

# PAUL'S EXAMPLE OF MINISTRY

## Introduction

One of the major reasons that Jesus was sent into this world was to prepare his disciples to be sent out to complete the work that Jesus began. So Jesus spent much of his public ministry preparing his disciples for their public ministry. In Acts 1, we see these disciples starting to come together and beginning the first tentative steps of fulfilling that mandate of being sent out by Jesus. However, apparently these disciples that he had spent three years preparing were not adequate to fulfill the task that he had for them.

Therefore, Jesus decided to call and prepare another disciple to fulfill that task. This person was a young man named Saul when we first met him. In fact, when we first met him he was an enemy of Jesus. However, somehow in God's infinite wisdom, he knew that he wanted this young man to be someone he could send out to accomplish a very important ministry. Paul gave his testimony to King Agrippa on near the end of the Book of Acts, after many years of ministry. And this is part of what he said that Jesus said to him during his conversion:

*“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. **I am sending you to them** to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’ (Acts 26:15-18).*

Jesus had been sent by his Father. We saw earlier that Jesus came to this world to do two things. He preached the gospel of the kingdom and he healed the sick. And now Jesus promises Paul that he is sending him to the Gentiles.

What was this young man going to do after he was sent out? We are given a little hint in the passage above. He was to open the eyes of the Gentiles. How did the sending work out in his life? There are many details we could talk about. However, I want to look at one particular aspect of his ministry. This is a two-verse section that gives us a hint about the way Paul was sent out and the strategy he used to fulfill the purpose for which he had been called.

On his second missionary journey, Paul had visited the Corinthians and planted a church there. He stayed and worked in that area for 18 months. He left Corinth, went to Jerusalem, reported back to Antioch and then traveled to Ephesus where he stayed several more years. Ephesus is almost directly across the Aegean Sea from Corinth so Paul had regular contact with the church at Corinth while he was living and working in Ephesus. Paul actually wrote at least three and possible four letters to the church at Corinth while he was in Ephesus.

It was in one of these epistles that Paul gives an important testimony. In these two verses Paul outlines the strategy that he had used in being sent by Jesus to fulfill his responsibility. *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. I praise you for*

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*remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you” (1 Corinthians 11:1-2).*

In this passage, Paul is writing to the Corinthians who were fairly recent converts, not more than three or four years removed from paganism. They are still learning what it means to become Christians. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul had been dealing with a difficult issue. The obvious issue was the eating of meat offered to idols. A more basic issue was offending other people or causing others to stumble. Here was what Paul was saying that led up to the words of our text:

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).*

Paul then says that the Corinthians should follow his example. In other words, he is explaining to them that when it comes to issues like eating meat offered to idols or other controversial issues, since he is attempting to follow the example of Jesus, they should just follow his example and, in so doing, they will be following the example of Christ.

So here is what we see so far: The Father sent Jesus to fulfill a certain ministry. A part of the ministry of Jesus was to send Paul to fulfill a certain ministry. And the ministry that he was to fulfill was to imitate Jesus. And now Paul is saying that a part of the ministry of the Corinthians is to imitate Paul as he is imitating Jesus.

This is not the last time that Paul is going to make such a statement. Some years later, when he was languishing in prison in Rome, Paul wrote to the Philippians and said,

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. **Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice.** And the God of peace will be with you.*

The first part of this paragraph is extremely convicting because it raises a very high standard for our thought life. However, verse 9 once again urges a group of Paul's converts to imitate him. Whatever they have learned from him or received from him or see in him, this is what the Philippians are to do.

This is the way that the gospel of the kingdom is being spread throughout the world. The Father sent Jesus who demonstrated what he wanted us to do. Jesus then sent Paul who demonstrated what Jesus wanted him to do. Paul then gained converts and sent them out to do what Jesus wanted them to do.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul actually concludes the point of the previous paragraph and 11:2 actually start the next discussion. However, in these two verses, Paul is almost incidentally pointing out to us something quite strategic about his ministry—about fulfilling what Jesus had sent him to do. We might even call this Paul's formula for promoting and spreading Christianity. It involves two steps:

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- **Example.** Paul says, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*”
- **Teaching;** He also says, “*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the **teachings**, just as I passed them on to you.*”

The initial approach to the Corinthians is described in Acts 18:1-18 so we will consult that passage to see what kind of example Paul left and what he taught. Please note that these two things overlap a bit. Paul taught what he practiced and he practiced what he taught. In this presentation, we will primarily focus on Paul's example of ministry.

What were some of the things that Paul had demonstrated to them? We have to go back to Acts to see them. Here are four preliminary thoughts:

- I am going to be basing my remarks on some small portions of scripture. However, I think that I will be able to demonstrate that there is a good reason to make such big points on such few words.
- I want you to know that some of the things that I am going to say may be a bit controversial or unconventional. Please note that there is nothing personal about any of these comments. These are simply things that I am learning and feel that it will be helpful to share with you.
- I do not share these things with you as if my thoughts are the final answer to the problems that I will raise. I share them with you to encourage thought and discussion and evaluation. I know that SIM is continually discussing and planning about the best way forward and I will be happy if some of these thoughts will be a part of the discussion or, perhaps more accurately, add my insights to discussions that are no doubt already going on.
- Please understand that in a short presentation like this, I do not have time to say everything that I do not mean.

