

YES, TO THE CRY OF HELP

Dr. George O. Wood

I want us to take a moment to look at a portion of scripture from the 16th chapter of the book of Acts. It's a famous missionary passage. Paul has walked 700 miles from Antioch of Syria though all of present day Turkey and finds himself at the seacoast city of Troas. While he is at Troas, verse 9 of chapter 16, during the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and beseeching him – begging him would be another way of putting it. One has here a mental picture of a dreamlike man standing in the long robes of the Mediterranean custom. With a beseeching face and with hands outstretched and with animated passionate gestures and words is saying, “Come over and help us.”

During the night Paul has this vision. When he had seen it Luke says, “We got ready at once to leave for Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” The fascinating thing is when Paul does come to Macedonia they find no man that matches his vision. In fact it's a number of weeks before even the first man is converted. But the man is an archetypal representative. He stands for all the people in Macedonia who are looking for something to give them meaning. Because God has put eternity within our hearts there are people who want to know, how can I have eternity and how can I know God. In their own hunger they are crying for help only they don't realize where their cry is being directed. But when a believer such as Paul has heard the cry for help, the conclusion must be reached that there is something I can do. I can say yes to the cry for help.

Why should I say yes? If I am spiritually sensitive to the Lord I am going to become aware of the fact that there is a need in the world for the gospel. I become aware of the need in Costa Mesa. But the Lord did not tell me to limit my vision to Costa Mesa. The Lord said Jerusalem, Judea, and the uttermost part of the world. I must be concerned as a Christian that everywhere in this world, beginning from this place on out, there is cry to know God, a cry for help. Why should I say yes to that cry for help? Because obviously first of all the Lord himself said yes. God had only one Son and he had him become a missionary.

Philippians 2 reminds us that “Although he had equality with God he thought not equality with God a thing to be grasped and humbled himself and took upon himself the form of a servant.” Jesus himself chose to model what he is asking of me. That he is concerned himself to answer the cry for help in the world.

A second reason why I must say yes to the cry for help is that because the Lord clearly told me to say yes for the cry for help. Matthew 28:19-20 after his resurrection these concerns were on Jesus. When I approach the scripture often I am most concerned with what *I* am going to get out of it. How it is going to bless me or inform my life or strengthen me. But I must remember that the nature of the scripture is always two sided. It is not only what is in it for me but I must be concerned about what God wants of me that may go beyond my own natural normal even carnal interests. This is what the Lord asks of me and of all his church. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

When Jesus gives a order such as this or an order such as repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, I treat that order the same way that I would treat an order if I were in the army and the commander in chief of the army, the president of the United States had issued an

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order. It is my job as a soldier in the fields to obey the standing orders of my commander in chief until such a time as those orders are changed or canceled.

I find no place in the scripture where this standing order of the gospel to take it everywhere has been canceled. I find no place where it has been modified or changed. I find it still in operation and as part of my loyalty to Jesus Christ I am under orders. Under those orders I must make a response.

A third reason why I say yes to the cry for help that is in the world today is because of the need. And when you see the need, when you have traveled the world or looked seriously at the need in our own community you just feel like the apostle Paul feels, the love of Christ constrains us. We cannot with the world in the state that it is in and with people's lives in the state they're in, pull some sort of sheet over our head and pretend the need doesn't exist. We go because of need.

If we cannot go then we pray and we send people who do go. That is why consistently throughout our experience as a church we have sought to be involved in the building of the church elsewhere. Currently involved in the support of 62 missionaries and we have a very distinctive philosophy of missions as a church in terms of what we will back. We're not interested in backing fly by night efforts. We're not interested in backing efforts that have a high United States overhead. That they spend as much money raising funds as they do actually doing working the mission field. We're not interested in missions that are simply building a name for that organization. We're interested in building the church of Jesus Christ and helping to bring the gospel to an area. Then once the gospel is there seeing a national church come into existence that with its own leadership and its own resources can reach its country. We're concerned about Bible translation, about evangelism and about the training of national leadership around the world.

I would like to share with you the story of some of the people that we are helping to meet the need in the world. I couldn't with the time that is given to me this morning take each of the missionaries on our roster. But I can take some and I can show you how we are helping them to meet the need that is in the world.

This week given to me this beautiful red paperback covered New Testament. Actually it's the two hundredth edition of the New Testament translated into a language by Wycliffe Bible translators. A copy of their two hundredth New Testament.

That doesn't include all of the many portions of scripture that have been translated where they don't yet have a complete New Testament. But this is the 200th translated, a language of several thousand people living in a dozen villages in Northern Ghana, Africa, that would not have the Bible unless some translations went in, reduced the language first to writing, then wrote the New Testament for them.

