



Thinking It Through

WILLIAM YUILLE

“I lay down My life for the sheep”

John 10:1-18

One of the Lord’s “I am” claims in the gospel of John is this: “I am the good shepherd” (v. 11,14). In this respect:

- He’s not like *the stranger*, who doesn’t know the sheep and isn’t known by the sheep (v. 3-5).

- He’s not like *the thief*, who seeks to get for himself and exploits and ravages the sheep (v. 7-10).

- He’s not like *the hireling*, who doesn’t care about the sheep but puts his own interests and safety first (v. 11-18). On the contrary, four times in verses 14 to 18, the Lord Jesus speaks about “laying down His life” for the sheep. He did so with:

Purpose: “...I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (v.14)

The death of the Lord Jesus wasn’t a meaningless event, an unfortunate end to an otherwise remarkable life. He knew His Father and what His Father desired, namely that men and women who had gone astray might be brought back into a relationship with Himself. Moreover, He knew that the achievement of this objective required that He give Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. And so He lay down His life on behalf of the sheep.

Confidence: “I lay it down that I might take it again” (v. 17)

The Lord Jesus understood exactly what was going to happen at Calvary: the savage attack of cruel men, the malicious assault of the evil one, the rejection by God Himself as He made Him to be sin for us. But it never occurred to Him that His death might be the end. On the contrary, He could confidently affirm, “You will not leave My soul in hell. You will not suffer Your holy One to see corruption. You will show Me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”¹ So it was that “for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross...”²

Willingness: “I lay it down of Myself” (v. 18)

He could have rejected Judas as one of the 12, because He knew from the beginning who should betray Him.

He could have avoided Jerusalem, but He steadfastly set His face to go there.

He could have hidden from His enemies, but He went to Gethsemane where Judas would be able to find Him.

He could have resisted arrest, but He went forth and presented Himself to those who came to take Him.

He could have fought, with 10,000 angels to assist, but He offered no resistance.

He could have defended Himself against the false accusations, but He opened not His mouth.

He could have come down from the cross, but He voluntarily gave up His spirit.

Obedience: “...power to lay it down...this commandment I have received from My Father” (v. 18)

Seventeen times in the gospel of John we read that the Father “sent” the Son into the world and 12 times we are told that the Son “came.” These are complementary statements. The initiative was with the Father, but the Son was responsive and obedient.

It is illustrated for us in the story of another father and son: “Jacob sent him [Joseph] out of the vale of Hebron. And he came to Shechem.”³ Joseph’s response was immediate and his obedience was total. His instructions were to go to Shechem but, when he arrived there and discovered that his brothers had moved on, he didn’t turn around and head back home. He knew what his father desired and was sensitive to his will and sought to comply with it. Therefore, he went on to Dothan and, as it turned out, to rejection and exile and suffering.

The attitude of the Lord Jesus was: “I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who sent Me.”⁴ It wasn’t that He was compelled to obey. The Father and the Son are distinct persons and yet they belong together and work together for the accomplishment of the divine purpose. There always was oneness of fellowship and cooperation and working. For the Lord Jesus that meant that He had no agenda of His own, but delighted in doing the will of His Father and thus He “became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”⁵ ■

¹ Psalm 16:10-11; ² Hebrews 12:2; ³ Genesis 37:14 (AV); ⁴ John 5:30;

⁵ Philippians 2:8

From “Town Drunk” to EVANGELIST!

by Eric & Roxana Ericsson



We met Raul (not his real name) some years ago in Sonora, Mexico. He was a migrant worker, harvesting grapes. He was called the “town drunk.” For generations his family held this title, and so Raul followed in the only “known way”—drinking and drugs. With awe and wonder illuminating his kind face, Raul told us of the times he walked down the highway from the city to the little town in which he lived with his family in Puebla, Mexico. It would be completely dark with cars zooming by as he weaved in and out of the traffic on this road with no shoulder. “Why did God preserve me?” Raul asked. “No one ran me over nor knocked me down. How did I find my way home,” he pondered.

Night after night he would return to his home, broken and in terrible disarray, to his patient, loving mother. His father also stumbled home each night after entertaining with music in the bar down the street. He would enter the humble home, angry, picking up chairs and hurling them at the walls (he later showed us the gashes and dents). The family had no hope, was in despair, and was barely surviving. Then one day they met the Master.