What did Paul do? What was his example? I will now make several observations about Paul's initial visit to Corinth described in Acts 18:1-18. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he refers to his own example. What kind of example did he provide when he was among them? Specifically, what kind of example did he provide for us as twenty-first century missionaries?

### **Paul Lived in Corinth.**

#### **Exposition**

*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he **stayed** and worked with them (Acts 18:1-3).*

Note these important phrases:

- 18:3: “*he **stayed** and worked with them.*”
- 18:11: “*So Paul **stayed** for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*”

The key word I want to focus on a bit is the word “stayed.” This implies that Paul lived in Corinth and while he lived in Corinth, he lived with Aquila and Priscilla.

***According to 18:11, Paul was forced to live in the pagan city.***

Corinth was one of the most pagan cities of the ancient world, filled with all kinds of idols and evil. To live in a pagan city, Paul experienced many things. He had to meet and establish relationships with new people. As far as we know, Paul had never been to Corinth. He knew no one there. Therefore, he had to start from the beginning to meet people and establish relationships with them. He had to sort out what to do about eating meat offered to idols. This was a question that later arose from the Corinthians. However, Paul had to have sorted that out in his own mind long before that. He had to know how to relate to people who understood only part of the truth.

The Jews who lived in the city understood part of the truth. Paul usually began his ministry in a new city with them. I will talk more about this later.

He had to learn to live with opposition. Even in Corinth, there was opposition. I will talk more about this later.

He had to learn all of the normal things one has to learn in a strange city.

- Where the market is
- Where to get clean water
- Who are the people who can advise him
- What the taboos of the culture are and how to avoid them

In one sense of the word, this was a cross-cultural experience. Each of these city states of the ancient world had its own kind of government and its own religions and its own customs. Therefore, since Paul stayed in that city for 18 months, he had to learn all of those things. Paul did not just visit Corinth. He “stayed” in Corinth which means that Corinth became his home for the next 18 months. It is likely that when Paul went to that city, he did not know how long he was going to be there. Therefore, he was forced to settle down and prepare to be there as if he were going to be there the rest of his life.

***According to 18:3, Paul apparently chose to live with Priscilla and Aquila.***

I am not sure exactly how this worked. However, it is not unlike what happens in Nigeria today. In fact, just a few minutes before I left my house to come out to Miango, a young man came to see me. He is from Cameroon. He had gone to Cameroon for Christmas. On his way back, his money was stolen in the train. However, when he got to the town where he was going to get off the train, he found a pastor that could help him. He stayed with him a couple of days while trying to get money. And on his way back, when he got to Gombe, he realized that he could not get back to Jos before the curfew. He remembered he had met someone from Gombe so he phoned him and the man accommodated him overnight. This kind of thing happens every day in Nigeria.

This is what Paul did in Corinth. He went down to the market where people sewed and repaired tents and he found a fellow tentmaker who was in the same kind of business. After talking a short time, Paul started working with them and, at the end of the day, when it was obvious that Paul had no other place to go, he was invited to stay with them. What was the result of Paul living with them?

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- Priscilla and Aquila were converted to Christ.
- Priscilla and Aquila became Paul's first disciples in Corinth.
- Priscilla and Aquila were so committed to serving Christ and following Paul that they left Corinth with Paul and went to Ephesus where they remained behind and represented Paul until he could get back a few months later.
- Priscilla and Aquila were able to teach Apollos some basic facts about Christianity even though they were relatively new believers.
- Priscilla and Aquila also eventually established a church that met in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19).
- Priscilla and Aquila later returned to Rome and Paul greets them in his epistle to the Romans and identifies them as "*my fellow workers in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 16:3).

All of these things happened as a result of Paul living with Priscilla and Aquilla. In this case, Paul's strategy was to demonstrate Christianity before talking about Christianity. Paul did not isolate himself from the people that he was seeking to influence but rather chose to live with them—to interact with them—to converse with them—to eat and sleep with them—to be with them in an informal setting.

Why did he do this? Paul believed that his life and work would earn him the right to speak about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

This is exactly what happened in Philippi some years before. Paul was arrested and beaten in Philippi. He and Silas were thrown in prison and locked in stocks. However, at midnight they started singing. The jailor had heard many strange sounds come from his prison but he had probably never heard songs of praise coming from prisoners at midnight who had been beaten the day before. A little later when the earthquake came and shook open the doors of the prison, he prepared to kill himself because it was a crime punishable by death to allow a prisoner to escape. However, there was this strange man Paul standing in the open door saying, "No, don't hurt yourself. We are all here." This was such an amazing response that it got his attention and after reflecting on all the other things he had seen in the life of this man in the previous 18 hours, he cried out to Paul, "*What must I do to be saved?*"

The point that I want to stress here is that Paul understood that a significant part of his ministry was simply living—particularly living with the people that he was attempting to evangelize and minister to.

