

MOBILIZING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR WORLD EVANGELIZATION

Loren Cunningham

Mr. Cunningham, Lausanne, Switzerland, is the leader of Youth With a Mission.

Mobilizing youth for world evangelization is a challenge that faces not only youth-evangelistic organizations, but a challenge which must be met by every mission, church, and evangelistic movement. Of the countless methods tried over the years, there is one process whose pattern was established by the undisputed leader of all evangelists, our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is this method I would like to set forth in the next several pages. We will trace together the scriptural foundation for this step-by-step development of the building of an evangelical outreach. Let us now follow Jesus himself, our greatest example of leadership.

1. The excitement of vision phase

In Luke 5:5, Simon tells Jesus, "At Your bidding I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break and they signaled to their partners in the other boat; for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink... And Jesus said... 'Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.' And...they left everything and followed Him."

When Jesus called Peter, James, and John he challenged them by giving these men a clear demonstration of God's power. The first step to mobilize youth for world evangelism is to challenge them with an exciting God-given vision. Jesus excited his disciples with what they were to do for him. He started by showing them the potential of "God and man" cooperation. There cease to be human limitations when man completely obeys the Lord. Instead of believing the circumstances, they believed him, obeyed him, and had their miracle. They caught so many fish that their nets began to break and their boats began to sink. That's excitement! The Lord told them, in effect, "You saw what I did when you cooperated with me; from now on you will be catching men." They left everything to follow him because he gave them a vision and excited them with the potential of the Holy Spirit working through them to win souls to Christ. In fact they would win so many souls that their nets would break and their boats would sink under the load, IF they would completely obey him and totally believe him. God asks leaders to challenge and lead laborers into the harvest field. We will be successful to the degree that we follow the example of Jesus. Jesus started with the supernatural. We must do the same. How can youth be mobilized for evangelism? Youth are challenged by a vision that comes from God.

The general vision is "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The specific vision (or will of God) is doing the right thing, in the right place, with the right people, at the right time, in the right way, with the right attitude of heart! As leaders, we must

study the Scriptures to understand his general plan for world evangelism and then wait in the place of prayer for the specific vision. Let us not forget that Jesus "did nothing on His own initiative" (John 8:28). He has set the pattern for us to listen to the voice of the Lord and then to obey him. When you share the vision God gave you with others, the Holy Spirit will excite the vision in their own hearts and it will become their vision.

Every vision that has produced lasting fruit in the youth movement with which I am associated has been one born of God. Independent action on the part of man, however well organized or publicized, always falls short. Youth get excited when they are able to see what God wants them to do and how God can do it through them as they totally depend upon him, cooperating with him in full belief. When the leaders lead, the people will follow (Judges 5:12). We must lead them into the vision of world evangelization.

The leader must receive his specific direction from God, not as the result of a brainstorming session in a committee meeting. How can we teach youth spiritual realities if God is not real enough to us to speak specifically? As my friend Duncan Campbell, the Scottish revivalist, used to say, "Everything is real in evangelism but God." There is a vast difference between the static presentation of a lifeless plan, no matter how smoothly done, and the demonstration of the true power of a risen, living Savior.

It is also important to keep in mind that while youth are frequently open they are almost always sensitive to the genuine and are quickly turned off by the superficial. Never use gimmicks to mobilize youth into such serious work as world evangelism. Many have become permanently alienated from service in the harvest through such practices. By beginning each crusade, outreach project, or training mission with a specific word from the Lord, its leaders can truly expect the blessing of God to be upon it.

Anything is exciting if it is from God, and when you catch a specific vision for world evangelism you will be excited. Youth everywhere get excited when you talk about world evangelism when they know that it is something that God wants done. Your job in mobilizing youth is to tell them what God has shown you and how you know the vision was from God.

2. The experimental phase

Luke tells us, "And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing. And He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece.' ... And departing, they began going about among the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere" (Luke 9:1-3,6). And in chapter ten, "Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest!" He told them to take no money, no bags, no

shoes, greet no one on the way. This was their "short term" experiment. Travel light, travel fast, and get out and do the job.

They had seen the vision. The vision was to catch men. Now they were to experiment. They were not just to observe or hear what someone else had done. Now they were to do it themselves. This is exciting because it means involvement. I have watched this in the lives of hundreds of youth year after year in Youth With A Mission.