This is how it happened:

God put a former student of ours in Raul’s life. This student began to tell him about this wonderful Jesus who had transformed his life. Raul finally agreed to come to a service in the little town church after he’d had a few stops at the local pub. We happened to be there that night and noticed this young fellow stumble in. He was a terrible mess—his hair hung down, eyes wild and painful. Despite his appearance, Raul “drank” in the message we shared with him. He said, “I want to have what you have. Tell me how!” And he got it! With an open heart he surrendered his life—a life that God would one day use to bring many into His Kingdom.

How We Ended Up in Mexico

Our vision [for missions] came at an early age for the both of us, who were raised worlds apart—Eric in Argentina and Roxana in Alaska, daughter of Ernie and Helen Crabb, missionaries to that area. In Roxana’s Bible, the quote: “Pray for Mexico, Go to Mexico” was written alongside John 15:16 (*I have chosen YOU...*). It took a long time to get there, and much preparation before that dream finally became a reality.

Eric finished his evangelistic trip hitchhiking around the world, and in 1967 we were married in Sweden. Now, as husband and wife, we began to serve God in Argentina. Our ministry refocused us back to the States for a time. Finally, in 1989 we left for Mexico from Oregon, bidding farewell to family and friends, our careers and a home. The purpose? To collaborate in a training school for Mexican nationals who were seeking to know God and follow Him closely, and in the process, become His witnesses, reaching and teaching their own people for God’s Kingdom.

Twenty-five years ago the Lord called to our attention the needy people of Mexico. The burden he gave us was to get close to them, love them, let them see the beauty of Jesus through us, share our life story of “God’s amazing love and grace,” and mentor these precious souls as they grew into a relationship with God that would totally transform their lives. Allowing God to first work in us, and to radiate His love through us, constrained us to go! We found that real love is “pointing people toward the greatest beauty, the highest value and deepest satisfaction, the most lasting joy and wonderful friendship and most overwhelming worship”—all this and more toward knowing and loving, following and serving God. To witness this miracle of a new creation in Christ Jesus



Top Row (L-R): Former students ministering in mountainous villages where they live; “Teacher, teach us more!”; Baptism in the muddy stream.



Bottom row (L-R): Personal help and encouragement; Breakfast before visitation to homes in the village.

“This is why we believe God put us and others into their practical ways, **ENCOURAGING** them to go places people and **ESTABLISH** new works for the Lord.”



From Left: Missionary - reaching isolated areas with the Word of God; Roxana preparing teachers for children's ministries; Children's classes under the trees.

in people like Raul brings the greatest joy one could possibly experience!

Over 400 students have influenced our lives, (for the learning has been mutual) many of whom, after training in intensive Bible study and instruction on character development, are now serving in some of the most difficult working places in remote parts of Mexico. We came because we desired to reach the desperately needy people for Jesus. We helped them develop some of the skills they needed to pass on what they learned more effectively.

Raul was one of these students at the intensive Bible training school. He arrived in a state of shock not knowing quite what to expect, but desiring above all else, to learn the best he could, and then take the Message back to his family and to his town. Raul sat in the front of the class, seldom asking a question, but making great attempts to grasp the meaning of each of the truths being taught from the Word and apply them to his life. He was like a sponge! One day he came to us with tears in his eyes. He informed us that the church in which he was involved with on weekends had asked him to speak the next Sunday! He mentioned how unworthy he felt and how deeply humbling it would be to stand in front of a group of people and speak God's Words! He was in awe of God's love and *grace*. Thus began a new ministry for Raul...serving his new Master under the law of love.

The school motto, "*Enter to learn, go out to serve*," means that time is provided on the weekends to practice in various ministries: discipling, teaching, working with youth and children's groups, preaching, evangelizing in homes and on the streets and assisting in any serviceable need in the church and out of the church. As the students develop new skills in serving in these areas, ample opportunities result to encourage and pray for one another. We also use these times for mentoring and training. Learning to work in teams is vital to their future work. Valuing each other's gifts and depending on one another is so

needy in the lives of these students. It is one of the main areas of training for establishing new works in remote areas.

