

When They Are Not Able to Come In, We Will Go Out!

Most of you are aware that I was a missionary before I became a pastor. I served in the mission field from 1986-1994. After my eight years of missionary work, I felt the deep need to study Christian Theology. So I wrapped up my missionary work and enrolled in the seminary. Like most first year students I did not have a lot of choice in what classes I would be taking due to the mandatory "01" classes. But I really wanted to take the class called Missiology, so even though I knew adding an extra class would be a challenge, I signed up for it.

In my very first Missiology class, the professor asked us to share our understanding of missions. This immediately divided the class in two. One group felt missions were to win souls by converting people into followers of Christ. The other group felt the purpose of missions was to help people who are hurting.

Both sides were passionate in their belief and the discussion that followed became rather heated. One group insisted that sending missionaries into foreign lands was a total waste of money and time. They felt the people would be better served by using the cost of a missionary's airfare and living expenditures to provide them with clean water, bread, school buildings and medicine, etc.

Really? I understood very well where they were coming from, but I felt personally offended, as I had just gotten out of the mission field. Did I really waste my time and money?

The opposing group argued back saying that what they were recommending was just social work and that non-Christians could do that. That our duty is to bring people to Christ, and our mission is to convert them into Christians. I agreed that our mission is to bring people to Christ, but the word "convert" brought back some bad memories to me. I remember some missionaries only measuring their success by how many people had converted into Christianity. They tried to do anything to make them accept Christ. They handed out gifts, money, and helping hands, and in return they expected people to attend the church. One missionary reported that there were 300 people attending church. Later, I heard that there were 300 gift bags given out to get them there.

Sitting in the middle of this heated discussion, I found myself thinking about what is our mission? And how should we be approaching it?

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Last week Pastor Richard shared the mission statement in our Book of Discipline: “The mission of the church is to **make disciples of Jesus Christ** for the transformation of the world.”

This is well said, and so biblical. What is “Making Disciples of Jesus”? It doesn't sound like just sending money and materials to the poor would cover it. Nor does converting people to Christianity.

I would love to share a story of my time in the mission field. That experience taught me so much that I reflect and speak about it often.

I first served in the Philippines when I was in my early twenties. I was with a group of young people committed to sharing the good news using creative arts and drama. We traveled all over the Philippines performing dramas, mime, and dance. Sometimes we also provided workshops or performed for the local churches.

Once, our group decided to take off for a trip. We thought we would go to the beautiful island of Cebu. So the next day, some team members went out to buy the needed boat tickets but came back empty. They were sold out. The next day the same thing happened. So, the following day, we set out really early and arrived before the ticket office opened. There was already a line and as soon as the office was opened they hung a “Sold Out” sign in the window.

How could this be possible? Apparently, there was some corruption allowing people to purchase tickets behind the window. Our group had become very frustrated, and our frustration displayed itself with short tempers towards each other. The unity of our team was being shaken. Finally, our team leader called us together for a meeting to pray and ask God for guidance.

As we were praying, one person said, “I feel like we should go to Samar before we head to Cebu.” Then another member said, “I feel the same.” In fact, everyone was feeling a strong sense to go to Samar. Samar was known as a hard island, and their people were not welcoming of outsiders. Many missionaries have gone there but felt they were unsuccessful. Poverty was great in their many villages. In fact some parts of the island did not have any running water or electricity. It was because of those reasons, we had not even considered that island as a destination.

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I must confess that our team made the decision to go to Cebu on our own, but God had a different plan. So when we got in tune with God through prayer, we all were able to hear that God was guiding us to go to Samar.

Lesson learned... Always begin your mission with God. Sometimes out of excitement, we go before God, without asking God for guidance.

The following day when we arrived at the ticket office we found we were able to buy enough tickets for our group to go to Samar. Also, we contacted some of the local churches in Samar via telegram. Right away we found three churches who wanted us to come to their churches right away. It was as if they were expecting us.

Upon our arrival in Samar we met with young people and performed some of our dramas and mime workshops. We met some kind people who opened up their homes providing us with a place to stay. My memory is a little vague on exactly where we stayed but I clearly remember my shock when I learned that there wasn't any running water. The village people collected rainwater in big containers to supply water needs. I was told to take a shower with the water from the container. When I uncovered the lid, the surface of the water was filled with mosquito larvae. I closed the lid, decided I really didn't need a shower. It was very hot on this tropical island, and I didn't know how long I could stay away from the shower?? The very next day, I gave in!

We spent a good three days and it was time to leave. Usually, our group would go into the streets and perform, but this time our leader had decided not to. We could just rest that afternoon and get on the boat that night. Something in me urged me to tell the leader we should go out. So I went to the leader and did just that: "we should do the street performance before we depart." The leader gave me all the reasons why we should not go out that day. "It was raining and we would have to perform on the wet ground, the people of Samar did not appreciate outsiders, many missionary similar to our group had attempted to do the same in a better situation and statistics showed that they had failed as people did not show any interest in them..." I heard it all but my heart still felt that we should go out.