We challenge youth to first witness near their home, community or local area in what we call a Domestic Crusade. After a brief training session we send them out two by two. Wherever possible we send an inexperienced youth with an experienced witness. A Domestic Crusade qualifies them to take the next step, which is a "Summer of Service" in their own nation or abroad. Following this two-to-three month experience together with a minimum of three months' training in one of our Schools of Evangelism they may apply for a full-time worker's status for one year's service or more. By not asking for a four-year minimum commitment, or worse yet, a life-commitment to work within a particular mission, we are encouraging them to grow into spiritual maturity and places of responsibility a step at a time. By demanding a major decision prior to the worker's spiritual maturation, Christian organizations tend to lose many potential soul-winners. More on this in topic six.

Whenever God sends young people out for the first time, their motives correct and their heart preparation complete, he always encourages them with miracles — always! By "miracle," I mean a supernatural act which can only be attributed to God. Whether it is financial provision, salvation of a sinner, or a physical healing, God will always encourage these new workers. This is part of the experimental stage of working with God. The disciples that Jesus sent out, the twelve and the seventy, saw signs following. They saw miracles take place through their ministry. They had seen the Lord heal the sick. Now they prayed and the sick were healed. Youth do not want to just sit and learn theory, they want to get involved. They want to see the New Testament principles and promises performed through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is real training! Only when God works through you has true learning taken place. You can study and memorize volumes of theory. You can even get excited over what you should do. But it is only when you step out in faith, when you get out there, become hot, tired, dusty, and hungry, and yet see God at work, only then is it worth the struggle that is involved in world evangelism.

3. The explanation of the cost phase

The third step is the explanation of the cost. In John 6:26, Jesus said, "You seek Me... because you ate of the loaves, and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life..." Then his disciples asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Christ began to explain to them what his kingdom was all about. He had just fed these thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. They immediately seized on the idea of making him king. After all, they decided, a king who can feed all of his people by one miracle is the best king a people can have. They wouldn't have to pay taxes.

He could do a miracle and wipe out the Roman army. What a utopia right here on earth! But Jesus, contrary to their imaginations and desires, began to explain to them the cost of what it really meant for them to continue and see the kingdom of God as God envisioned it. The experimental stage is not the culmination of Christian maturity. Miracles are real and for today, but God wants more than miracles. He wants mature men and women who will endure as good soldiers. When the children of Israel went out of Egypt through the Red Sea, they followed the fire by night and the cloud by day. They saw many miracles. Food rained down from heaven. The sick were healed by the masses when the serpent was lifted up. Water came out of the rock. They did not even need new clothes. They saw many miracles, but they had not arrived at spiritual maturity. In fact, they were so far removed from it that they were not even allowed to enter the promised land.

There is a fallacy in Christian circles that miracles take place because of the efforts of a "spiritual giant." Miracles are wrought by God as attestation of his Word. They will accompany his Word as we obey it. And I speak for Christians at all levels of development — yes, even the immature. But it is the one who counts the cost and pays the price of going ahead to spiritual maturity, of going ahead to the point of multiplication, of reaching the place where he can catch so many men that "his nets will break," whom God wants to lead the body of Christ on to this place of spiritual maturity. But Jesus had a screening process and it was simply the price to become fishers of men. And after he outlined it (John 6:41-65), many disciples left him. Yet twelve remained, Peter asking, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." Peter was spoiled with the supernatural. He was addicted to the divine; he didn't want to leave because he had seen God in action. Once youth have stepped out, on faith, depending utterly upon God, in obedience to total commitment, they then begin to see God in action. They will never again be satisfied with the product of man's routines and efforts without God. They will be spoiled, and will continually want to see God work in a greater way. But I feel here a need to caution you in your explanation of "cost." Although the cost must be explained to youthful workers, timing is of utmost importance. The full explanation of the ultimate nature of their commitment to God is best delayed until after they have been encouraged by the experimental stage. This is in line with Christ's words, "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12).

4. The exam phase

Every student knows what exam time means. It is the time when he proves to the teacher he has learned the material. We are disciples. Our exam is when we are actually tested, tried, and proven. Moses told the children of Israel, "And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut. 8:2).