It was to this intensely structured and relationally geared school that Raul discovered his "wings," and, like so many others, stretched them out and learned to fly! This is why we believe God put us and others into their lives—for the purpose of equipping them in practical ways, encouraging them to go to places where no gospel has been preached, live among the people and establish new works for the Lord.

Raul continued to attend sessions at the school. The next time we went to his little town in Puebla, a room of the house had been cleaned out and painted. A "pulpit" was made of plywood and chairs lined the walls. We sat in a clean, happy atmosphere and celebrated the Lord's Supper with his beautiful mother, who, when she saw her "new son" so radically changed, wasted no time in receiving the Lord into her life. All sat solemnly around the tortilla and the juice singing and praying and rejoicing for what Christ had done for them! How simple and refreshing was that gathering of new believers! The "bread and wine," symbols of redemptive power, took on a deeper dimension for us! It was hard to keep back the tears of joy in the presence of such a loving, sacrificial Father!

The next year when visiting this same place, we attended a baptism in a nearby muddy stream. Raul, who was doing the baptizing, had won and discipled the young couple into the family of God. It was a glorious event with singing and celebration, praise, worship and good food on the shores of that muddy stream, no different from the one where the Lord was baptized, we imagined. The work in that difficult to reach town goes on for Jesus—and more souls are being brought into the Kingdom...through the single life of this one "seeker" who found!

There are many stories like these. Located in the hot, Sonoran desert a new school has begun called **Christian Education Center**. It is near Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico. We are

lives – for the purpose of **EQUIPPING** them in where no gospel has been preached, **LIVE** among the

only in the third term, but already God is preparing workers to harvest souls for his Kingdom. Classes begin in January and go through April. Daily instruction gets going at 7 a.m. with devotions, and continues until 9 p.m. with breaks for lunch, daily chores, study time, fellowship and worship, and periodically, times of solitude in the desert for prayer and meditation on the Word. The weekends are spent serving in developing churches in outlying districts and at times, on evangelistic outings to remote, un-evangelized *pueblos*. These visits greatly encourage the solitary workers struggling in difficult and rustic places. The students develop skills and a love for sharing the good news on these outings.

The teachers are selected from those whose desire is to develop nationals for ministry in Mexico. They have been involved in missions, have studied, and have experienced the Lord's work in their own lives, often through trials and suffering. They speak Spanish and identify with the needs of the students. Their love for the Lord and the people of Mexico is their outstanding quality. They do not have to have a high educational degree, but their track record of faithfulness to the Lord and accomplishing His purpose no matter the cost is of enormous value. Above all, "models" of the Christian family and God honoring living are what is greatly desired and valued. It is a blessing to work with such a caliber of people!

For 22 years we used a "Bible coach" (as they are called in Argentina), loaded with materials, Bibles, Sunday school lessons, etc. to keep in touch with the students, disseminated throughout the country, for the purpose of encouraging and mentoring them on their own turf. Eric with his inseparable accordion and Roxana singing and teaching along side him, spent months maneuvering in and out of "difficult to reach" places, encountering "family" and faithful witnesses, longing and *just waiting* for that visit! Those visits were accompanied with much love and ended always with tears as we parted, hoping to return soon in God's will. Unfortunately those trips have all but ended due to long distances

(thousands of miles) and increasing dangers.

In these later years we are reduced to help the closer works around Sonora to Nayarit, as age is creeping up on us. We thank all of you, who through the years have supported and sustained this ministry and others like it with your prayers and giving. Give glory to God for the things He has done and is doing through His humble servants, in this case, *south of the border*. May His tribe increase! ■



Eric Ericsson, born and raised in Argentina, and his wife, Roxana, an MK from Alaska, were commended to serve first in Argentina by the assembly in Yakima, Washington (Tieton Drive Bible Chapel) in 1969; then they were commended by the Westside Bible Fellowship in Hillsboro, Oregon in 1989 to serve in Mexico. They have three grown children and seven grandchildren.



Top Row (L-R):
Student body and workers from 2011;
Learning together in small groups; Children's classes in the villages.



Bottom Row (L-R): Time alone with the Lord in the desert; Children's materials are so welcome – future missionaries!; New church starting in a village without a testimony.