It is given to me by the Wycliffe missionaries that are part of our church family. I will treasure this. "Those of us from Wycliffe who currently attend Newport Mesa Christian Center present this copy of Wycliffe's 200th New Testament to the church in appreciation of your support of Bible translation. Thank you for being part of the team dedicated to getting God's word to the Bible-less people of the world." All these people serving within our church family involved in Wycliffe.

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You're humbled when you realize that here is the 200th edition. But here is so yet so much to go. It is one thing to put the Bible in a person's hand and then you look at the fact that we have Christian bookstores and cassette recordings and records and all kinds of literature. There are whole segments of the body of Christ that only have a portion of the word. Some now have the whole New Testament. It's part of our response to the cry for help to back the people that are out there in the jungles, out there in the areas of primitive life and are living among people whose living standard is nothing like ours. But they're there because they heard the cry. And they're translating the scripture. Learning the language, reducing it to writing and translating it so that a new generation might know the glory of the gospel.

I'd like to take you to Sierra Leone, West Africa. A country of three and a half million people with only six percent Christian. Sixty-six percent animists – that is worshipping the elements of nature. And twenty-eight percent Islam. Today in Sierra Leone, West Africa in a little town, in a really kind of primitive part of the world, there Norm and Betty are. They could be home. They could have grandchildren. They could retire. He let a successful business in Santa Ana in 1960 to go to Africa as a missionary. You will find today in a recent letter they told me kind of their activities. They started a youth center in that town because they want to plant the church and reach the young people first. So they opened a youth center. Tuesday through Friday, 2-5 o'clock, games and recreation to attract youth. Then five nights a week evangelistic meetings for youth. The other two nights a week is spent in village evangelism or a rare night of rest. All day Sunday services. Involved in the training of young people for the ministry. Over a score of young people already been saved through that youth outreach that are now training to minister as pastors to their own people.

I could take you down south to the troubled city of San Salvador, El Salvador. There you will see the great work of evangelistic center, which is the largest evangelical church in all of Central America. A congregation of 16,000 persons. John and Lois from our church family who has spearheaded that effort and seen that church grow and are now serving as overseers of the assemblies of God work in all Central America. John just wrote me concerning prayer for the church in Nicaragua facing as you can well realize unbelievable tension in that country because of the revolution. The need to be undergirded in prayer. John and Los are there sometimes very much exposed and in great danger because John is a prominent evangelical in the country and in the area. But they are there because they heard the cry for help.

Or I could take you to another part of the world, Jakarta, Indonesia. Great city of seven million people. The capital of the largest Muslim country in the world. Many people think that the Arabian countries have all the Muslims but the largest Muslim country in the world is Indonesia. There in this city of seven million people Phil and Sandy are getting ready today to leave in a week or two to come home on furlow. Health practically broken. This time of service they have served as coordinators for the Wycliffe mission in all of Indonesia. Have had extensive responsibilities for that because Wycliffe is intensively involved in the primitive area of Indonesia translating the scripture.

Or in that same town I could take you to my friends Wayne and Judy and I could show you the Bible school that they have helped to build. The hundred Indonesian students that are in training for pastoral ministry today under their leadership. And a night school program that they have developed to help train lay people in 30 Assembly of God churches that are dotted throughout that city. They are responding to the cry for help.

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Or back to Central America, in Panama where Larry and Dorothy today are building a Bible school. In fact they have responsibility for five Bible schools in that country that are training 240 students for ministry as well as unbelievable other kinds of activities.

I could take you to the country of Turkey and I don't want to name the couple there because when I name the country I don't name the couple and when I name the couple I don't name the country because this tape circulates rather widely and we never want their identity or their cover to be blown in the country. They are there really as missionaries but they're not using that title. They're there to teach the English language. That is their cover for slipping in. Because it is illegal to do missionary work in Turkey today.

Of a population of 40 million plus Turkish people it is estimated that among the Turkish ethnic groups out of that 40 million there are less than fifty born again believers. And here are these dear friends, this young couple with their two young boys elementary age. They are in a country trying to get a foothold for the gospel. I have been in their home. I have shared with them their burden for the city in which they live. I know that the converts are one by one but somewhere the church has got to get a hold and grow. And they're there on the frontiers.

I could take you to Yugoslavia and with delight and take you to Peter and Vasta and their church and the work of training Yugoslavian young people for the ministry.