When Jesus died, the disciples had to "die" with him. In order to continue following him, they relinquished all natural rights. The rights of

reputation, ownership, family, friends, food, shelter, and even life itself had to be given up. This is the cost that we pay in order to mature. Christ said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Mark 8:34). "If you try to save something, you will lose it, but if you will lose it for His sake and the sake of the gospel, you will save it." That includes all human rights. The Lord will test every worker in every one of these areas. God will ask us at times to fast or to spend all night in prayer. This is a time of testing but also a time of growth. As God tests us to see if we will relinquish each of our rights, we will actually live through the "cross experience." We will pay the price. God has given us our human rights in order that we may turn them back to him and say, "I love you, God, more than the things you've given me." He will even test us with our ministry. He gives us a ministry and then he asks if we will "give it up." How? He gives us a dilemma. If we don't obey him we lose our authority; and if we do obey him we will lose our ministry in the eyes of others. Then when it looks as if the ministry is gone, God creates something new out of the situation. This has happened to my ministry and to our mission prior to every major advancement. If it is to be a world-wide advancement it is first a world-wide test. God wants his sons, like a grain of wheat to fall to the ground and die. This is that process which precedes a new release, a new authority, a new revelation of Jesus. These principles must be taught to young workers (and old as well) in order that they may have understanding at each step of their growth.

5. The executive phase

An executive is someone with *experience, understanding, and authority*. John 15:13-16, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain: that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you." Our authority actually comes from the Lord. Promotion is not of man. Honor is not from man but from God, the Bible declares. As God releases authority, it brings the disciple to a new level of maturity and authority in his ministry. It happens quite suddenly, almost unexpectedly. He no longer speaks sermons but convictions. Also, God begins exchanging quantity for quality. Please note, these phases of Christian growth are continual processes not just one-time events. Each time God establishes a new ministry or vision for a worker he has to go through these steps again, only at a more sophisticated level. "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts" (Prov. 17:3). "The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times" (Psalm 12:6).

To the degree that a worker is successful in his exam, to that degree God releases understanding and authority. If at the last he fails part of it, he has released only a partial authority and has to be tested again until he is able to pass the test completely. When he passes it with the right at-

titude and does all to the satisfaction of God, then God will release the authority. If the Christian has "padded" himself "in case God doesn't come through" and protected himself with extra man-made securities, he will have to take the test again later. When the worker, in a manner of child-like innocence, believes God and passes every test that comes his way, maximum authority is released to him. The young disciple quickly becomes a mature worker.

6. The extensive phase

This phase is concerned with God's plan to reach the whole world. Through Christ we see this ideal. He is building a dynamic growing pyramid of loving stones. Christ is the author and head of the pyramid that grows from the top downward.

Before discussing this ideal let us note what I believe to be one reason for the stunted growth of Christian movements. We all have seen mission organizations that never grow beyond the initial founders. Consider with me a hypothetical organization of several young men, aged twenty to thirty, who get a vision and begin to do what God has told them. Twenty years later they are aged forty to fifty, and yet no one younger has been added. What has happened? They received a vision from God and got excited about it. They stepped out and experimented and found that it was of God, and God's anointing was upon them and their vision. Then they began to understand the price of discipleship. These men went on and passed the test, and a new authority was upon them. They became excellent at winning souls, but it was by the method of a hook and fishing line — winning them one at a time — not "nets full and boat loads." There was no multiplication, just addition. The ratio God wants goes beyond just working with the authority of God on one spiritual generation of workers. He wants our lives to be multiplied, leaders begetting leaders, geometrically not just arithmetically. When someone wanted to join this organization the leaders said, "We've very high standards." It is good to have high standards, but the standards they set were not the ones they had when they began. They were standards they developed since they arrived at the Executive phase. Because of these new "high standards," no new people joined their organization. In fact, they themselves could not have joined the organization they founded if they had required the same standard for themselves that they now require of others. So their mission is still winning souls, but it is not growing in staff and workers. Their converts simply go into other movements for service.

