

What Seven Years of Missions Work Has Taught Me

In 1997, God called me out of 33 years of pastoral experience to train pastors and their wives. During these seven years, God has taught me many lessons about life, people and ministry, but the most significant thing God has taught me is thankfulness. Before being exposed to an overpopulated world, poverty, various pagan religions, crime, lawlessness and vicious opposition to Christ, I was a typical American that had no idea how the majority of the rest of the world lived. Today, I am overwhelmed with God's grace and so thankful for what I have as a child of God that lives in the USA. I want to share with you some of the things for which I am thankful.

THANKFUL FOR WHAT GOD IS DOING IN THE WORLD

I have seen and heard what God is doing in the hearts of men in every culture of the world. He is working mightily in some nations and other nations are starting to open their doors to the gospel. Revival is occurring in many nations and cultures. This is something I read about in the Book of Acts but never saw or experienced in the USA.

In South America, about 9 million people a year are professing faith in Christ. The church is growing so fast that it has become a major threat to the Roman Catholic Church.

On the continent of Africa, about 7 million people a year are professing faith in Christ. It is estimated that by the year 2040 there could be as many as 500 million professing Christians in Africa.

In South Korea, 28% of the population claims to be Christian. Korea is the most Christian nation on the earth. Where ever I go in the world, there are dedicated Korean missionaries, and many Koreans are training to go into China when the gospel is officially allowed in that great nation.

It is estimated that there are 800 to 100 million Christians inside of China today. There are more true Christians in China than in the USA.

While today there is only 3% of India that profess Christ, it is predicted that the next great moving of Spirit will be in the massive country of over one billion people.

While the Middle East is engulfed in war, hatred and confusion, the gospel is being spread by satellite TV, which is educating Muslims about the truth of Christianity. There is a tremendous response to learn more about Christ and the gospel.

These are just a few things that cause me to be humbled before the Almighty God, and to be thankful that He has not abandoned this world. Nations rise and fall, but God's compassion and mercy to save will continue on until Christ returns.

THANKFUL FOR THE USA

I am extremely thankful to live in the United States of America and proud to be a citizen of this great country. I am grateful for the Christian influence that had been in this country since its beginning. I am convinced that America in many ways has a superior culture to other nations and that is because of the Christian influence that has been in this nation since its inception. America is not a Christian nation. It is not a perfect nation because it is filled with sinful people, but it is a nation based on democratic principles, which came out of our Christian heritage.

Yet, I see America taking spiritual, economic and political directions that deeply concern me. Each time I go overseas (about five times a year) and come back, I see a little more deterioration in this culture. Surely, we cannot turn the clock back, but we can pray that God will bring America a revival in the Christian religion. The only hope for the USA is not government but revival that starts with individual Christians and churches, resulting in multiple thousands becoming Christians, who in turn affect the culture. This happened in England through the Methodist revival, and it has happened several times in the USA as seen the Great Awakening and the Second Awakening. I am concerned about three basic threats to our American culture.

Materialism. This nation is the land of plenty and we are the envy of every nation on earth. Most people would immigrate to the USA if they could because offers the "good life." This materialism, however, is killing the church in America. *Where the church suffers, the church grows. Where the church materially prospers, the church grows weak.* God does not care how much money we make or have as long as we give liberally of our money to the Lord's work and share it to help the less privileged. Christ does not want money to become a god to us, but to lay all of our money at the feet of Jesus. The issue is never, "How much shall I give" but "how much shall I keep because it all belongs to God?"

We had no choice to be born in America. We do not have to feel guilty when we have abundance, but we can be grateful for all the blessings our God has given us in this nation.

Secularism. Each day American becomes more godless and more secular in its approach to life – moral relativism is the accepted attitude. Morality in politics, business and religion are cast to the wind. There seems to be no need for God in our culture because we have bowed to the god of science, the god of hedonism and the god of materialism. *The fastest growing religion in the USA percentage wise is "no religion."* People are going away from the church in droves or they are staying in the church but redefining Christianity to make it politically correct. Secularist disdain Christians and biblical Christianity, and are out to destroy the Christian religion.

Tolerance. America is a nation of tolerance. This is a strength and a weakness. We tolerate all religions, all political beliefs, all types of morality or immorality, and all forms of lifestyles. In America, right and wrong is determined by the majority vote not on any objective standard like the bible. Any group that says they are right or the only way is not tolerated, and is tabbed as “religious fanatics” or “religious right.” In America today, all religions are tolerated except biblical Christianity that says Christ is the only way to heaven. If we would say that Christ is the best way but not the only way, most Americans would accept us. But Jesus Christ does not leave us that option. He says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). My personal belief is that biblical Christians will face serious social persecutions in America in the very near future. Much of this persecution will come from the institutional church, which says Christ is the best way but not the only way.