Or I could take you down into Macedonia, south Yugoslavia, and there have you see Dave and Linda who Linda is expecting any day now and perhaps the baby has already been born, their second child. The birth itself will be miraculous because it was not supposed to be able to happen. This young couple with two preschool children, there under the guise as students. He's been in the country now five years. He keeps finishing course at one university and transferring to the next. He'll know all the Yugoslav and Slavic language by the time he gets done.

What are they doing down in Macedonia? They have discovered that there are a million Albanians that have migrated out of Albania north across the border into southern Yugoslavia. It is illegal in Albania to even be a Christian today. It's the most repressive country in the world toward the gospel. But they have a concern to reach Albanians. They are starting with the Albanians that are in southern Yugoslavia. Believe it or not conversions are happening and they are building the first Albanian church that has been built in modern times. It was never supposed to be possible. But it is happening.

Or I could take you to Holland to my cousin Faith and her husband Ed and show you the Christian center they're establishing in Amsterdam, one of the highest drug centers in the world. In the midst of all of that decaying city in its inner parts they're at work building a Christian center.

Or I could take you right into this sanctuary at 11:00 and have you meet Paul and Linda. Would you stand? There may be some people who don't know you. And by the way, all the Wycliffe people here would you stand? Let's say thanks. I have the joy of serving on Paul and Linda's board. I know what an honest ministry and a tremendous ministry they have been given the task by the Holy Spirit of leading. Paul's voice and his program message to the conscious is heard a thousand times a day in all of Latin America, on 543 radio stations. He has fifteen million listeners. His daily column is in 43 newspapers. His program daily is on 12 television stations. All the airtime provided free by stations in Latin America. Missions money that we give and

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others give help provide for the cost of making the material. Crusades, counseling, Bible courses, literature distribution. They have heard the cry for help.

Or go to another part of the world, Upper Volta, West Africa. John and Audrey, grandparents with children and grandchildren in our church body. They don't really have to be there but they're there because long ago they heard a cry for help and they were constrained by the love of Christ. And now directing a Bible school with 151 Upper Volta students preparing for ministry. Living in a country where the government was just overthrown six months go and coping with all the changes that that brings.

Or go with me again to the Pacific to New Guinea and find Dave and Fran and their three young children living in a very primitive area where when a year ago they returned home for furlow, just shortly after they'd been with us for service, Dave wrote me back and said that they had walked into their home and the termites had eaten all the floors up. Dave in a recent letter says "Beautiful may be the feet of those who walk upon the mountain who bring good news, but swamp walking most certainly not a beauty treatment for the feet. After a week of hiking from village to village I was ten pounds leaner, pretty well scratched up and mosquito bitten from head to toe. But the precious time spent with the people along the way made every bite worthwhile even though I spent one horrid week recovering from malaria when I returned home." Why are they there? Because they heard the cry for help.

Or go with me to Haiti a country of five million under repressive political regime and great influence of the occult. Ron and Carolyn have been there for years planting the church. Recently we received communication from them about the step by step plan to plant a church. A plan you will not find in the seminary textbook on how to do missionary work. Step one is to obtain fifteen copies of "Great Questions of Life International," Correspondence Institute's basic course. Simple course of salvation. Step two: give the lessons to converted son of a voodoo worshiper. Step three: the converted son of the voodoo worshiper takes the courses into the remote villages of the hills of Haiti where here is no evangelical church. Step four: he enrolls fifteen students in the fifteen courses. Step five: he asks these fifteen students to refer other students. Step six: he holds church services with the budding congregation. As simply as it may seem these are the steps followed by the converted son of voodoo worshiper to plant a church in Haiti which now has 250 members and another church they started has 168 members and another church they started has 175 members." Responding to the cry for help.

Or our dear friends who have been such a part of this church family Ron and Wanda in Uganda. If you had any place in the world I would not elect to go it would be there. I read in the newspaper again this week that just thirty miles away there were 40 more bodies massacred. Somebody was killing somebody. In a letter I received this week from Ron and Wanda and they have two little children, Amy 9 and John 7. Why are they out there in a country like this? Ron says "Greetings from popcorn city. That's the name given here to the frequent shooting. Actually the last few months have seen a decrease in shooting at least in our end of town. You remember this is the town Idi Amin reigned in, But other parts of the city are still troubled and especially in surrounding areas controlled by guerilla forces. This beautiful cultured town is filled with religious form yet corruption and climbing over each other pervades. With a shot economy (sometimes literal shot) it is no wonder. Increasingly Wanda and I are being drawn to this city. It seems God's time for starting the First Assembly of God church in Kampala. We're negotiating for some land on the main road in this town of 350,000, as well as a weekly TV program. We're finding family closeness comes in ways sometimes quite different from home.