### **Application**

By living in an area, people can see what kind of person you are and what kind of religion you practice and what a difference it makes in your life. Therefore, it seems to me that a very important part of our evangelism and missionary strategy must be to "stay with" people—to simply live with people. Jesus is the first great illustration of this. This is first illustrated when he came from heaven and lived on this earth. However, it is also illustrated with the way he trained his disciples.

How did he train his disciples? He invited them to follow him and live with him. Wherever Jesus slept, the disciples slept. Wherever Jesus ate, the disciples ate. And to say it another way, wherever the disciples slept, Jesus also slept. Whatever the disciples ate, Jesus ate. Jesus did not sleep in a different hotel than his disciples. He did not have a different diet

than others. He simply “stayed with them.” Jesus lived with his disciples and the living itself was a part of his ministry.

### **Specific Application to Missionaries**

I am convinced that there is something for missionaries to learn from Paul's practice of living with the people. The “missionary compound” is an old institution. It developed at a time when missionaries lived in the villages and were usually given land by the local people where they built their houses, their clinics, their schools and other facilities. It was an adaptation to the culture and the environment. And it has proved to be very useful to establishing the church in Nigeria and many other parts of Africa.

However, my question is this: Has the traditional missionary compound outlived its usefulness?

- Are we cutting off part of our ministry by isolating ourselves behind big walls and strong steel doors?
- Do we not fail to provide people opportunities to see us and interact with us in a natural and informal setting when people have to pass through so many levels of security and bring people into a rather unnatural and even foreign atmosphere?
- Are our interactions in our work and in our worship all that is necessary to teach people about what true Christianity is?
- Would we not be able to minister more effectively if we lived closer to the people that we are attempting to minister to?

I know that every missionary organization and every missionary leader carries twin concerns. (I have those same concerns and responsibilities.) First, we are concerned about fulfilling the ministry that God has given us to do—which is building God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Second, we are also concerned about the welfare of our people, including their needs for social interaction and their needs for safety. How do you balance those two things? Unfortunately there is no formula. It takes wisdom to do these things.

Let me share a little bit of my own experience with you. My own experience was absolutely planned by God. We had no preparation for coming to Africa. We just showed up. As a lecturer in the university, we were given accommodation on the campus. Therefore, I lived in the same kind of house that my colleagues lived in. I enjoyed the same privileges and suffered the same privations and limitations that they experienced. My children played with the local children on the campus. Our friends were our neighbors. We learned to live in Africa from Africans. That was sometimes good and sometimes bad. I will not tell you that it was always easy but I think it was a very important part of our strategy. Our home became very open to Nigerians. My children had to learn to receive and interact with Nigerians. We had to adapt to so many new ways because we had no choice. And by living where they live, I was able to develop a rapport with my colleagues and neighbors that I do not think I would have been able to develop any other way. I lived with them.

One of the biggest concerns that missionary administrators have is for the safety of their staff. This is very understandable. However, let me narrate my own experience a little more. In 2001, during the first Jos Crisis, we were living in the university community which was very vulnerable to attack by Muslims. In fact, about 200 Muslims managed to penetrate the front gate to the UNIJOS Senior Staff quarters. They fought a pretty major battle there

and managed to burn the first house inside our university compound. We chose to stay in our community and for the next several days operated a refugee camp at our house, feeding and accommodating about 150 people. In addition, I was meeting daily with all my neighbors in our local security meetings. And an amazing thing happened. I got to know my neighbors far better than I had ever known them before. And perhaps even more important we were able to demonstrate the love of Christ to dozens of people in a way that we would have missed had we not been in that environment.

Here is more of the story. We do not have a fence around our house. It is quite vulnerable. Just a little over two years ago, armed robbers came in my house when I was in Abuja. They were able to get away with some money and Mary's cell phone. However, what they left behind was the opportunity to demonstrate how a Christian responds to an armed robbery. I am proud of the calm and gracious testimony that Mary had during that time and I also grateful for another very rich opportunity to develop even more intimate friendships with our neighbors. Three of our other neighbors had been attacked within a six month period so to see that we the foreigners were not exempt and accepted what had come our way, was a part of our testimony in the community.

As you know we experienced another crisis just six weeks ago. In our particular area, it was perhaps even more intense than the first one. Instead of just one church being burned, seven churches within a mile of our house were burned. There was more black smoke and more gunfire this time than last time. And there were more opportunities to minister. Another 150 people came to our house for food and accommodation And some other people came.

- The Acting Vice Chancellor came.
- The State Government came.
- The NGO's came.
- The pastors came.
- The press came.

These people came with words of appreciation and thanksgiving. Since we had gone through this before, they also came seeking advice. They came looking for direction and leadership. The reason that these people came is that we lived among them. And by living among them, we had gained their respect and I do not underestimate the need for safety and security and companionship. However, I cannot also ignore the benefits of living among them.

## **Summary**

Paul lived with Priscilla and Aquila and that greatly enhanced his ministry. Again, there are no formulas here. We have to have God's wisdom. However, this is what is obvious.

- Living among them is not as safe living among ourselves.
- Living among them is not as convenient as living among ourselves.
- Living among them is not as fun as living among ourselves.