Tolerance has blinded Americans to the Muslim threat in our nation. We tolerate a religion that is out to control the USA. Anees Zaka stated in the article “The Truth About Islam” recorded the following quote by Omar Ahmad, co-founder of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, “Islam isn’t in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant...the Koran, the Muslim book of scripture, should be the highest authority in America and Islam the only accepted religion on earth” (PCA, Equip for Ministry, May/June 2004).

I am thankful that I live in a country where I can speak out for Christ, but I do not know how much longer we will have this privilege.

THANKFUL FOR THE LITTLE THINGS

Since becoming a world-Christian and traveling in many third world countries, I have become very grateful for the little things—things I used to take for granted. I am beginning to realize how blessed I have been and how unthankful I have been for the little things. Here are some things I am truly grateful for:

1. Clean drinking water from the tap (most water is contaminated and often light brown; must keep mouth shut when bathing or showering).
2. Hot showers (often we have no running water and bathe in buckets).
3. English toilets (often we have to use squatters and one time I fell in one).
4. Toilet paper (many cultures do not use toilet paper, and when they do it is not available).
5. Traffic laws (many countries have no traffic laws—no stop signs, traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, and cows, dogs and pigs running wild in the streets by the thousands).
6. No cockroaches, ants, mice and other bugs in the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom (Hindus do not kill animals or bugs because of reincarnation—you may be killing one of your ancestors).
7. Clean air (in some countries air pollution is so bad that one has to put a handkerchief over the mouth while driving through a city).

8. Public sanitation (adults and children urinate and defecate publicly).
9. Clean dishes, glasses and utensils (dishes are often rinsed but never washed with soap, leaving a greasy film—a health hazard).
10. Variety of food (many cultures eat the same food every day—rice, stringy goat meat, tough beef, boiled potatoes, maize meal clumps, mashed bananas, greens, tea).
11. Good roads (roads in most countries are bumpy, dusty, rough and if paved are filled with dangerous potholes).
12. No weird smells (burning wood, cow manure, burning incense, human body odor, moldy odors, stench from multiple piles of garbage, pungent odors from burning flesh from public crematories, horrible air pollution making breathing very difficult).
13. Being able to communicate with people (often people do not speak English and when they do, we cannot understand them because of an African, Indian or Asian accent).
14. Very little poverty (in most third world countries, poverty is everywhere; people are hungry and are begging for money).
15. Minimal crime (in the third world, crime is rampant and it is not safe to walk alone). ILLUSTRATION: Larry Warren
16. For a car (it is a luxury to have a car in most third world cultures).

THANKFUL FOR CHRISTIANS THAT ARE SACRIFICING AND STANDING FOR CHRIST

God is raising up an army in USA and around the world to fight the rising tide of world religions, secularism, materialism and heathenism. Revival is taking place in various parts of the world, and where revival is happening, the church suffers. Many Christians are dying for their faith in Christ. In Sudan alone there have been over two million martyrs. In Nigeria, the Muslims are doing an ethnic cleansing of Christians to make it possible for the government to become Muslim. *There have been more martyrs for the Christian Faith in the last 100 years than there has been in the whole history of the church.* Tertullian was right when he said, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.”

Christians are dying at this very hour simply because the name the name of Christ. Yet, history is filled with Christians that died because they had convictions about sin, salvation, Christ, heaven and hell.

John Wesley said, “I am immortal until the hour of my death.” Henry Martyn said, “If God has work for me to do, I cannot die.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

If God calls us to die for Christ, He will be with us as He was with Stephen. The Apostle Paul said, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Philip. 1:21).

Most of us will never be called upon to die for Christ. However, we are called upon as His disciples to die daily for Christ. As Christians we must learn to sacrifice, restrain our excessive desires, turn from family and friends that are foes of Christ and keep us from going forward. Christ ask that He be first in our lives and that will involve commitment, change and perseverance.

THANKFUL FOR THE PROMISES OF GOD

While Christ has told us to commit, sacrifice and persevere, He has also gives us some marvelous promises when we stand for Him and with Him.

I tell you the truth, Jesus said to them, “No one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and, in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28-30).

Was Jesus lying to us? Was He jerking us around? Are these promises true or false? You alone can answer that and what decision you make will bring you blessing or cursing.

CONCLUSION

A thankful heart is essential to validate the reality of faith. Unthankfulness is the mark of an unbeliever: **“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened (Rom. 1:21).** Thankfulness is a mark of true worship: **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name (Psa. 100:4).** **“Come, let us sing for joy in the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song (Psa. 95:1-2).** Thankfulness is a mark of the Spirit-filled Christian. **“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph. 5:18-20).**

If we will get a thankful heart for all that God has done for us, we will get a heart for the lost people of the world. When we really understand what God has done for us, then we will lay everything we have- our lives, our possessions, our friends, our goals,

our desires-at the feet of Jesus. Then we will see the world in great need of the Savior and be willing share to see the world come to Christ.