Church Planting in NANTES, FRANCE



by Gerry Seed

Nantes the “Fruitful”

Nantes is a thriving port city on the west coast of France where the famous Loire River connects with the Atlantic Ocean. With a population of around 600,000 people it ranks about the eighth largest city in the country of France. Once heavily dependent on the ship building industry (and even further back on the slave trade industry), Nantes has succeeded in greatly diversifying its economic existence and has developed a dynamic economic and cultural identity which continues to prosper in spite of current economic trends. It is now one of the most attractive cities in France with a strong growth rate.

Nantes the “Desolate”

But the economic and social dynamics of the city obscure its desperate spiritual state. Although the gospel has made immense inroads in France in recent years, Nantes is still a spiritual desert by most standards. Historically, Nantes played an important role in the spread of the Reform in France with the signing in Nantes of the edict allowing a certain religious freedom to the Protestants. But the impact of the Reform was soon squelched and little influence of the gospel of grace remained in the years that followed.

For many long decades Nantes has been the least evangelized large city in France. When we arrived in Nantes back in 1995 at the invitation of the small existing assembly, there were only 10 evangelical churches of any type in the area, representing a total of approximately 600 to 700 evangelical Christians.

Two Visions for Multiplication

Sixteen years later and the situation has dramatically changed! Praise the Lord! The number of evangelical churches has more than doubled and the number of believers has been multiplied by three or four. Part of that multiplication has come through the work of the brethren assemblies in the area. Two very different projects by two different assemblies have led to the establishment of two more local churches in various parts of the city.

I. A “Hive Off” Vision

The original brethren assembly in Nantes was probably the first evangelical church in the city. The assembly was first formed in the 1920’s through the efforts of an English businessman. When they asked us to come and help, the assembly was still meeting in the building left to them by Mr. Brooks in 1927. By 1995 there were about 30 in fellowship. But the Lord was at work. Several had recently been saved. Some of the believers already had a vision of reaching out and starting a new work on the opposite side of the city where a few of the families lived and where there was no evangelical witness whatsoever. It was they who suggested that we find a house in that area in view of a future outreach.

In the following years (1995-1999) the work continued to grow rapidly (by French standards)! The hall, which had already been enlarged to the maximum capacity of the small plot of land, was full to overflowing. The idea, however, of a hive off to start a new assembly on the east side of the city was quickly put to one side, as it would have left the original group too weak and it would not have solved the space problem on a long-term



NANTES WEST

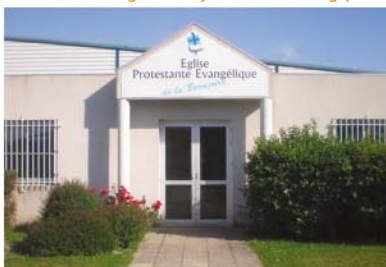
Top: Nantes streets; Nantes West assembly built in 2002. **Left:** Original chapel after renovations in 1986. **Below:** Nantes W. & Beaujoire together.





BEAUJOIRE

L-R: Second mtg. at Beaujoire; Current mtg. place.



basis. It was decided to look for bigger premises which would permit growth to a point where a hive off in the northeast part of the city would be a viable possibility. This eventually led to the building of a new chapel not far from the original hall.

The new chapel more than doubled the capacity of the old building, but within a short space of time it too was full to overflowing. This pushed us once again to consider the possibility of a hive off to start a new assembly on the east side of the city. On Jan. 29, 2006, a group of 15 adults and 12 children from the Nantes West assembly met together for the first time in a hotel on the east side of the city. We started off meeting once a month on our own. After a year we upped it to twice a month and then finally in September 2008 we started meeting every Sunday in the same hotel. It has been a "progressive hive off" spread out over four years.

This work in the Beaujoire area of the city has consistently been seen as an extension Nantes West assembly. During the previous couple of years we had been working hard at preparing the leadership of the new assembly. The eldership had been enlarged to a group of six and the deacons group had been doubled with representatives from both the West and the Beaujoire. For a time both groups met together to maintain a joint vision for the new project and to train new leaders for the new work. The deacons now meet separately but the elders continue to meet as one group on a temporary basis.