A leader must always be willing to take in people who are not as mature as he is. Without this, the Extensive phase will never be reached. I have heard our leaders say, "Some of the eighteen-year-olds are just not mature enough." I look at them and ask, "When did you join?" Most of them joined at eighteen. Our own attitudes change as we grow. Our standards, however, for others should not be as high as for ourselves, especially when they concern beginners. Never lose the excitement of the first phase of ministry, the vision. Always communicate this vision to others and allow them the privilege of making mistakes just as you did when you began. Each year the numbers of workers should increase as

the pyramid grows larger. Each year the newest group of workers should also be the greatest in number. Doesn't that mean greater problems? Yes, but you will have leadership with greater experience, understanding, and authority growing up just ahead of the new groups. So as each group is added, years of experience are added to the older groups, and this keeps the work in balance. I always say that in Youth With A Mission we make more mistakes than almost any other Christian organization in the world because we are dealing with thousands of new young workers who make new mistakes. At least we give them the opportunity to make their own mistakes. This is part of growth needed in order to reach the world for Christ. Let us look again at our greatest example — Jesus himself.

He took young men where he found them and led them, a step at a time, into maturity. He first excited them with a vision. You will recall in Luke chapter five, he began with only three students — Peter, James, and John. Then by chapter nine he had a group of twelve, and in chapter ten he had seventy. By the first chapter of Acts his hard core followers had increased to 120. By the second chapter they had reached the Executive phase and ministered with great authority. In Acts 2:41 "... there were added ... three thousand souls," and in verse 47, "The Lord added to the church daily..." By Acts 4:4 "The number of the men was about five thousand," and in verse 32 they are called "a multitude." In chapter 6, verses 1 and 7 both record that "the number of the disciples multiplied," showing they had moved into the Extensive stage of multiplication. Their impact increased so greatly that later, some time after their scattering (chapter 8), they were referred to as "these that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). The growing church, though young, was on its way to total world evangelization.

It was Jesus, not Paul, that gave us the "Timothy principle." He showed us by his example that we are to have "a John, the beloved." The next circle of influence is Peter, James, and John — the inner circle. They were with Him at the first calling, on the mount of Transfiguration, at the Garden of Gethsemane.

This inner circle of disciples will keep a leader from getting a false "public image" and a public ministry different from his private spiritual growth and life. As we take care of the depth of our ministry, God will take care of the breadth. When we reach a new level of authority in our relationship with God, then God gives us a new authority with men. God will release disciples to us as he sees he can trust us with them. As God releases to us a Timothy or as our ministry grows to two or three followers, we should bring them in close to us and pray, study the Word, and face the decisions of the ministry with them on a day-to-day, detail-by-detail basis. As leaders we must let them see our mistakes as well as our strengths. Let them understand the principles behind each decision. Let them see how we seek to know and apply God's will to our life and ministry.

Our workers must know us both in our reactions to failures as well as successes. We must regularly humble ourselves before them by being open about failures. Then we too grow, especially as we have the humility to learn from our followers. Every leader should look for and expect God to add these disciples to him as he passes his tests as a leader. The

Holy Spirit will recruit them. When he does, the leader's job is to recognize them and receive the responsibility for their discipling. After that will come the twelve, then the seventy, and through them will begin the multiplication. Now, each one that joins the pyramid starts a pyramid of his own. The follower never competes with his spiritual leader. It is unwise to compare ourselves with one another, as we are all to obey our head, Jesus. Many little pyramids make up the big pyramid (Christ) from within, each tracing their leadership and submission to Jesus. Think of the structural strength of the overall pyramid. This is the strength of the body of Christ. Christ is the head over all. When each one of us starts his own pyramid, yet totally submitted to the ones over us that have fed and led us into spiritual maturity, and yet submitted totally to Christ, we will begin this extensive multiplication phase that will culminate in this generation by girdling the globe with the Gospel. At the same time the converts will become workers and the workers will be disciples and become leaders.

Conclusion

Mobilizing youth for evangelism is a process, not a one-time event. The Lord has a unique vision and experience for you as a leader. As you pass your tests, God's authority will come to you. But don't stop there; go on, and allow God to multiply your experience through others. Leaders simply go first, and then lead others through the same phases of growth. Never ask them to do what you yourself have not yet accomplished. This was and is Christ's method to get laborers, to disciple them, and to send them into the harvest field of the world. As this is accomplished in the family atmosphere of fellowship and love, all the spiritual, social, psychological, and personal needs of each worker can be met in the process of world evangelization.