However, remember that your living is part of your ministry. What should you do? I will allow you to think through that. I think it is ideal when people live with the people they are working among. I think it might be time to start phasing out our missionary compounds and start to live among them.

## **Paul Worked in Corinth.**

### **Exposition**

*After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and **worked** with them (Acts 18:1-3).*

Paul worked with Priscilla and Aquila in tent making. And I believe that Paul recognized that work was not just a necessary corollary to his ministry. His work was a part of his ministry.

Earlier, I talked about a holistic approach to ministry. In a holistic approach to ministry, we believe that all aspects of life are a part of our ministry. There are two key verses in Colossians three that give us some insight into the concept of holistic ministry:

- 3:17: *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*
- 3:23-24: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,<sup>24</sup> since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

Interestingly, the first of these verses is given against a context of exhortations about teaching and worship.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (3:16-17).*

However, the second of these verses is given in a context of work—particular the service of a slave to his master.

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men (3:22-23).*

The work of a slave was not spiritual work. It was not evangelism. It was farming and cooking and cleaning and doing other kinds of work. These passages tell us that all of our work, whether it is tent-making or whether it is preaching in the synagogue, is to be done for the glory of God and to be done as a part of our ministry.

### **Application**

*One of the best ways to demonstrate faith is to demonstrate it through work.*

Work has many advantages.

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- It puts you with unbelievers in a non-threatening situation.
- It demonstrates one's faith in real-life situations.
- In times of stress
- In times of blessing
- In times of need
- It provides you with the necessary income to be able to share with others.

I am sure that many people have been brought to the Lord by fellow workers. However, the application goes beyond this.

***We do our work as a ministry because nearly all of our work is a service to humanity, which is, according to the story Jesus told in Matthew 25, a ministry to Jesus himself.***

When we are working in farming or the food industry, we are working to produce things that will sustain God's creations. When we are working in the health field, we are working to prevent disease and to help people recover from things that will weaken their bodies. When we are working in the education field, we are helping people to discover the truth that God himself has created. All of these are not just jobs. They are ministries because they are helping to provide benefit and blessing to other people.

### **Specific Application to Missions**

How does this apply to missions? Interestingly, the Lord has this amazing way of getting us to do the right thing. Many of our missionary organizations are seeking ways to get into the Muslim world. They cannot go as traditional missionaries. They cannot go as evangelists. They cannot go as teachers of the Bible. However, they can go as academics; they can go as medical personnel; they can go as technical people; they can go as agricultural people. And, in going to work among them, they are following very closely a missionary strategy that Paul developed in the early days of Christianity.

Is it not time for SIM to start thinking about recruiting professionals who will go to another part of the world, not to preach the gospel but to live and work among them?

A number of years ago, one of my friends went to a communist country to teach in a university. It is against the law to proselytize in this country. One can go to prison for attempting to convert one to Christianity and foreigners would be deported from the country. However, my friend went and lived and worked in this university for several years. After about three years, he decided to go home for a short break. His department decided to have a party for him before he went. During the party, his dean stood up and introduced my friend and said, "Professor, all of us have observed that there is something different about you from other foreigners who have come to our country and our university. You are truly different. I am asking that you stand up here and tell us what it is that has made you like you are and particularly what are the experiences in your life that have affected you the most?" My friend stood up and said, "Although this may sound strange, the single thing that has affected my life the most is that I met a man that many people consider to be dead." He then went on and gave his testimony about how Christ had changed his life. And the last I had heard, he and his family had won 28 people to Christ in the communist country.

*"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12).*

Here is one additional application. Work in all disciplines is good. We, as missionaries, must help the church to appreciate the fact that there is Christianity ministry in practically every profession.

A few weeks ago, Gbile Akane came to the University of Jos for out an outreach. While with us, he met with the Christian academic staff. He described how many of the lecturers are seeking to become pastors. Some want to start their own churches where they can minister to 20 or 30 people. And yet, they often have hundreds of students in their classrooms that they see and teach every day. It is rather short-sighted to think that ministry in a church building is more important or more strategic than teaching in a classroom.

We must teach our Christian friends who are not involved in full-time Christian service that their work is their ministry. They do not go to work and they after that do their ministry. Our work is our ministry. Learn the lesson from Paul, he went to Corinth and met Priscilla and Aquila where he “*stayed and worked with them.*”

### **Paul Focused His Ministry Where There Were Open Doors.**

#### **Examples**

When Paul arrived in Corinth, it was probably on a weekday. Therefore, he went down to the market, to the tent-making session to see what would happen. There the Lord orchestrated a meeting with Priscilla and Aquila (18:2-3). This was the beginning of his ministry in Corinth. The meeting with Priscilla and Aquila was in some ways beyond his control. He did not know who would be in the market when he went there but he went with an open heart and met this couple.

When the Sabbath day came, Paul went to the local synagogue (18:4). He no doubt dressed in his rabbinical regalia and as soon as he arrived there, took advantage of the standing invitation that a visiting rabbi would have in any synagogue, and addressed the local congregation. Since Paul was a Jew, he knew the Jew's language and buzz words and was able to communicate effectively with them. This, too, was an open door of ministry—that was open in nearly every city he visited.