In June 2009, we were able to rent an office facility at the Beaujoire which we adapted for our meetings. The advantage of having a place of our own in which to meet was seen almost immediately, as the numbers attending increased, resulting in people being saved! With now about 50 attending on a Sunday morning, the current premises are proving too small. The group is now officially an independent assembly and continues to grow in numbers and in spiritual maturity. One major project at the moment is the building of a new chapel. Renting suitable premises has become exorbitant. The city offered to sell us a piece of land ideally situated in the neighborhood at very a reasonable price. The architect is currently at work on the plans for the new building which should get underway by April or May 2012, Lord willing.

II. A Pioneer Team Vision

Back when the the Nantes West assembly was seeking the Lord's will about the future development of a new work on the east side of the city, others on the opposite side of the country also had a new assembly in Nantes on their heart. This project started taking form in 1995 as a couple in one of the largest

assemblies in the country had a vision for a pioneer work in another needy area of the country. In 2000 the "Bonne Nouvelle" assembly in Strasbourg sent out a missionary team to pioneer a new work in Rezé, one of the southern suburbs of Nantes. Rezé and the surrounding area is made up of nearly 100,000 people and only one other evangelical

church. The team was initially made up of one couple commended full-time and two other families committed to the project who found employment in the area. Two other families joined them a short while later.

The team has been committed to a strong presence in the community in order to be a public light and a witness. They have been involved in a number of activities in the community in an effort to reach out to the families and young people of the area.

One of the key thrusts of their outreach has been centered on children. The original couples had all been actively involved in the evangelical scout movement known as the "Flambeaux." They had lots of experience and energy – but virtually no children with whom to start a program. The Nantes West assembly had lots of children but no experience. A partnership was formed that eventually went beyond the two assemblies and the "Flambeaux" work amongst the children based in Rezé became a major tool in evangelizing the area. The group grew to well over 100 children every two weeks and has now "hived off" to form another group in the northeast area of the city, linked up with the new Beaujoire assembly and a couple of other churches in the area. A number of children have been saved through this work and several families reached and added to the church in Rezé.



Top: The Rezé assembly.
Bottom: The new chapel under construction.

REZÉ

The first worship service of the new assembly was held in a hotel in January 2001. Since that time they have moved around a fair bit, meeting in a youth hostel, a restaurant, an old folk's home and even a Catholic retreat center. A suitable meeting place has been a constant challenge for them. But in spite of so much moving around, the Lord has blessed and the assembly has grown. There are now over 100 on a typical Sunday – half of whom are children!

The work has grown and matured. A leadership team has been put in place and the initial full-time couple is now going back into full-time secular employment, all the while remaining active in the assembly. Others are taking on greater responsibilities.

Last year they were able to buy a piece of land near the cen-

tre of Rezé in order to build a new building suitable for their purposes. The building is nearing completion and they hope to move in by the beginning of 2012.

Nantes the "Fruitful?"

God has blessed and encouraged both of these very different initiatives in order to fulfill His own promise: *"I will build my church ..."* What we have learned is that there is no "right method" when it comes to church planting. What the Lord is looking for is "right hearts" that He can use for His glory and the advancing of His kingdom. The multiplication of local churches in the city is a key element to the spread of the gospel in this city. The brethren assemblies have made a great step forward in this domain. But the city is still a very far cry from the goal fixed by national evangelical leaders to have one evangelical church for every 10,000 people. May it please Him to do in this part of France what He did so many years ago: *"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."* (Act 9:31 NKJV) ■

