

God’s Time for Ghana, Our Time to Invest - Mentoring the Next Generation of Missionaries

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Several years ago, I had the privilege of getting to know Richess, a young lady who serves with Operation Serve, a ministry of Excellent Youth Outreach, here in Ghana. I met Richess, for the first time, at a national mission’s event where my wife and I were mobilizing students for long-term service. After a short time of interaction, she, in her passionate way, asked me, “Uncle Roland, when can I come over to visit you and Mama Cristina? I want to talk to you more about missions.” We quickly set a time for the following week when she came to our home in Tema. Again, after a short time of introductions, sharing with her about where we were from and briefly about our family, she asked her first question, “What has been the most exciting thing you have ever done as a missionary?”

I didn’t have to think very long as I shared the story of the privilege I had in presenting a small baby boy to the Lord, maybe the first ever, of a family from an unreached people group in Central Africa; the joy of reaching the unreached and presenting them before the throne of Jesus. Young Richess seemed to hang on every word. The rest of the afternoon was filled with more stories, questions, answers, and finally Cristina and I prayed for her. Since that day, we have had many young Ghanaian men and women approach us with the same passion and desire to hear and learn from our experiences and to learn about what God is doing around the world today.

We are convinced that God is on the move in Africa, God is on the move here in Ghana; young people seem desperate to learn from those who have gone before them and they want to be encouraged and

challenged to take big steps of faith of their own. I also sense in my spirit that they too want the privilege to serve, to suffer and even die for the sake of the Gospel. We, as those who have gone before, need to be bold like the Apostle Paul when he said, “*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*” (Phil. 4:9 ESV). We as Church and mission leaders need to set the care and ‘mentorship’ of these young people on our priority lists; doing our part in walking with them into spiritual maturity and then on to where God is calling them.

It was in 1986 when my wife Cristina and I became Christians, surrendering our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. Until that time, we had never entered an Evangelical Church and we never remember even hearing a clear presentation of the Gospel. But through the testimony of my brother, who had been

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converted several years before and the reading of the Bible on our own in search of truth, the Holy Spirit brought us both to our knees in the privacy of our home in Canada. As we embraced the truth in the Word of God and experienced the joy of our new lives in Christ, our only desire was to know Him more, to obey His commands and please Him. For the next months, the Word of God became our passion: reading, studying, and memorizing. Then, the Lord gave us Pastor Wayne from a local Baptist Church.

The Monday morning after visiting his Church for the first time, he was at our door, offering to be there if we wanted to talk, and later inviting us to join a Bible study with several other young couples who had recently joined the Church as well. We jumped at the chance to study God’s word. Pastor Wayne

decided to walk us through the Gospel of Matthew, and we would get together once a week to study, ask questions and pray. Pastor Wayne was always careful not to just feed us the answers, but to allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, challenge us and guide us. After about 6 months of studying who Jesus the Messiah was, His parables, His teachings and the miracles He did, we got to Matthew 24:14, “*And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” Wow, this was the first time we had ever considered the nations, and how we had to go and tell them; we were part of God’s plan to go and tell, and then the end would come! We, along with one other couple, started to pray and dream together. He was a local police officer and I was a social worker; We knew God was speaking to us but what were we to do?

About 4 weeks later, our study landed in Matthew 28:18-20, where we read, *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Go therefore 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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.”* We had our answer. Cristina and I had only been saved for about a year when we excitedly told the pastor that we were going to quit our jobs and go into missions. To be honest, we really did not know what ‘going into missions’ really meant, but we knew we couldn’t just remain the same while so many were dying without Christ. Pastor Wayne had been walking with us for about a year, he had been observing how the Holy Spirit had been preparing us and he knew that the Lord was in it. As our first ‘mission mentor,’ we now

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see how Pastor Wayne invested in us, he taught us, prayed with us, and trusted that the Holy Spirit would guide us into truth and help us to take steps of obedience to His Word. After talking with the Church leadership, he became a champion for

us before the Church, as he led them to pray and support us. Several months later, they laid their hands on us and send us out as their missionaries.

After 2 years of serving the Lord on our first mission assignment, sharing Christ and ministering among the poor and children in crisis in one of Canada’s major cities, we were now convinced that there was no turning back. Pastor Jim, from the local Church that we were attending, knew it as well, and one day he called me aside and said, “Brother, God has a call on your life, you need to get some Bible School Training.” Although the thought excited me, I quickly

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As Pastor Jim was for us, God calls us also to prayerfully identify and to be part of confirming the call of God on the lives of those He puts into our care. For the following years of training, Pastor Jim continued to walk with us, encouraging us, and challenged us to be faithful to that call. He also, like Pastor Wayne, championed us before the rest of the church, encouraging them to pray and support us in our future ministry.

