

Relationship in the Kingdom

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Our years in Pemba have been tumultuous, intense, filled with demonic attacks, violence, threats, opposition from the government, discouragement, theft, loss, disappointments, failures, staff turnover, and the constant, unrelenting demands of extreme poverty and disease all around us. It almost always seemed that our capabilities and resources were no match for the challenges we faced every day, resulting in a level of chaos and stress that literally threatened our health and lives. Intense witchcraft and a lack of exposure to familiar standards of right and wrong made our work in this very remote part of the world seem all the more impossible. Heidi and I remember many times when we did not know how we could continue, often wondering if we really had good, lasting fruit that was worth the sacrifice.

We are often asked what the overcoming key to our ministry and growth is. We don't think in terms of keys or secrets, but of the simplest truths of the gospel. We have learned by experience that there is no way forward when pressed to our extremities but to sacrifice ourselves at every turn for His sake, knowing nothing but Jesus and Him crucified. We must die to live. It is better to give than to receive, and better to love than to be loved. We cannot lose, because we have a perfect Savior who is able to finish what He began in us, if we do not give up and throw away our faith.

In years past we did not think we could identify with Paul like this, but now we understand more of what he meant: *"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead"* (2 Cor. 1:8-9).

Heidi and I get overwhelmed by our awareness that we are only jars of clay, very fragile and finite, capable of only giving out so much, and with very limited understanding and strength. But we have come to be encouraged by this very state of affairs, because God's power and glory will become obvious in our weakness: *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body"* (2 Cor. 4:7-10).

In Pemba we just started another three-month Bible school session with new student pastors from the bush, many of whom are barely aware of any Christian doctrine and still confused about so much. But three of them have already raised the dead and given their testimonies in class! The Holy Spirit is opening hearts and bringing in the harvest more than ever, in spite of our weaknesses. Our churches are monuments to the grace of God. We are asked how we keep them all together, organized and feeling like a unified family, but we can offer no adequate human explanation, in spite of all our efforts. We have learned that He is able to melt hearts and keep people connected in spirit by His own power, and build a hunger for the Savior that conquers every obstacle. This is His revival, His church, His display of glory, and He qualifies us to do His work.

What motivates us to keep going? What puts energy into our spirits when we run out of answers and resources? How do we stay patient and upbeat when the outlook seems bleak, yet again? Where does our power to live, serve and give come from? The question is important, because missionaries do get tired, discouraged and down. Christians of all kinds run out of motivation, no matter how much they have. Leaders with huge responsibilities lose their peace and joy. Ministries become

more like businesses, and preachers more like sales managers. But what makes the Kingdom run? What is the fuel that fires us effortlessly? What is the real thing?

Every day we find out more of the answers to these most fundamental questions, and every day we learn that what used to motivate us is no longer enough. We are going higher, pressing on to what lies ahead. We keep learning what Jesus is interested in, and lose interest in what we used to pursue. And we learn that unless Jesus is interested in what we are pursuing, the going gets tougher than we can bear.

But there is a secret place, a hiding place, a lower place, a holy place that exceeds our dreams. It is not found in anything external and impersonal. It is not found simply in activity, sacrifice and dedication. It is not found in goals, projects, productions and progress. It is not found in finances and growth. It may be missed entirely even when preaching, teaching, training and discipling. It may be forgotten completely when evangelizing and praying for the sick. The greatest and most powerful gifts don't necessarily contain it. Even ministry to the poor may become an impersonal effort that misses that greatest and most intensely motivating creation of God, that supreme display of His glory: relationship!

Love is a gift of relationship, not just self-sacrifice. The secret place is not necessarily found in a prayer closet or a posture of soaking, or in battling for a just cause, or in a massive prayer and fasting effort. Even the most amazing miracles can leave us lonely and without relationship. We can run out of motivation advancing the most noble ideals and working at all levels to transform society. We can minister until we have no more strength, and still go home and lie in bed without the relationship for which our hearts are made.

Everything is okay with relationship. It is all that Jesus cares about, all that motivates Him. He could do many more amazing miracles and dazzle the world with His powers, but He is interested only in relationship. The entire creation, all the grandeur of the physical world, and all His works are designed to serve one thing: relationship. Revival has no content without it. Renewal and manifestations are pointless apart from it. Miracles only find their meaning in it. Joy is shallow and groundless unless rooted in it. Without relationship we are the living dead.

There is no pressure in genuine relationship. When it turns into work, it is gone and finished. It is effortless to maintain. It is not the goal of struggle, but the fire of life. It brings the utmost peace, and washes away all tension. It is the point of living, the substance of existence, the atmosphere of heaven. It motivates to heroic heights, bringing out our best. In relationship we know we are alive, we have arrived, we are satisfied. When we turn away from relationship to pursue anything else, we lose. We have no strength to give and love without it. It is a haven, a rock, a river of living water, the perfect source of motivation to keep going.

As our Perfect Savior, Jesus provides us with relationship. For this He died and rose again on our behalf. He provides not only His Word, His promises and His gifts, but also freely fills our lives with relationship in response to the desire He has put in our hearts. No guilt and condemnation can keep us from drinking in all the relationship with Him that we desire. Nothing in our past can block us. No attitudes in others can prevent us from tasting and seeing that He is good. And from this tree of life that is our Savior, we can branch out into more and more relationship with those all around us. He takes away our loneliness. In Him we end our search and find our destination.

So in this experience of revival in Africa, our values have been refined in the fires of pressure, opposition and disappointment. Thousands of churches and testimonies of supernatural power do not keep us motivated. Huge feeding projects are not enough for us. We need more of a goal than to target people groups and disciple followers. Education and development don't keep our hearts alive. Mobilizing world-wide support still falls short. Academic missiology lacks the energy that Africa needs.

No, our hearts must have perfect relationship, a perfect union between us and our Savior, in the Holy Spirit. We were never meant to be alone for a moment. Our whole motive is to live life and do everything together with our God, to take pleasure in His company always. Our power to live comes entirely from our satisfying relationship with Him, and to stay there is to stay in our own private revival that cannot be disturbed by anything else. Only when that relationship is golden, incandescent and pure enough do we have the power to delight in all that God has richly provided for us to enjoy.

Therefore in Him we do not pursue revival, but rather revival pursues us! Church growth and miracles pursue us. His presence pursues us. He Himself follows us, responds to us, and takes pleasure in making us happy, for we make Him happy. We care how He feels. We satisfy His longing. To stay close to Him is no effort, but a relief, a release, a door to freedom. To get a miracle is never the point, but in our relationship with Him miracles are a delight for Him to perform on our behalf. In fact, we cannot live without miracles, and in the normal Christian life we recognize that everything is a miracle, *“for in him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28).

Love in Jesus,

Rolland and Heidi

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