After a few weeks, the leaders of the synagogue turned against him and, at this point, Paul went to the Gentiles (18:6b). It is instructive that Paul did not continue to waste his time with the Jews when God opened a door to the Gentiles.

So in the little information we have about Paul's ministry in Corinth, we see him simply following the open doors that God had given to him.

#### **Principles**

***Paul started his ministry where there were open doors.***

This is a very natural thing to do. This did not mean that Paul did not have a strategy. In fact, Paul did have a strategy. It was to start where there were natural opening and there usually were natural openings in the market place and in the synagogue. This is related to the next point, which is just a continuation of this point.

***Paul anticipated and helped to push open certain doors.***

Corinth was not the first place Paul had ministered. Going to the market in Corinth was not the first market he had gone to. Going to the synagogue in Corinth was not the first synagogue he had gone to. In other words, Paul did not necessarily look for a unique open door in every new city he went to. The opened doors in one city gave him ideas about possible open doors in other cities. The things he learned in one place would be useful in another place.

In fact, it is obvious that Paul even helped to push open some of the doors. Open doors are not always supernaturally opened. It simply takes observation and wisdom to see open doors that have already been open. We need divine wisdom to take advantage of the open doors that God gives to us.

Between 30 and 40 years ago, SIM brought literally hundreds of missionaries to Nigeria whose primary ministry was to teach Bible in the mission schools and the emerging public schools. However, when the government took over the schools, SIM largely got out of the secondary school business. However, there is an absolutely amazing open door in the public schools of Nigeria and that is the ability to teach the Bible in the public schools and be paid to do it.

I estimate that there are about 10,000 public teachers in Nigeria who teach the Bible as a full-time career in the public schools. In the northern part of Nigeria, they average teaching 249 students each. In Lagos, they average teaching 363 students each. The curriculum they teach is excellent. And they are actually paid a salary to do this. And yet few churches see this as an open door. Our church leaders are often critical of the CRK teachers because they are corrupt and sleep with their students. Those things may occasionally happen but those are distractions to keep us from seeing the absolutely amazing open doors before us.

If we are wise, we can see other open doors.

- The HIV/AIDS crisis is given us doors of opportunity that we have not had before.
- The Jos Crisis and the potential violence opens up doors for us to try to work with Muslims to solve these problems.
- The corruption in society gives us an opportunity to join forces with other Christians and even Muslims to fight it and this union has other potential benefits.

Please remember that one person's problem is another person's opportunity. Every problem in society is an open door for the person who is interested in solving it.

***Paul viewed a closed door as an indication of God's new direction.***

When the Jews withdrew their invitation from Paul to speak in the synagogue, he viewed that as God's timing to move on to the Gentiles. I believe that God works in our lives as much through closed doors as he does through open doors. Notice these verses from Acts 16:6-10:

*Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of*

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*Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

### **Application**

What are the open doors that God has given to you? You cannot possibly take advantage of all the open doors. However, you should be sensitive to the leadership of the Spirit. God is not a static God. He is a living God. And God wants us to be constantly responding to the changing circumstances of life. Therefore, God is going to be opening new doors for us.

- I challenge you to look for those open doors.
- I challenge you to push on the open doors a little.
- I challenge you to take advantage of these open doors.

I have two brief observations I want to share with our young missionaries.

***It is more fulfilling to develop something that maintain something.***

This is one of the real joys of missionary work—doing something creative and being unhindered by the bureaucracy of the western world. This is one of the mistakes that our young Nigerian professionals make when they complete their training in the western world. They can stay in the West and make a lot more money but they are only maintaining things. However, they could return to their country and make a whole lot less money but receive the joy of developing things.

***Do not defeat yourself by anticipating the negative responses of other people.***

Most people are comfortable doing what they have always done. Therefore, many people are uncomfortable doing something new and are skeptical about doing something new. Many people assume that everyone else in the world feels the same way that they do so they don't attempt anything new. However, I have made it a commitment in my life that I will not defeat myself by anticipating the negative answers of others. They may not allow me to do it but let them tell me no. I would challenge you to develop that kind of attitude. Attempt new things and bigger things for God and do not allow a spirit of pessimism to discourage you. Many of your projects will fail but some will succeed.

Will you accept the challenge to look for and develop the open doors of the next generation of SIM missionary work in Nigeria?

## **Paul Started Reaching Out to the Corinthians Through Their Religion**

### **Exposition**

Luke 18:4 says, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." Paul was a Jew and had worshipped the Lord as a Jew his whole life. He had been trained as a rabbi so he knew the Jewish religion as well as anybody could. We

must remember that, according to Paul's testimony, the old religion had never done anything for him. He had been very faithful to observe and practice that religion. However, according to Romans 7, it never satisfied his soul. He was left empty and depressed by the old religion. Note these statements from Galatians about the old religion:

- 3:10: *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse*
- 3:11: *Clearly no one is justified before God by the law*
- 3:23: *Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*
- 4:3-5: *So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*
- 4:24-25: *These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.*

So it is very obvious that Paul considered the old religion—the Judaism as it was being practiced at that time preparatory at best and slavery and bondage at worse.

