

Subject: Leadership in YWAM

It has fallen to me to report to you the way Jesus led us during our last Global Leadership Team gathering in Kona. You may have heard that we dropped the institutional titles used by Team 3. What's that all about?

Simply put, we rediscovered the value of the language and teaching of the Bible when it addresses how we are to organize our lives together. Last week I opened my Bible at Titus 1:5 - "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you." I saw again that it was not complicated. This is a basic principle that we are to imitate. Where do we start? There should at least be a good example of this principle among the leaders working with Loren and Darlene as they father and mother the family born to them over these fifty years.

The concept of eldership, as alluded to in Paul's letter to Titus, was of parental figures moved by a spirit of adoption rather than delegates who are governors exercising power within an institution. There are many institutions within YWAM, however YWAM as a whole transcends the dynamics of an institution.

You may think that's obvious but at times we need to re-emphasize a biblical paradigm. For instance, I was elected by secret ballot to be your president. The members of the Global Leadership Team in Nanning put names on little pieces of paper. They were counted, the results were discussed, the group confirmed the choice, and an appointment was made. Sounds like a mixture of electoral politics and godly deliberation, doesn't it? It served a purpose at the time, but none of us were really comfortable with the process as an example of the ways of God. What is a president anyway? The term is derived from 'presiding elder' within church government but that is not what it has come to mean today. It now usually describes the head of a regime that governs a nation-state. The terms chairman and director also derive modern meaning from the worlds of politics and business. Is this wrong? Not necessarily, but we must be careful. Words are powerful. Language shapes and perpetuates cultural perceptions and can influence our behavior. How important is biblical terminology?

The story of the Bible reveals the nature, character and personality of the persons of the Trinity and describes how they relate to one another in perfect harmony or oneness. It also reveals God's interaction with Abraham and his descendants, a dynastic family who, after many generations experienced the life and ministry of Jesus and the birth of the international Church. The Bible reveals how God governs within His Church. It says that the creator God is a king who is a father. All the metaphors of family are the primary descriptors of the Kingdom of God.

When that ballot was being counted in Nanning I was daydreaming and reading my Bible. I was reading the strange story of the Recabites in Jeremiah 35, a family who is singled out for unprecedented blessing because they honored and obeyed the wishes of their forefathers. I knew that God was speaking to me about my attitude towards Loren and Darlene and the foundational generation of YWAM. I sensed that God was wanting to cultivate a new level of gratitude and respect in my heart toward those who had gone before me and my generation. That's why a year later in Singapore, instead of giving an inaugural speech, I simply shared a multimedia put together to honor the life of Loren's dad, T.C. Cunningham. I wanted us to reflect on the Kingdom of God as an inheritance received through the labors of the families of many generations.

You see, in Nanning we made a covenant. We looked at it again in Kona a few weeks ago and realized that we have spent the last eight years moving towards its application. This is what we mean when you

hear Global Leadership Team members talk of realignment. Let's look at it again:

*Gathered under Almighty God in this great land of China we purpose to renew our commitment to the Lordship of Jesus to fulfill his call to YWAM to all nations and peoples of the world.*

*We call unto his Holy Spirit, through whom we can do all things for a renewed apostolic anointing.*

*We reaffirm our commitment to the words of the Lord that we call our Values, as well as his vision for YWAM of evangelism, training and mercy ministries.*

*We resolve with the Lord to follow him into the vision of Project 4K as our next challenge as a mission, and deeply desire his blessings for a new surge of apostolic pioneering.*

*We agree with his word to us to encourage the newest to the oldest YWAMers to seek to know and obey his voice in the freedom of the Spirit, and to release them into the fullness of the promises of God.*

*We joyfully submit our personal ministries and the corporate ministries we lead to the spiritual eldership of the GLT and the appropriate elderships at all levels under the GLT.*

*We choose afresh to be transparent and open in our relationships with each other, and to give fresh emphasis in our mission to God's Word as our compass and plumb line for daily living.*

*We renew our commitment to our responsibilities as elders to serve and encourage those under our care with love, as loving servants, respecting their dignity and value as his children, and giving godly coaching for them to be released to fulfill the fresh new words from the Lord.*

