



A Strategic Vision: Mobilizing the National Church to Reach Unreached Peoples

HOWARD FOLTZ

It was my first trip to Ethiopia. My pastor, Dr. Charles Blair, had preceded me on three previous visits doing leadership training with the 17 denominations of the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE). On his third visit, the Ethiopian leaders told Pastor Blair that he could bring other teachers to Ethiopia. Pastor Blair had worked with me on our AIMS project for the former Soviet Union right after the Berlin Wall came down. In this vast project, we trained national leaders in church planting who were experiencing newfound freedom in unevangelized areas, including work among unreached Muslim and Buddhist peoples. The results and miracles in the former Soviet Union were tremendous! We made a video of this project, and Pastor Blair took it with him to Ethiopia to show the EFCE leaders. They were inspired and said, "We need this training and impact here." We were eager to respond.

We started our training with our proven *Harvest Connection* seminar. *Harvest Connection* includes a teaching on the *Biblical Basis of Missions, The State of the World, The State of Ethiopia, What a Great Commission Church Looks Like, and The Eight Best Practices of Doing Missions*. The goal is to help leaders make their churches mission-based churches that would send missionaries where the Gospel has never gone before.

The second component is the *State of the World and Ethiopia* that highlights the unfinished task around the world, but particularly in Ethiopia. We asked

the Ethiopian churches to do their own research on unreached peoples in their country. This was an interesting step, for it took some explanation to help them understand the particular terminology of reaching unreached people groups. They found 70 groups that they determined were unreached and without sufficient churches to sustain an indigenous church movement. It was amazing to see how few of the leaders had a complete understanding of the unfinished task both in the world and in Ethiopia. The statistical facts struck them, and I can remember clearly many of these wonderful leaders openly

weeping as they considered those in their own country who had never heard the Gospel.

The third component of *Harvest Connection* is a look at a *Great Commission Church*. We taught that the church is not made of wood and straw or bricks and mortar, but is built by the dynamics of God working in the midst of His people.

Then, church structure emerges from the dynamics of God. The end result is the dynamics of God being released through church structures to see the Body of Christ expanded through new souls coming into His Kingdom and churches planted.

The fourth component is the *Eight Best Practices of Doing Missions through Local Churches*. We taught that these practices are proven experiences in America and other parts of the world, and we want them to pray and think through how they could be contextualized within the Ethiopian context. The eight best practices are: prayer, missions task force, strategy, faith promise giving, missions conferences,