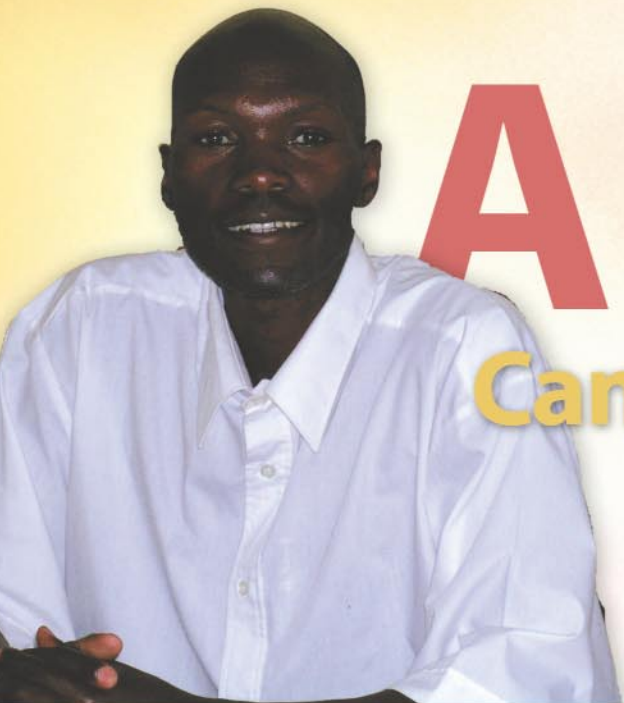
FLAMBEAUX

Left: Bible time for the "Flambeaux".
Right: The "Flambeaux" on a weekend outing.



Gerry & Dorothy Seed were commended to the work of the Lord in France in 1985 and 1988 by assemblies in Canada and N. Ireland.

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AIDS Victims

Can "Live Forever"

by Bob & Sue Cullen

During our early days in Uganda, we were visiting one of our offices for Bible study-by correspondence in the nearby town of Rukungiri (roo koon gee ree). The Ugandan brother who managed the office there at that time was named Emmanuel. He was, and still is, a very industrious servant of God. He is also innovative – as we approached his desk that day we saw that he had displayed the Emmaus course booklets in a very unique way! He had laid out some of the course books on the table so that the titles, with the help of a few words added in between, made up a sentence. It read something like this: "The Word of God teaches that the Servant of God is *The Greatest Man Alive* and as you *Journey Through the Bible* you find that *What the Bible Teaches* is there is *One God One Way* and in believing in Him, *You Can Live Forever.*" We were enchanted! Delighted!

You can do things with titles. As we encountered people who had AIDS, we imagined what it must be like to know you transmit this disease and to realize that at *any time* your body could give in to its ravages and death might soon become a reality. We also imagined what a message of hope could be offered if one with AIDS were given the Emmaus course entitled "You Can Live Forever." It was such a wonderful message for AIDS patients. One of our missionary friends, Dr. Larry Pepper, who was a doctor for the Southern Baptist Christian Mission, caught on to this idea and ordered box after box of this course to use in his spiritual ministry at the hospital. Dr. Pepper works now in Tanzania but while he was here in Uganda that message of "You can live forever!" helped many, many people.

Later that message became more meaningful and much closer to us and this is why. A man named Cornelius began to avidly study the Emmaus courses at our office here in Kabale (kah bah lee). Soon enough he had taken most of the courses. Through his study of the Bible, his understanding of salvation was confirmed in his heart. He became a strong believer in

Christ and was a faithful servant in our assembly.

But his decision to follow Christ cost him a great deal. His father was a Catholic and when he heard that Cornelius was fellowshiping with our group of believers, he took away all his inheritance – lands, businesses and house. All were gone! Not only that, his wife rejected him and took their children to live with her. It was only his Christian mother who stayed by him.

Shortly thereafter we were able to offer Cornelius housing at our property and he moved into a small house there. His wife, Placidia, brought the children to visit their father one day and while there one of the Ugandan brothers in the assembly led her to faith in Christ. Things slowly changed for Cornelius - his wife and children came to live on the Emmaus property and they moved into a larger house. We had a need for someone with Bible knowledge to fill an empty position at our correspondence office. We knew Cornelius would qualify because he had acquired much Bible knowledge through his personal studies. Cornelius and his family were with us for quite a number of years. Eventually, Cornelius received back a portion of his inheritances from his father.

Cornelius soon suspected that he had contracted AIDS because of the lifestyle he lived before he became a Christian. We went with him to Mbarara, (em bah rah rah) a neighboring town where we once again collaborated with the good doctor, Larry Pepper. Dr. Pepper was very kind and sensitive in



how he made the necessary tests, by letting Cornelius know the new situation and how he could deal with it effectively. After returning home to Kabale, Bob went with Cornelius to the local hospital under recommendation from the doctor to apply for and receive subsidized anti-retro-viral treatment. Cornelius resigned from his job at our Emmaus office, however he helped us greatly by recommending the man who currently works with us.