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for example one Saturday night without electricity we were playing Monopoly by candlelight when out in the street a gunfight erupted – machine guns and all. We dashed upstairs and huddled in a corner, singing scripture songs with the kids tucked under our arms for about 45 minutes. God’s peace was rich even as we heard women wailing over their dead. My kids are experiencing peace for themselves. No amount of theology or dad’s lectures will do that for them.”

They ask for prayers, favor with the city government concerning church land in Kampla, strategy, and power to start the first Kampala church. “Help, a nasty unknown virus has made this year a tough one. Security there have been several armed attempt to break into our home. Peace, the kids seem to be handling things well but keep them and us in prayer, Our pastors, pray for that inner character building.” Why are they out here? Because they heard the need.

We ought ourselves to respond because we want to be part of the supply line. No army ever gets troops out there then deserts the supply lines. We’re part of the supply line. I guess that leads to the fourth reason why we ought to answer yes.

I need it. I’m part of that supply line of missions. I try to say as a Christian, what if what I were doing was universalized? What if everybody did what I was doing and am doing? That makes me think about a lot of things. I want to live in such a way and give in such a way that if my actions were universalized the name of the Lord would be glorified.

How am I needed? I may be needed to go. I must tell you that Jewel and I have found it very hard to come back from our trip to Asia. There are so many churches in this area. I’m not saying I’m going to leave. But in a city of Hong Kong of five and a half million and see so few evangelical works, you cannot leave a place like that casually. So we always as believers have to ask, Is God calling me, myself, to be in the mission field other than the mission field of my own home?

A second thing we must access is if I’m not going to go, can I pray? Sure I can pray. And can I give?

I would like to suggest that the best time to begin giving to missions is as soon as you become Christian or as a young person. Many young people here. I think young people ought to make commitments to missions as well. I would suggest that you give the equivalent of a Big Mac perhaps a week or month, depending on what your allowance is. It’s so easy to spend money on ourselves. We need to evaluate even those small things and say have I invested an equivalent amount or even more in the work of the Lord?

College president Pierson of Miami Christian college sent out an appeal for his college for finances some time ago and received some critical letters for appealing for finances. He wrote back a letter to the mailing list. I obtained a copy. It said something like this: “The trouble is you’re always asking for money. You’re probably right. But let me tell you a personal story. I had a little boy, my first born. He was a delight to our hearts but he was always costing me something. He needed clothing, shoes, food and special needs that I gladly provided for he was my son. Then one day he died. It was an experience that I hope you will never have. He does not cost me a dollar now. Every need is an unfailing sign of life and growth, body, mind, and soul have their need and they must be met continually. A ministry that is constantly in need of

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funds is alive and growing and going somewhere. A dead ministry` has no need and will not bother you.”

I present to you today the names and hearts of 62 missionaries that our church is involved in supporting and say they responded to the cry for help. We also have a chance to respond.

Take the card I gave at the beginning and realize what a faith promise is. It's a goal. It's not a signed commitment. We don't even want your name on his because there's no follow up from our end to you saying you said you'd give so much no here is it? It's a way of helping you arrive at a goal for the next six months to pray for and work for. I am at a certain amount of giving and every pledge time I've determined before the Lord to increase it incrementally. So every time it goes up just a little bit. That stretches my faith as I go along. It is missions money that when given is on your offering envelop recorded as missions. We have treated it as in addition to our tithe which go to support the work here. It's one of the best things that you or I will never have the chance to do. To commit to the Lord's work in missions. So if you would like to take that and if you are going to give a weekly amount indicate how much a week, or how much a month. We will take these and tabulate them and have report to you next week concerning the giving.

If you don't have a pen or pencil borrow one from somebody. As a pastor I'm not so much concerned nearly about the amount as I am concerned about each one feeling a part in having a responsibility. It's each of us being part of the supply line that makes all the difference. Will you help to pray and will you help to send?

Then you can tear off the perforated part. The small part keep and put it in your bible or some place where it will be a reminder to you of your commitment.

Our Lord, as we come to this moment of commitment of commitment which we make once every six months in this church fellowship, we want to thank you for our friends who are abroad. And some here among ethic ministries in the United States and some in support administrative ministries here. We want to thank you for each one. For their responding to the love of Christ which constrains them. Help us, Lord, to respond also with love from our heart to reach the world. We must do the works of him who has sent us while it is yet day for the night cometh when no man can work. May our commitments, Lord, reflect obedience to the great commission. May they reflect love for the lost. May they reflect faith in you and some degree of sacrifice on our own part. We ask in the name of the Lord. Amen.