Those years at Bible School were wonderful; studying God’s Word, getting to know the many people God brought into our lives such as professors, international students, but the best were the missionaries who would come to spend time with us on the campus. There was one of them who quickly became our favourite, brother Wilf; he was a WEC missionary, already in his seventies, who had served the Lord as

a worker in Colombia and the jungles of Venezuela for over 30 years. During those years he had suffered much persecution, having been taken hostage by a guerrilla group, having Churches and Bibles burned, mocked, and insulted. By the way he told his stories, you could tell that he, like Jesus in Hebrews 12:2, *joyfully* spent these years in selfless preaching, teaching, and planting small churches. Although brother Wilf never had the privilege of seeing much of the fruit that we see in the Colombian Church today, God had given him a vision of thousands of Colombian missionaries being sent out around the world.

Well, the first day we invited him to our home for an afternoon, he knew he had just laid eyes on his first fruit; Mama Cristina was a Colombian. He spent the rest of the afternoon telling us stories from his many years in Colombia. We began to share with him that, we felt the Lord was leading us to work with Betel, a ministry of WEC International, to reach the drug addicts on the streets of Spain. By the smile on his face, we could see that he was humoured by our idea, but boldly expressed that he felt the Lord was calling us to work in Equatorial Guinea. We had no idea even where Equatorial Guinea was, but he assured us that he would be praying for and that the Lord would take us to that small Spanish speaking country on the west-coast of Africa. We also respectfully smiled and listened as he shared his vision with us. To our surprise, only a few years later, after joining WEC and having spent just one year in Spain, we were once again packing our bags, with our three small children, and on our way to Equatorial Guinea. Wilf was a humble, godly, self-sacrificing man in the ministry that the Lord had sent him to, but he also was a man that took seriously the investment into the lives of those that the Lord had given him to mentor. Although Wilf lived thousands of miles from us, he always kept in contact, calling, writing letters and visiting when he could. He never discouraged us from moving on to Spain, but he never stopped talking about Equatorial Guinea and praying for us to go. On the prayers and vision of this old saint, we were carried from Canada to Spain and on to Equatorial Guinea, where we spent 20 years of fruitful ministry. When it was time for us to first leave Canada, Wilf was also the

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first one to begin financially supporting us and was committed to regularly getting together with others to pray for us. He continued his commitment to us until the day that the Lord took him home.

I could go on, honouring the many people that the Lord has used in our lives as ‘mentors for a certain season.’ Men and women that we have looked up to as our ‘heroes of the faith,’ or those who have prayed and encouraged us, or those courageous ones who were brave enough to speak hard words into our lives or just give us a ‘kick in the pants,’ pushing us to continue on faithfully with what the Lord had called us to do. But in my reflection of these many people, especially Pastors Wayne and Jim and brother Wilf that God used to walk with us, patiently mentoring us over the years, I am led to think of those that the Lord has also placed into our care.

During our 20 years of ministry in Equatorial Guinea, we had hundreds of students come through our Bible School. We spent hundreds of hours training them: teaching, praying, evangelizing alongside working, chapels, retreats. I could go on and on, but really what did they learn from us? For many years we lived alongside our students and all of them, through the years, spent time in our home, eating together, doing devotions together and just enjoying good fellowship. Without asking any questions,

we knew that they were watching how we, the Missionaries did our devotions, interacted with our children and even how we ate our meals together. On our last visit to Equatorial Guinea, we were invited to have a meal together with one of our former students who was a pastor in a local Church. We sat all together at the table, and before we ate, they reached out to take our hands so we would pray together. Cristina and I both looked at each other and smiled. They later told us stories of things that they observed from us and later adopted into their own family as ‘new tra-

ditions.’ We realized again that the young people are watching, but are we making ourselves available to be seen?

An important point that we learned from men like Pastors Wayne and Jim and brother Wilf is that, we as mentors’ of the next generation of workers to the nations, need to intentionally invest in the young

people that the Lord leads to us. We need to trust the Holy Spirit, through deep study of His Word, to guide them into truth and obedience. Let the Holy Spirit, as well, speak through us in guiding and confirming their calls. We need to walk with them into spiritual maturity, praying with them about the nations and being available to help discover where God is leading them. We also need to believe in them and be champions for them before their families, friends and Churches, helping them to build up a team that will continue to pray and support them to fulfill the call that God has put on their lives.

Today, we, as Church and mission leaders, stand at the threshold of a movement of God in sending out thousands of workers from Ghana to the nations. We need to stop just discussing why the Church in Africa has been so slow in sending out workers up until now and open our eyes to the reality that God is at work in Africa, He is at work in Ghana. Now is the time! We need to open our hearts and lives to the army of young people that are out there needing us to invest in them, pray with them, guide them, and believe in them. We need to be there to champion them before their Churches and be willing to support them personally. And, when we as the Church in Ghana, invest, send and support workers being

sent, *“my God will supply every need of you (you at the home front and our workers going out) according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.” (Philippians 4:19, 20 ESV)*

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