*We commit to serve our leaders by submitting major leadership appointments, new visions or changes of directions, policies and practices in the ministries we lead, supporting and encouraging a spiritual environment of trust, unity, love and peace within YWAM, that we may enjoy the complete fellowship God intends for us within our YWAM relationships.*

*Therefore, we declare to God this day to be available at all times and in all places to His call and purpose in this 21st century, to be all that we can be and do all that we can do to fulfill His Great Commission here and everywhere.*

For eight years we have asked Jesus for wisdom about our senior leadership body, the Global Leadership Team and the executive within it known as Team 3+. Unity has been more important than quick resolution, so we have moved slowly, listening to the input from each other. The major steps we took in Kona were done with the agreement of all. I'm not talking about everything we discussed, we had a full agenda. I'm talking about the emphasis on appointing biblical elders referred to in our Nanning Covenant above.

Team 3 did not resign and transition to successors; rather we proposed to the GLT that Loren and Darlene be given the responsibility of prayerfully appointing an initial group of elders. Start with a small group, model something we can see and then multiply what we have learned. The proposal was approved, with many details left to be resolved in due time.

Loren and Darlene received this responsibility and suggested that they start with the group they were already most familiar with, perhaps adding more later. In other words they proposed to set aside the seven people

we have called Team 3+ as a foundational prayer shield for the mission. In case you don't know who that is, it's Loren and Darlene Cunningham, Lynn Green, Iain Muir, John Dawson, Jim Stier and Tom Hallas.

All these people continue to have assignments. I was assigned to write you this letter, Lynn was assigned to organize a global leadership gathering, however the primary responsibility of this group is priestly rather than apostolic or prophetic.

The GLT as a whole also sees its purpose as primarily priestly. There are a few inescapable governmental, institutional operations and obligations that the Global Leadership Team has to address each year when they meet. The attendees must also represent some sort of connection to all the parts of the YWAM family worldwide, however the GLT no longer sees itself as a governing body of delegates. In fact they agreed to change their name to the "Global Forum" because it more accurately reflects the dynamics of a gathering of praying elders submitted to the Holy Spirit and to each other. They talked of "inviting the presence of God into the Mission" as their prime responsibility.

So what does this look like practically? The Global Leadership Forum will continue to meet to provide leadership for the mission. The global eldership group will meet alongside the Global Leadership Forum to support it but will also meet at other times and be present for global leadership gatherings and staff conferences.

We want the practice of gathered elders praying together to be modeled everywhere, but we want to set aside this initial group around Loren and Darlene. We want them to model something singular so that the term "elder" is never applied casually. It implies a high standard of love, unity, spiritual authority, anointing and the respect of the people who identify with our fifty-year family story.

Tom Hallas is with me as I write this. He suffered a mild heart attack after the GLT and tonight he returns on the long flight from Los Angeles to Sydney. This morning we sat in the winter sun and prayed for you. It began with God giving me Matthew 8 early this morning, a passage about the healing grace flowing from Jesus. I read it and claimed it and declared this story as a living word for Tom. We then got a text that Lynn was also suffering and we began to declare this same word over Lynn's heart, his family and his circumstances. There is deep love in evidence among us which has been revealed through the many trials our families have passed through recently and the way fellow "elders" have responded to each other. As we were praying for you, the whole family of Youth With a Mission, it was from this position of unity and love, with a heart of adoption toward you all. Tom turned to me and declared that he was experiencing new levels of spiritual authority as he declared the mind and purpose of God over all those associated with him from this position of united eldership in this new season in our life together.

So beloved coworkers with Jesus, take a look at the Nanning Covenant and see how it applies to you. May the blessing and grace of God be upon you this day. Love His people, live His Word and enjoy His presence. Join with us in this prayer:

"Faithful Jesus, thank you for Your patient, tender love shown to us for fifty years. Thank you for all that took place during our 44 Jubilee Celebrations in 2010. We love You more than ever. We give our future to You."

Thanks for listening, YWAM Family,

John with Tom