone. God wants me to leave all of this to Him and let Him take charge. If we want to step out of our own way of life, we ought to obey God’s call and guidance. Like Abram, step out of our own lives, enter into the cultural context of other ethnic groups, and become a blessing to all races and peoples.

Conclusion

The prophet Isaiah said, “Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength.” (Isaiah 40:31) I know my strength must be renewed, because my former strength cannot bear the work of God today. New wine cannot be put in old wineskins. My methods and ideas need to be constantly updated by God, and like Jonah, my nationalism and narrow individualism needs to be broken. With God’s insight and renewal, I will not lose my biggest goal. So I must step into my weakness, step out of my narrow field of vision, and step out of my comfortable way of life. Only in this way can I see the greater needs of God’s kingdom and accept the higher challenges God has given to me.



Photo by Ruslan Bardash on Unsplash



Taste & See



Chris Chu serves as a mission mobilizer for Gospel Operation International

The vivid imagery of Psalm 34:8 has always stuck with me: “Taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!” I resonate with the idea that to truly know something’s value, one has to experience it and enjoy it for oneself. For example, I love eating fan tuan (飯糰) for breakfast, but when I first heard about them I was unimpressed. “It’s just a roll of rice with a few bits of pickle, fried cruller and pork floss thrown in,” I thought to myself. “What’s the big deal?” The “big deal” became apparent to me when I took my first bite. As my teeth sunk in the subtly sweet glutinous rice, chewiness gave way to the crunch of the cruller, and was accented by tart, savoury, sweet and meaty

notes from the condiments, popping off in my mouth like fireworks of flavor. I might have heard about the deliciousness of fan tuan, but now I had tasted for myself, and I was hooked.

Food is just food; how much greater is the joy and fulfillment of knowing Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior, experiencing His peace and friendship, and being adopted into the family of God! There are also salty, sour and bitter notes to the life of a disciple: experiencing exile from loved ones in the world who do not understand or accept our Christian identity, the struggle for faith during dark nights of the soul when God seems slow to answer, or the surrender of precious dreams in order

to follow God, just to name a few. Yet I cannot help but agree with the Apostle Paul: "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Phil. 3:8)

There are no words that could suffice by themselves to describe the fullness of Christian joy and experience, so it is the Christian's task to use more than words. Throughout Christian history, believers have sought to live incarnational lives--lives that bear witness to the truth and transforming reality of Christ's redemption--so that the world around them could taste and see for themselves the goodness of God.

Patient Ferment

The body of Christ grew in three hundred years from a small band of believers praying in the Upper Room to a global religion that reached across the Roman Empire and made up an estimated 8 to 12 percent of the Imperial population, according to sociologist Rodney Stark. Stark estimated that the church would have had to grow by 40% every 10 years to reach this level. Yet according to Mennonite historian Alan Kreider, the growth was odd. Christian communities of the early church period did not grow as a result of planning, organization, missional strategy or

evangelical technique. The growth often took place during periods of hostility towards Christianity. Churches did not use their services to attract new people, often opting instead to keep church meetings secret. Based on his study of early Christian writings, Kreider believes that the early church grew primarily through an emphasis on what he calls "patient ferment"—a process by which Christians drew people to faith through courageous, compassionate and virtuous life in community that bore witness to the transforming power of God. Kreider cites Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the 3rd Century AD, who wrote, "Beloved brethren, [we] are philosophers not in words but in deeds; we exhibit our wisdom not by our dress, but by truth; we know virtues by their practice rather than through boasting of them; we do not



speaking great things but we live them." Patiently, the people of God reflected God's patience by steadily bearing witness to God's goodness, holiness and salvation, even as they were rejected by the world around them. God used their witness to bring millions of people to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the small family of believers in Acts 2 grew into a global community of faith.

The Mission of God

Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, truth and life; no one comes to the Father except through me." Christ lived and taught in such a way that revealed the Father, and offered his life on the cross as a sin offering for humanity, so that whoever cleaves to Him by repentance and faith would also

be united with Him in His resurrection, restoration and renewal. There is no better news, and it is the Christian's task to share God's goodness to the world, offering her neighbors a taste through her living witness! The Anglican scholar and missiologist Christopher Wright wrote, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for God's mission." We Christians proclaim the good news of Christ's redemption at home and abroad, in our families and in homes we are invited into, in our neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth. We have tasted and seen; now we participate in God's patient ferment, going to the world and putting Christ on display so that others may taste and see.



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