Cornelius moved with his wife to the village area and they are now supporting themselves with agricultural projects. They are carrying on God's work there too – Cornelius walks the hills telling others about Christ and the couple has weekly fellowship in their home. Cornelius visits the Kabale assembly every so often. When he comes we try to bless him with financial fellowship because he always blesses us with his presence.

He brought a blessing to us in another way a few years back by helping a woman named Grace. She is a lovely Christian woman who started attending our assembly. One day she bravely stood up and said, "I have AIDS but I have faith in Jesus Christ and I want to serve him with whatever is left of my days." As was typical of Cornelius' concern for others, he advised Grace to apply for the ARV medications at the Kabale hospital.

Grace now receives these treatments and they have kept her strong and she provides vital assistance to us on our Emmaus Bible School campus. She is a faithful worker doing upkeep with two other women. She is cooperative, faithful, joyful, thankful and always giving God the glory for everything in her life. She went the extra mile - not only weeding but making sure that the flowers we planted (which would always die out) would get water and protection from the goats! This especially endeared her to us. It was something no one had asked her to do. Her testimony has reached even beyond what she does at the campus. Recently, her family who is Catholic

and Muslim, called her to her home in the village to present a formal apology to her for the wrong way they had treated her.

I keep a 3x5 card in my Bible. It is from Cornelius. I'm sure he was reading a book by Charles Swindoll when he wrote this note. It would be typical of Cornelius to take what he absorbed into his life and use it to encourage others. The card reads, "Attitude is more important than facts. Your attitude needs to remain positive and in control position. Quality, care and dedication make the work easier. Jesus said 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain move and it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you.' Therefore, when faced with a mountain, do not quit. Keep on striving until you climb over, find a pass through, tunnel underneath or simply stay and turn the mountain into a gold mine...with God's help."

I will never throw that card away. As long as I have any say, it will stay in my Bible. I take it out and read it when I need encouragement. Its words represent many other people here in Uganda that face mountains every day. Though the unbelieving do not trust the God of heaven nor His Son, Jesus Christ, other believers like Cornelius and Grace trust that God can do a mighty work with people to save them from the judgment of sin and whatever mountain they find themselves facing. Cornelius and Grace are two people among many who are to us an amazing inspiration and keep us going by their strong trust in our great God! All our Ugandan brothers and sisters are strong in our thoughts and that is only one way in which they "live." Another and more important way is because of their faith in Jesus Christ they will all "Live forever!" ■



Bob & Sue Cullen were commended to the work of the Lord in Uganda by area assemblies in Portland, Oregon in 1978 and then again by assemblies in Memphis, Tennessee in 1988.

"...yet now he has brought you back as his friends. He has done this through his death on the cross in his own human body. As a result, he has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand in it firmly." –Colossians 1:20-23a



Opposite page at top: Cornelius. **This page from left:** Grace; Time of studying with Gracy and Mary; Students qualify for large certificates; Present office facilitator gets his large certificate; Large certificates for 12 Bible courses completed.

lost our vision

by Paul Young

The seeds of failure in the church of Britain are not new but were sown years ago, resulting in the malaise that is prevalent today. The malaise is witnessed in the lack of expectation that God will bless His Word, and a loss of confidence in the

gospel as the only answer to humankind's deepest need. It is also seen in a blurred view of the greatness and splendour of God and in ignorance of the intensity of the spiritual battle. A diminishing view of sin and judgment is also characteristic

of a church that has lost its way and which is bending to the prevailing attitudes of society. There are many factors that contribute to this loss of vision. We will consider three.

1. ATTACK

The church in Britain is being attacked and therefore it is easy to feel defensive. It has not yet been attacked with the brutality of imprisonment, torture or martyrdom, although the law has been used to limit Christian work and prevent clear Bible teaching.

The attacks have been more subtle. **New atheism** has been launched as a frontal philosophical attack on the Bible and the notion of God as Creator. This has been spearheaded by popular writers, and atheism is considered by many to be a respectable position to hold. **Postmodernism** has undermined the idea that evidence or truth can ever be objective and so the evidential nature of the gospel is brought into question. **Secularism** has forced religious belief into the private areas of life and insists that it must never

be seen on the public stage; for example, politicians should never admit to praying before making important decisions. **Pluralism** requires equal treatment for all faiths regardless of truth and evidence or the effects such views may have on society. It also insists on affirming all faiths, regardless of the contradictions between them. The **media** is all-intrusive and with its generally negative attitude towards Christianity has a profound impact on the public conscience. This can leave us bewildered and wondering if it is possible to go forward as a church today.

