

British Evangelist Treks Across United States Repenting for Slavery

Traveling by faith on a skimpy budget, Geoff Sadler has been visiting U.S. cities and seaports that were once part of the slave trade.

The Liverpool, England, native begs African Americans to forgive his city's role as the leading slave-ship port in the 18th century in hopes that genuine reconciliation will bring revival to his nation, theirs and Africa.

Sadler, 42, hatched the idea to repent for his hometown's past sins in the fall of 2003 after researching Liverpool's history of building slave ships as well as ships for the Confederate navy during the Civil War. "It shocked me," he said.

Wealthy merchants also bankrolled slave-snatching expeditions to the west coast of Africa from 1740 to 1808. The ships unloaded their grieving human cargoes in Southern ports. John Newton, the reformed slave-ship captain who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace," sailed from Liverpool.

Sadler came to Christ at a Billy Graham crusade in Liverpool in 1984. He quit his job as a carpet installer and attended Roffey Place Bible School. He joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and worked in England, the former Soviet Union and the United States. While working for YWAM Slavic Ministries in Oregon in 2003, he sensed God calling him to apologize to black people.

"God started speaking to me about being involved in reaching

out to African people both here and abroad, and also being involved in reconciliation and repentance issues concerning Liverpool's involvement in the slave trade," he said.

During a Sunday worship service in Albany, Ore., in November, he approached a black churchgoer saying: "This may sound weird but I'm from Liverpool, England, and we were heavily involved in the slave trade in the 1700s. I want to ask for forgiveness and will you pray with me."

The man didn't act surprised about Sadler's offbeat plea and prayed with him. Several weeks later Sadler connected with black people on the street. Hesitant at first, he gained confidence that he was doing God's will and won over skeptics with his self-effacing demeanor. Then the Holy Spirit prompted him, "Go to places where Liverpool ships docked."

In January he landed on the East Coast sharing his vision one-on-one with hundreds of African Americans. He visited the site of the main slave market in Richmond, Va., where he prayed publicly and witnessed to passers-by. However, one man challenged, "Oh yeah, we forgive you, but where's the money?" When Sadler pulled the last \$5 bill from his wallet, the young man refused it, but showed him an article about reparations.

Watching Sadler praying by the Mississippi River in New Orleans, two black men questioned what he was doing. When he revealed his mission their eyes moistened. "We wish there were more people like you doing this," they said.

In Annapolis, Md., he knelt in a historic pub and restaurant, attracting the attention of kitchen workers. One of them accepted his forgiveness while another one said, "How

are you going to make it up to us?"

In Atlanta Sadler spoke to street people loitering near a subway station. "I felt God moving in their hearts," he said. "Some people became tearful. There was sadness in their eyes."

Sadler addressed members of Messiah's World Outreach, an independent African American charismatic church in Scottdale, Ga., a suburb of Atlanta. The congregation embraced his message and was impressed that someone would travel from England to repent for the sins of his forefathers.

"This gentleman is one of the few voices acknowledging that," said the church's pastor, Donn C. Thomas. "Rather than reopening wounds, it's an opportunity to heal wounds that have never been closed. It's an attempt by God to bring significant healing to the generation that is living today. Who knows, it could start a revival in reconciliation."

Sadler will join a church in Georgia soon. In October he will participate in a YWAM initiative visiting former U.S. slave markets and ports. They will walk in shackles and chains as a symbolic sign of apology for the slave trade.

Sadler sees all of his efforts aimed ultimately at revival in Liverpool. "I feel this is the purpose God has prepared for me," he said. "This is my calling now. I see reconciliation and repentance as a foundation for revival in the United States, Liverpool and Africa."

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