Even though this was true, Paul was willing to use the old religion as a bridge to tell them of something better. Note that he never ridiculed the old religion. Although he often pointed out the superiority over what Jesus brought to this world, he was not arrogant or abusive toward the older religion.

Here is something that we do not always think about. The religion of Judaism, particularly as it was being practiced at that time, was not really the total truth. There were holes and even errors in the beliefs and practices of the religion. However, Paul had no hesitation in using the religion to take him as far as he could go. Paul did not believe that because there were some holes in Judaism or some outright errors, he needed to completely reject that religion. He used this religion as a bridge to get their attention and to give him an opportunity to explain the truths of Christianity. The Jewish religion became a starting place to introduce this new aspect of religion which was brought by Jesus.

Paul saw an advantage of beginning his evangelistic and church planting work in the religious community. Paul's normal practice when he went to a new city was to go to the synagogue. Because he was a rabbi, he had an automatic invitation to address the group. Paul would present Jesus based upon the Old Testament Scriptures.

And here is another interesting truth: Paul also even *utilized the pagan religions* to some extent as a bridge to introducing people to Christianity. Paul went to Athens and accepted an invitation to speak to a group of pagan philosophers. He did not refuse this invitation just because he believed or practiced something different from what he believed and practiced. Paul was complimentary of them about their religion or at least he began his speech by acknowledging their religion which would have been viewed as positive by those who heard him. He began his speech by saying,

*Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this*

*inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).*

Paul even quotes one of the pagan poets in his speech (17:28).

Here is the point: ***Paul was willing to take any religion as far as it would take him down the road toward Christ.*** It is only when that road branched off into untruth that Paul would disassociate himself from that religion. Paul's view of other religions was that they could be useful in introducing Christianity, especially in the beginning. There would be time later to sort out what part of the old religion could be retained. However, there was no problem in . . .

- Showing respect for their religion
- Interacting with those who practiced another religion
- Using the objects of their religion to point them in a new direction.
- Finding common ground in the old religion and the new faith he was introducing.

Paul wanted to use the old religions as a starting point or a bridge to the new truth and new way that Jesus had brought to this world.

## **Application**

Is there anything that we can learn from Paul's approach? Here are three thoughts:

***We should learn at least something about the local religions where we work.***

Most of us live in an area in which Islam is quite prominent. Therefore, I would encourage all of us to learn a bit about Islam. If you learn a bit about Islam, those on the other side will appreciate it and you will gain their respect. And God may use just what you know about Islam as a bridge to reach someone for Christ some day.

***We should be respectful and be careful about provocative statements.***

Jesus said that we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. That means that all other religions are false to some extent. However, all other religions are held to strongly by their adherents and the best way to lose an opportunity to reach another person to Christ is to abuse his beliefs, particularly his beliefs about his religion. I learned an important African proverb when I lived in Port Harcourt. It is this: "What you have not said, you can always say." We need to practice this proverb when interacting with other religions. We do not have to say publicly all that we think.

***We should look for opportunities to relate with people of other religions.***

You will never win a person from another religion to Christ if you do not establish some kind of relationship with that person. We need to look for common interests and opportunities to reach out to those persons. There may be ways that we can use the religion or parts of the religion to get the attention or create a bridge to unbelievers.

Here are some questions:

## *Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism*

- Is it ever good for a Christian leader and even missionary to meet Muslim religious leaders?
- Is it possible that we can find common ground with Muslims?

This is what we have attempted to do with our AIDS ministry. In trying to develop a faith-based AIDS awareness program for public schools, we have deliberately chosen to work directly with Muslims. We Christians believe about the same thing about sexual abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage as the Muslims believe. So why not use their religion as a bridge to create friendships and allow them to see real Christianity? Therefore, we hold joint workshops in which Christians hear Muslim presentations and Muslims hear Christian's presentations. We all eat the same food. We experience the same things. Here are some of the things I have learned in my interactions with my Muslim colleagues.

- ***We are learning about Islam.*** You cannot spend a week working closely with Muslims without learning something about Islam.
- ***We are building relationships with individual Muslims.***
- ***We are helping to create peace in the community through mutually working together on projects.*** Since God is a God of peace, this has to be something that is pleasing to God.
- ***We are doing image evangelism.***
- ***We are changing the perception of Muslims about Christians.*** As you know the perception of Muslims about Christians is not very good in northern Nigeria. All the statements you heard during the crisis about Muslims like "These people are animals," etc., these are the same kinds of statements they make about us for some of the same reasons we make them about them.

Before we can attract any of them to Christ, we must attract them to ourselves.

When I was reading through Acts recently, I discovered a fascinating verse. It occurs immediately after Paul concluded his speech to the Areopagus in Athens. It says, "*At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed.*" (Acts 17:33-34). And we now know that if they started following Paul, they were also following Christ. Paul won them to himself and when he did so, he also won them to his Savior.