2. ENTICEMENT

Christians have not been immune to materialism in the Western culture. We too can be taken up with moneymaking, the tangible and the entertainment in society, and lose the cutting edge of our spirituality, prayerfulness and vision which an earlier generation strove for and delighted in. It is too easy to be attached to earthly, material things. We must gain the perspective that money and possessions are our servants, not our masters, and be alert to such a danger.

There is another danger: the loss of deep, well-thought-out responses being replaced by simplistic superficial answers to profound issues that affect people deeply. Many are faced with hunger, redundancy, unemployment, broken relationships, sickness and bereavement, and they do not need and cannot cope with what are sometimes Christian platitudes. They need the quality answers which the Bible provides and the loving actions of Christians which should follow hard on the heels of such answers. There are many hurting, isolated, sad people in our society and we should show genuine compassion for them. Above all, people need the gospel, so a significant part of our lives should be about evangelism and mission.

3. DISTRACTION

One of the ways to lose vision is to be distracted. Distraction can take many forms but one of the most significant is to be too busy. We have our

In days of shrinkage, decline and closure, there can be a sense of just holding on to what is and thinking nothing of forward progress and therefore little of overseas mission.



occupations, families, churches, homes and gardens, and we are very active people. In the busyness of life we can lose sight of God. We try to make up for this by busying ourselves with church work, but no amount of activity can take the place of knowing God. Our most important objective should be to know Him personally and intimately, and from that depth of true communion effective activity can flow. How do we find this intimacy with God?

i. **Solitude:** there is a need to be alone with God. We love to be with people, especially those closest to us, but we must find time to be alone with God.

ii. **Stillness:** there is a need to reduce or even to stop all our activity and be still. The Psalmist said: *Be still and know that I am God* (Ps. 46:10).

iii. **Silence:** we need to hush the noise of our lives and wait silently in the presence of God to hear His quiet voice.

Yet this is difficult because there are so many people to meet, that we find solitude elusive. There is so much to do that being still is tough, and so many voices to listen to that it is hard to be silent. Yet we must if we are going to capture and maintain the vision God has given for world mission.

So the need is to live every day in holiness and for the glory of God - to proclaim the gospel evidentially and with every means at our disposal to persuade people to believe, not only through the formal services of church but also in the office, the home and the neighbourhood. Also we need burdened, committed prayer, with a deep sense that we are seeking the power of God to be at work in our lives and in our churches, with a clear understanding that the lost are lost. Our shallow, sentimental culture encourages wishy-washy platitudes to answer such issues including the belief that a God of love will not consign anyone to hell. The truth must be stated that hell is a reality and the lost go there. They need the gospel and we must proclaim it and win them for Christ.

An artist was asked to paint a picture of a dying church. He spent many hours and when the picture was unveiled it took people's breath away. It conveyed a beautifully constructed church building with no expense spared. The place was full of people with new hymn books and an overflowing collection plate. All seemed perfect and a sense of blessing seemed to prevail. However, a closer look at the picture revealed one corner where a collection box was located. On the front of the box were the words "For Overseas Mission" but across the slot at the top was a cobweb. The artist had it right. The church, unconcerned for the work of mission and of reaching the lost, is a church in serious decline.

The following quote is taken from "Revival and You" by James Alexander Stewart:

A church many years ago had, because of coldness of heart, only twenty members who gathered on Sunday evenings for Bible study. Some suggested that they close the building and give up the testimony in that predominantly Catholic city. A few held

on in faith and, with careful thought, being elderly people, had a solemn meeting of dedication where they told God that whatever should be the price for an awakening in their church and city they were willing to pay it...They continued for many months seeking the face of the Lord...They would not let go of the Lord until He had blessed them. When I began meetings in their church, many hundreds of souls were saved from the opening nights, many among them being the children of those who had been praying. So mightily did the Lord work in the church to the salvation of souls that very soon the building which seated 800 people was packed to capacity at every meeting...They soon overflowed their banks, so that 20 mission stations were established...The deadest church in the nation became the most spiritual and wide-awake. ■



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