Application time—generating a “grass-roots” missions movement

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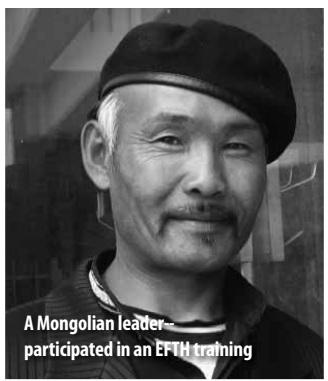
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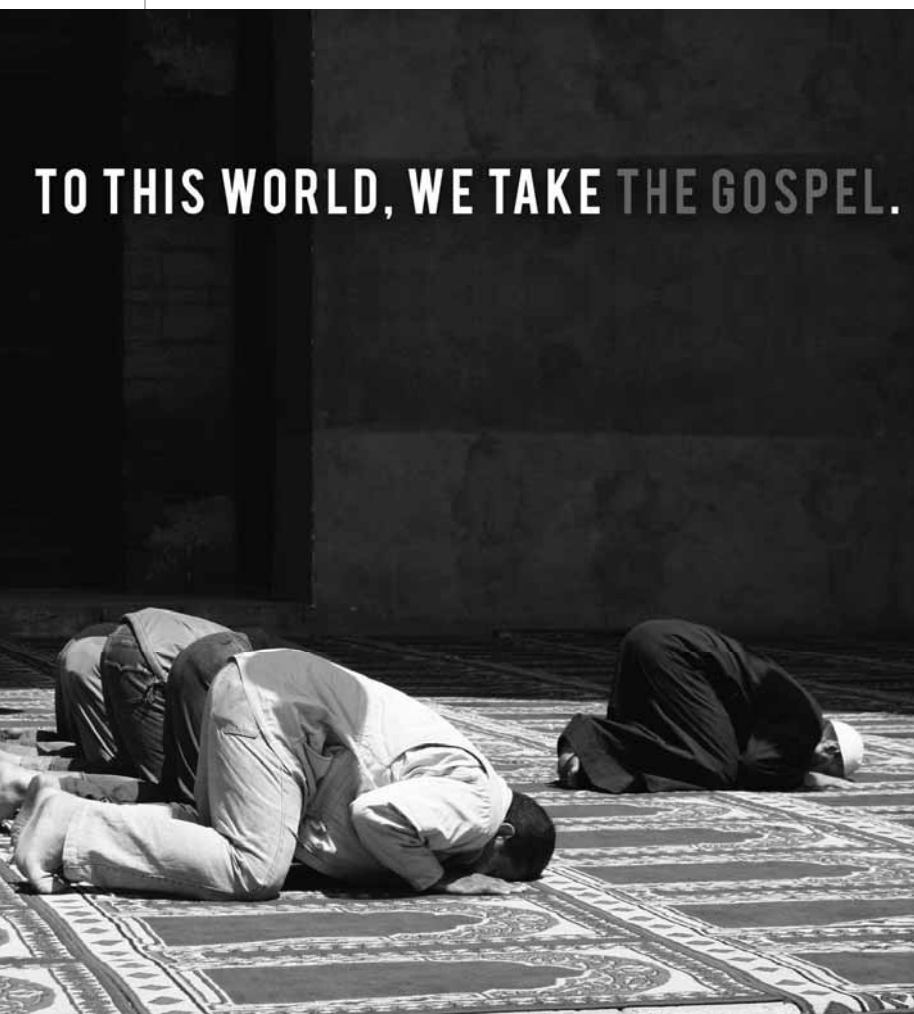
short-term teams, adopting unreached people groups and missionary training.

Since I have been part of this training ministry around the world, I have seen what I call “prophetic intervention” occur multiple times. In prophetic intervention, the anointed Word of God enters into the minds and ministry of God’s leaders and leverages them into a new biblical worldview, where their churches become mission sending churches, instead of doing Jerusalem/Judea outreach only. Because of prophetic intervention, AIMS has

returned to Ethiopia 23 times for follow-up training, consultation, evaluation and refinement of our partnership with EFCE churches. From that first training in 1993, when the leaders told me they had not sent out Ethiopian missionaries before, they have now deployed and sent out over 1,600 Ethiopian missionaries. The number of unreached people groups has decreased from 70 to 35, and thousands of new churches have been planted. The missionaries have reported dozens of miracles, and over 20,000 Muslims have come to Christ in East and South Ethiopia alone. They have even sent missionaries to Sudan, India and Pakistan. In addition, the practice of faith promise giving that they now teach their churches has broken some of the power of negative dependency, for nearly all of these missionaries are supported only with Ethiopian funds.



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In the follow-up visits to Ethiopia and the other countries, we further developed our curriculum into what we call *Equipping for the Harvest* (EFTH). It includes: 1) *The Harvest Connection* seminar as cited above; 2) *Networking* national pastors and churches together into a partnership targeting a specific unreached people group; 3) *The Biblical Basis of Faith Promise Giving* with testimonies from developing world churches and the power of applying these biblical principles.

We always ask the national leaders to pray about what unreached people groups they want to target. The fire and passion of intercession grows through these prayer times day after day. Then we teach how they can financially sustain a missions movement within their country through *Faith Promise Giving*.

The last application of the EFTH training is to gather pastors in partnership groups. Prior to the training conference, we train facilitators for each people group, who in turn lead the pastors in that partnership in adopting that people group. The partnership then develops a basic initial strategy to raise up missionaries to send to the unreached people. The end goal is a church-planting movement in that group. This process has generated over 1200 strategic national partnerships designed to reach unreached peoples. To Him be all the glory! f