



Motivation for Africa
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Pemba, Mozambique
6 July 2007

Photo gallery: <http://www.irismin.org/july2007.htm>

A little over four years ago Heidi and I, along with Surpresa Sithole, our Mozambican international director, flew to Nairobi in our little Cessna for a leadership conference. On the way back we stopped in Pemba in Mozambique's far northern province of Cabo Delgado, and for the first time attempted ministry among a people considered unreached and unreachable by missiologists.

We took a short bus ride into town near the airport, stepped off, and found a group of fourteen or so young men standing nearby. Heidi immediately used her Portuguese to witness to them right there where they stood, and in a few minutes all fourteen were saved and wanted a pastor. On our next trip we got a small plot of land on a hill among a sea of huts, and built a Pemba-style church building out of reeds and stones. It was filled mostly by children, but pastored by our extremely fervent, Spirit-filled Pastor José, still one of our key leaders in Pemba. This last week Pastor José testified at our annual staff retreat that now we have over seven hundred Iris churches in Cabo Delgado Province, a figure we could not have imagined on that first trip.

Our four 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 in 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, ha, 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).

Leprosy and AIDS are being healed by God in our churches in DR Congo. Our missionaries in Sudan are being caught up to heaven in visions while stationed in a most dangerous environment. Our Bible school students in South Africa are seeing waves of healing blow through a hospital when doctors and nurses are absent on strike. The dead continue to be raised, and the blind and deaf continue to see and hear, causing whole villages to come to Jesus at a time. The poor and abandoned are fed and taken into families. And yet we press on to the best yet in Him, in faith all the way, as always! There is a massive amount of suffering still in Africa, but we can deal with it only as our motivation is steady, sure and secure, located in the unbreakable bond between us and our God and Savior.

We love and thank all of you who join us and support us as you yourselves continue to drink along with us from this inexhaustible well of motivation. May His richness and joy be yours beyond your wildest dreams as you comprehend more of His love for you each day. Continue to eat of Him and drink of Him to your heart's content until His will is done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Much, much love in Him, Rolland

From Heidi:

The cup of joy poured out to His Makua Bride

Jesus has mercifully allowed me to not only sip from the cup of suffering, but also to drink fully from His cup of joy. After the challenges of feeding 50,000 people a day, the flood relief, bombings and monster cyclones, Jesus has brought me joy unspeakable and full of glory this June. This month I loved cheering King Jesus on as He brilliantly shined His liquid glory love into the darkness of the unreached Makua tribe. Seeing village after village run to King Jesus makes me fall even more in love with Him. I love my life, and I love Him more than life! What a privilege to be alive when the harvest is so ripe and the Lord of the harvest is sending forth laborers (Matt. 9:36-40). We must lift up our eyes to see that the harvest is indeed ripe and ready (John 4).

In our missions school we have 170 international students loving and living among our beautiful Mozambican pastors. I believe that in heaven Jesus will have a Bride who is not only pure and spotless, but truly color-blind and without superficial divisions of gender, race, culture, socioeconomics and age. We are trying to model that one Bride in a community -- a village of joy -- here in my home of Pemba. Four years ago, when God sent me to leave my beloved children in the south and run into the darkness of the north in Cabo Delgado, there were only a few converts. Now, over 700 churches have been planted! I know God will give us the Makua Bride as my inheritance.

Recently friends and our beautiful Mozambican children loaded up our Land Rovers and charged off into the "bush bush." As Joanne was worshipping, Rebekah, a preacher at our Holy Given School, seemed to see straight into the spirit realm. It looked to her like the heavens broke open and angels flooded the place as a tornado of glory filled the village. I preached as Joanne worshipped. Rebekah saw that at that very moment whatever we asked for in Jesus' name was granted. So I asked for the Makua! I asked for the deaf to hear. I wrapped my arms around three deaf mutes and merciful Jesus opened their ears. Surely God is opening the ears of the Mozambicans to hear His good news! May we have ears to hear all that He is saying. The newly saved village started worshipping with Joanne and me as we sang in Makua. My calling is to be a worshipper before anything else. There in the darkness and dirt new brothers and sisters worshipped worthy Jesus. Sounds of newly created Makua praise filled this little mud hut village. The joy never ends. Last week Pastors Che and Sue Ahn, friends of mine with teams of Koreans, Americans and Mozambicans, young and old, again drove off into the bush bush. A young deaf man was brought to the meeting because people had told his family if they took him to us he would be able to hear. And he did!!! Demons were cast out of people who had previously turned their lives over to the power of darkness. The village offered to build me my very own mud hut! They told me I had to stay and live with them there.

Although I always bring my tent, they insisted I stay in their hut with them. So there I was with the new pastor's wife, the children and the family chickens -- and just to spice it up a bit a few rats joined us. I know God is calling me to be a mother to the Makua and also to this new missions movement. We are all called to stop and love the one before us until the whole world knows of His love. May He multiply our little lives laid down so an entire army can arise.

This seventh month of 2007 as Shara and I head off to Jerusalem, I am praying for perfection and the completion of all God's promises. May we see a generation give that which they cannot keep in order to gain that which they cannot lose. May you drink deeply of His cup of joy. May we all give the Lamb the just reward of His sufferings.

In love with Jesus, Heidi

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