When Sam, our leader looked into my eyes, I believe he realized there was something else very important. (Normally, I had been very obedient to the leaders.) He said, "Fine, we will go out there for a short time, three local church's youth will share the dramas they had made during the workshop, and we will perform one of

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ours. It will be a short one, but I want you to wrap it up with you sharing your testimony.” I remember it was a challenge for me, because I had never spoken in front of people using English. My English then was poor. So poor, in fact, that I could not answer the phone.

Well, we went out into the street, the rain had stopped but the ground was wet. It seemed like it was going to be a waste of time as we had been told these people would not gather to watch our performance on a dry day.

The first church youth performed...a few people in the village gathered. Then the second group performed, and more people came out. By the time our team was ready to perform, over 200 people surrounded us. This had never happened before. Not only were we surprised, but even the local church people were shocked. After our team had performed, it was time for me to share what we were doing there. I prayed to God for courage and to give me the words “in English”.

“My name is HeyYoung and I am from South Korea. I came from there to meet with you today. You may ask why? Here is my reason. My food, language, and culture are so different from yours, but I have found one thing the same. We all have emptiness in our heart. We are all searching for the true meaning of our lives. We are all trying to find unconditional love. I have found that unconditional love. I found the meaning of my life. My heart is no longer empty but is filled. The answer I found was Jesus Christ, who accepted me unconditionally. I have come to you all the way from Korea, spending my time and money, because I want you to have this great love of Jesus in your life as well.”

Somehow my sharing touched the people. It was obvious that God had used my very broken English to share his word with them. People started coming up to pray, and many of their eyes were filled with tears. I am convinced that when we struggled to get the boat tickets, God already had these people in His heart. God even uses broken English to share His love.

Lesson Learned: Our weakness is a vessel for God’s power, and our flaws a canvas for God’s grace. The more important lesson that I learned is that it is not our job to convert people, but it is God who changes people’s heart. We make mistakes when we try to convert others. Our job is to introduce what Jesus has done and how his sacrificial life has affected our own. Our duty is to

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spread the seeds and water them, and it is God's job to let them grow and mature.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

I saw God's mighty hands; I saw people's lives filled with God's grace that day. To God be the glory!

As we designate this month to talk about mission as a sermon series, I want you to be encouraged by two simple but important factors of doing God's mission:

1. God is our leader. Begin our mission listening to God.
2. No qualification is needed as God will use anyone to spread God's love when we open ourselves to God.

Let me share one more story. Some of you probably heard about this, too, but again, it affected me so much I am not ashamed to share it again.

It was at my former church, when a disabled man in a wheelchair came to worship. It was during the early worship service when this man came to worship with us. At that time the church only had a chair lift to assist people to enter into the sanctuary. He told me that he was not able to move from his wheelchair to the chairlift because he was paralyzed from neck down. So I said, "don't worry, we will find some people to lift him and his wheel chair together." Then he said his wheelchair was a motorized one, which weighed over 500 lbs. There was no way we could lift him and the wheelchair together over the steps.

He knew I did not have an answer to this dilemma, so he told me, "Don't worry, I am used to this kind of situation."

I felt bad but there was no other way to help him. I said good-bye to him and entered into the sanctuary.

Then one of the beloved church members noticed from my face that something was not right. She asked me, "Is there anything wrong?" I told her what just happened.

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“Yes, it is a pastor’s nightmare to tell people that you cannot worship because you cannot get into the sanctuary.”

Then there was a response from her, which I will never forget. “IF HE IS NOT ABLE TO GET IN, THEN WE WILL GO OUT.”

Then, suddenly, everyone was moving. There weren’t any discussions. It seemed everyone already knew what to do. Some people went to get some folding chairs, while others went after the disabled man to invite him to worship. Others moved the microphone with the speaker box outside. The only person not moving but remained standing in the middle of everything probably was ME in shock. In only a few minutes the worship service had been completely relocated to the outside of the lawn and it included the disabled man. He could not get in, so we all went out.

Didn’t St Francis say, “Preach the Gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words”? Indeed, my church people preached to me that morning.

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Today, I wonder who is outside of the church? Why they could not get into the church? There must be different reasons, if the disabled man was physically challenged to come in, there may be people who are emotionally or even spiritually challenged to come in. Whatever the reason they are unable to come in, we may need to go out where they are.

So please allow me ask these three questions:

Is there anyone outside of the church who is not able to come into the church today??

Are you willing to go out to them?

What kind of words and actions would you like to share so that they may be able to find Jesus and decide to follow him?

Remember, our job is to plant, water, and then **watch** how God makes them grow and bear fruit. Amen!