Obviously, not everyone will have the same opportunity to reach out to Muslims and even pagans as others. However, we must recognize that using the older religions as a bridge to the new faith was a key strategy of Paul. I would assume that working with the old religions to some extent was one of those strategies that Paul meant when he said, "*Follow my example as I follow Christ.*"

## **Paul Implemented His Ministry With Teamwork**

### **Exposition**

Luke 18:5 says: "*When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*" Silas and Timothy were two of Paul's colleagues and traveling companions. Paul had apparently sent them back to Thessalonica perhaps from Athens when he went on to Corinth. However, in a short time, Paul's team reassembled in Corinth.

## *Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism*

From the beginning, Paul had worked with a team.

- On the first missionary journey, he had worked with Barnabas and John Mark.
- On his second missionary journey, he started out with Silas.
- When he got to Derbe, Timothy joined the team.
- When he got to Troas, Luke joined the team.

Paul worked closely with other people. He recognized that he could not do all of these things himself. He needed partners in the ministry.

### **Application**

Proverbs 4:9-12 says:

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three stands is not quickly broken.*

One of the secrets of success in any enterprise is to get good people to help do the work. Paul believed in this philosophy. Jesus had earlier sent out his disciples two-by-two. This is a very useful practice to modern missionaries as well. One needs the encouragement, companionship and courage, which a companion gives. There are several applications of this concept of partnership to missions.

#### ***Individual missionaries should work in teams.***

Whether we like it or not, few of us will ever be totally absorbed into the culture or feel totally and completely and permanently a part of the culture. Therefore, it is good to have people with whom we can associate and support. Jesus understood this principle and sent his people out “two by two.” In a simple word, it is good to have fellow missionaries in our work.

- We need the support we get from each other.
- We need to balance we get from one another.
- We need the correction we get from one another.
- We need the fellowship we get from one another.

Make sure you are spending the necessary time and energy to build up and support your missionary team.

#### ***Individual missionaries need to partner with their Nigerian colleagues.***

There are few if any jobs that you as a missionary are doing right now that someday a Nigerian will be doing. Therefore, it is important for the missionary to be spending time right now with their local colleagues preparing them to take over the ministry whenever he or she is gone. Working closely together with our local colleagues is one of the most rewarding things that we will do.

### *Example and Teaching: Paul's Method of Evangelism*

I have had a lot of ideas throughout my life and ministry and have written up quite a few proposals. I have started a whole lot of projects. However, the only ones that have really been successful are those in which I have been able to get others involved.

- We have a Diploma in Christian studies program at the University of Jos.
- We have a good CRK ministry to day because I got Prof. Ilori involved.
- We have a good AIDS ministry because I have gotten others involved.

To the extent that I have been able to get local people involved in projects, to that extent they have succeeded. When I attempt to do these projects myself, they may last for a while but they usually do not last.

I cannot think of a much greater ministry that you can have than to invest your life in the lives of your Nigerian colleagues.

#### ***Missionary organizations need to partner with local bodies.***

It is unlikely that any missionary organization is going to come to Nigeria and work successfully without having a local partner. The local partners that I work with are not Christian organizations. We work with universities and ministries of education. Obviously, SIM works with ECWA. This is the way it should work. If we attempt to bypass the local people and the local organizations, we may be able to satisfy the donors who sent us here but we are not going to create a very successful long-term ministry.

About five or six years ago, a church in the US decided to sponsor a big outreach program here in Jos. They spent well over a million dollars planning this big event at the Polo Field. Their advertising and initial public relations efforts were brilliant. There were about a quarter of a million people who attended the event. Interestingly, they worked closely with PFN, CAN and New Life for All in planning this event. All of these bodies worked very hard to get out the people and it was very successful. However, from my perspective, that was about the only thing they did successfully. From that point onwards, they pretty well did everything on their own.

- They brought in their 250 person choir to do the singing.
- Their people did all of the preaching and teaching in the supplementary programs.
- The only Nigerians on the platform were translators.
- When the program was over on Saturday night, instead of their people fanning out and going to local churches, they all met together and none of them even visited a local church.

I think the organization made many mistakes but perhaps their biggest mistake was to ignore the huge contribution that the local body of Christ would make to their efforts.

Here was Paul's words to the local body with which he worked in Philippi:

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy **because of your partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:3-5).*

Make sure you maintain strong partnerships with your local partners.

***Missionary organizations need to reach out beyond their own comfort zone and make a deliberate effort to work with others.***

In the early days of missions, certain areas were zoned to different groups, especially in the north.

- The CMS worked on the plateau.
- The Danish Lutherans worked around Numan
- The Church of the Brethren worked around Biu and Mubi.
- The Evangelical United Brethren, who later became the United Methodist, worked around Jalingo.
- The CRC worked around Takum
- The Dutch Reformed Church worked in Tiv land in Benue State
- SIM worked in Egbe and southern Kaduna and then around Billiri and Kaltungo and other places.

That was probably a wise strategy in those days. However, I am convinced that we need more coordination and cooperation in our work today. We must not isolate ourselves from the rest of the body of Christ. We must seek to engage and cooperate with other bodies that go beyond our primary partners.

Certainly SIM has not done that in some of your ministries.

- The Challenge bookshops were open to all.
- The various hospitals and health clinics did not discriminate against anyone but served all Christians and even Muslims.
- Even the schools were reasonably open to others.

