

“GOING DOWN ??”



Pastor Fohle Lygunda li-M Covenant Church of Congo (CEUM)

Like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17), many servants of God and many Christian churches in the world run the risk of confiscating their faith for themselves. They prefer to hold on to the glory of God and His blessings for themselves. At the peak of their blessings, they forget God's plan for the rest of the world and rush to build fortresses around themselves. God, on the other hand, wants them to go down so they do not lose that which they think they are holding on to! This testimony will show how God pushed me to “GO DOWN”. I have learned that “going down with God” is not a loss, but rather the only way towards the explosion of His eternal blessing.



My Christian Life

I was born to Christian parents from the eastern province of Kisangani in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After the independence of our country in 1960, my father was employed as the director of a large company belonging to Portuguese settlers. My parents lived in good comfort. In 1964, when I was only one year old, a rebellion broke out and my father was accused of being a spy for the white people. Arrested and beaten almost to death, he only held on to life through the miraculous intervention of God.

All that he had was either taken or destroyed! It was in this way that he fled with his entire family to the Equateur province, far from his home region, in the midst of people of other cultures. Not knowing what to do, he became a fisherman – a miserable occupation in the Congo, when contrasted with his former life of dignity and comfort.

It was in this cross-cultural context that I grew up. No one could have imagined that this was the will of the Lord for the achievement of the grand goal he had of saving people through my life. God took my parent's riches away and they were refugees in their own country. God brought them down from a position of comfort to one of suffering, only because He knew what He was going to do, through them, for eternity. In all these adversities, God spared me and allowed me to study. After my secondary studies (grades 7-12) I could only find work in a school belonging to Muslims. What a temptation I found there for my faith! I worked until the moment when the council of my church designated me to begin pastoral studies (1986-1989).

It is important to note that the verse, which led me to Jesus in 1979, was from Proverbs 11:30, "...and he who wins souls is wise." The preacher made the following commentary: "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom . . . and he who is wise, should win souls." At that moment, I was 16 years old. I studied philosophy, and learned of great sages who doubted the existence of God and spoke of the absurdity of life. When I thought of the situation of my parents, I was tempted to accept these ideologies. As if by providence, the evangelist used these examples to bring us to conversion. In that way, I understood that intelligence and riches without God are nothing but vanity and ruin for the soul. Nevertheless, I could not yet realize that this verse would also give me work, the work of saving souls.

Today, when I look back at the history of my life, I find that God has allowed all the circumstances of my life so that I may accomplish His will of winning souls for Him. It is often difficult for people to understand that the condition – poverty or riches – in which they find themselves is known and willed by God to accomplish His eternal designs. This does not become possible except when men and women look at things through the perspective of God.

How God Brought Me Down

In my ministry, God convinced me to "go down" in three steps, a long process – by preparation (1989-1999), by mobilization (1999 – 2001) and now in action (beginning in 2001). From one step to the next, God has simply taught me that, if I accept belonging to him, it must be for a global cause. This learning has greatly affected my vision for the church and for my Christian ministry in general.

Preparation

I became a Pastor in 1989. My vision of the ministry was very narrow, connected only to my CEUM church. I considered myself to be a Pastor *in the CEUM*, a servant of Christ *in and for* my denomination. This vision characterized my ministry until 1999, when, due to the civil war that ravaged our country, my family and I experienced the most somber moments of our lives. I held a significant administrative position in my denomination. Together with other leaders of the church, we were pursued by bands of armed men. We lived for six months in the middle of the forest in a condition of famine, without medical care, unsafe and afraid. It was in this context that I reflected much on my ministry, and I was led to write a book about partnership as an opportunity for our churches. The church is not just the CEUM, but also all Christian congregations who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We are called to work together for the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

Mobilization

With this new vision, I started to consider myself to be a pastor *in the CEUM* but also as a servant of Christ *for the world*. I no longer saw myself as a Pastor of the CEUM exclusively. I was forced to consider the work of Pastor in terms of a *facilitator* (Ephesians 4:11-13) with the role of encouraging all the people to participate in the mission of God. This vision has greatly changed things in my life and has given a new impulse to my ministry. The CEUM recognized this in making me responsible for the missionary program in 1999. It was the push I needed. This responsibility inaugurated a series of activities of mobilization for missions - trips abroad to participate in different meetings about missions, my seminars on missions that were organized for all the churches without discrimination, the creation of a mission school in the African context, and the training of missionaries on behalf of different churches, etc. Soon, we will hold a mission conference, August 17-23, 2002 at Gbadolite to mobilize at least 200 central African church leaders to be inspired for missionary project beyond the 10/40 window, which we call, "Project Ruth: The Harvest of the Gleanings."

Action

This third step is the greatest challenge for me. It began to explode starting with my visit to Kenya (January-February 2002). I was part of a CEUM delegation. We covered 980 kilometers in the interior of the country on a visit that led us to the Indian Ocean to a city, which has 42 Mosques! On this occasion, I learned that there were three unreached people groups (Boni, Pokomos and Sanye) living in marginal conditions, in the manner of the pygmies of central Africa. I said to the president of my church, "The harvest is large, we should pray that the Lord of the harvest should send workers." This observation overwhelmed me. As I continued to talk about it, I had this internal conviction from the Lord: "Fohle, who are these workers? Aren't they those who are interested in missions? One of these workers, it's you, Fohle!" I then realized that God wanted to introduce me to the third step - the one that passes from a theoretical knowledge of missions to a practical experience. With this vision, the Lord pushed me to "go down" even farther. Like Peter, I need partners like John and James to help the unreached people - the Pygmies (Congo), Zandé and Fulani (Central African Republic), and Boni, Pokomos and Sanye (Kenya) so they may benefit from the blessing of salvation. I bless the Lord for having picked me up and led me to His light, for having forgiven me, for making me one of His servants. It is a privilege for me to be a co-worker with God in His global mission of saving the people He created in His image. This is the reason for me to say with Isaiah, "Here am I, Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). I was fully ordained into the CEUM (Covenant Church of the Congo) on February 17, 2002.

God Wants US To Come Down

The great lesson that I take from my life, from my vocation and from my ministry is that God leads us to come down with him to rejoin the multitudes that find themselves in the valley of death. God raises us up to see His glory, but He asks us right away to come down with His transforming glory to those in the shadow of death. God blesses us so that we can become sources of blessing to others. Abraham is a good example. God had already told him, "I will bless you . . . and all nations will be blessed in you" (Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham knew moments "of highs" and moments of "lows." Today, "all believers are descendants of Abraham" (Galatians 3:29).

God is not limited by the events of our lives. He is not limited by what we are or by what we have. He is NOT limited by what we experience – good or bad. He wants to take advantage of all this to transform the world. He is dynamic in his approach. He can even short-circuit the process of our situation or of our logic. It is astonishing, sometimes deceptive, but it is willed by God. In the experience of Abraham, God pursued his objectives in taking advantage of Abraham's situation, in the context of Mesopotamian false worship from whence Abraham came (Genesis 11), in war (Genesis 14), in a condition of famine (Genesis 12), in the conflict within his own family between Sarah and Hagar, in God's direction to sacrifice his only son. Abraham was faithful. Isaac was saved. Today, millions of people give themselves to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, accepting His free gift of salvation. Meanwhile, three or four billion remain yet in darkness, in a miserable state. God "GOES DOWN" to be with them. He wants to use us to bring His glory down to any unreached people in our world so they may "RISE UP".

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CEUM, Gemena, Democratic Republic of Congo
Mail to: c/o B. P. 1377,
Bangui, Central African Republic
lfohle@yahoo.com