However, I believe that we must go further.

I want to stress one particular area of partnership and cooperation that I think is necessary for SIM and your partner ECWA today. I believe that SIM and ECWA must make a deliberate effort to work more closely with Pentecostals. Whether we like it or not . . .

- Pentecostals are our brothers and sisters in Christ
- Pentecostalism is here in Nigeria to stay.
- Pentecostals have helped to bring a revival of some sort to the church, particularly in the area of worship.
- Pentecostals make up a large percentage of the bodies in NEMA (Nigeria Evangelical Missions Association) and are doing a lot of the front-line missions in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

We evangelicals have tended to draw away from them for several reasons.

- We do not like their theology. We question their interpretation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and several other doctrines.
- We do not like many of their practices in the church. For example, the practice of so-called prophecy annoys many of us.

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- We do not like much of the “healing” that goes on in the name of Pentecostalism because much of it is hypocritical and fake.
- We are certainly irritated by the emphasis on prosperity that has arisen in many parts of Pentecostalism.
- We do not want to say anything positive about them because our children are already running to the Pentecostals and if they see we have any respect for them, that might encourage them to continue moving toward Pentecostalism.

I am aware of all of those objections. However, the Bible expects those that have to give to those who have not. God expects that those who are strong should bear with and support those who are weak. The Bible assumes that those who have will give to those who do not have.

Therefore, I think that SIM and its counterpart ECWA should sit down and develop a serious and deliberate strategy for reaching out and possibly influencing Pentecostalism here in Nigeria. This is obviously already being done to some extent. Many Pentecostal students have enrolled at JETS and I assume other ECWA seminaries and Bible colleges. However, I believe we can do more.

- We need to take advantage of the energy and enthusiasm the Pentecostals bring to the church.
- We need to take advantage of the hunger that many Pentecostals have for serious Bible teaching. Many Pentecostals recognize that they are deficient in theological training and are eager to make up those differences. Where are they going to go to get the training that they need.

I believe we must look for opportunities to spend more time with Pentecostals and somehow develop a strategy in which we can positively influence them more. We may not need to convince them to stop speaking in tongues. However, we might be able to teach them how to interpret the Bible better. And if we can do that, we will have helped all of those people who have come under their influence. The bottom line is that we should stop complaining against them and stop fighting them and find a way that we can partner with them to build up God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

I am convinced that we are not going to accomplish the goals that God has for us as individuals or as an organization unless we focus on teamwork. Surely Paul also had this in mind when he said, “*Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.*”

## **Paul Persevered in Spite of Opposition**

### **Exposition**

Acts 18:6 declares, “*But when the Jews opposed Paul.*” Whenever you present Jesus in a non-Christian atmosphere, there is normally going to be opposition. What did they do? We have two hints about the kind of opposition that he experienced.

***Paul was abused by the Jews.***

Acts 18:6 says: “*But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive.*” No one likes to be abused. To be abused implies ridicule; it implies someone who thinks he knows more or

is more important than you are. It is an attempt to humiliate you. And none of us like this kind of thing. However, most of the great saints in the Bible were abused. And if the great saints in the Bible, including Jesus were abused, it is reasonable that we may be abused some time in our lives.

***Paul was attacked and arrested.***

Acts 18:12-13 says: *“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”* Have you ever been arrested? Please understand that the word “arrest” in Nigeria simply means to detain. I have been arrested three or four times. I have even had my vehicle “arrested.” If you continue to do the work of God, you may eventually be attacked and even arrested.

***Paul was taken to court.***

*“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law” (18:12-13).*

I do not like to go to court. However, I have had the unfortunate “privilege” or going to court here in Nigeria because of the gospel. Actually Paul’s stay in Corinth was not too bad. He experienced many other problems throughout his life. Note these statements: Note his testimony in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10:

*We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

Note his testimony in 2 Corinthians 11:22-29:

*Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the*

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*churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*

The bottom line is that Paul experienced much opposition in his life. However, in spite of the opposition, he continued his ministry. He did not allow opposition and obstacles to stand in his way.

According to 18:18; Paul continued on even in spite of opposition. “***Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time.***” This was after the opposition. In fact, Paul stayed there until there were enough believers to start and sustain a church. Note v. 18b: “*Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. **Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.***” Even though there was opposition and trouble and court cases and many other kinds of wahalla, Paul continued his ministry until he could safely leave a viable church.

### Application

Remember, God's work will always go forward the hard way, the difficult way, the painful way. It is almost certain that you are going to experience pain and obstacles and other kinds of problems during your service for the Lord. However, that is normal. Jesus said in Matthew 10:22: “*he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*” I believe that we could paraphrase to say, “he who continues his ministry to the end, will be successful.” Here is Paul's word to the Galatians; “*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up*” (6:9).

What is your attitude when opposition comes your way?

## **Conclusion**

Paul said, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*” Paul's example is pretty clear:

- He lived among the Corinthians.
- He worked among the Corinthians.
- He took advantage of the open doors.
- He interacted with their local religions as a bridge to Christianity.
- He utilized others and believed in teamwork.
- He persevered in the tough times.

Will we learn those lessons from Paul?

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