

Delaware evangelist uses videos to train overseas ministers

Gary Whetstone started training missionaries by video 16 years ago—when a VCR cost about \$2,000

Long before there was a Blockbuster on almost every corner, God spoke to Gary Whetstone about how videos could change the world. While traveling in Indonesia in 1984 Whetstone received a prophecy saying that if he would return to Delaware to pastor a church, the Lord would send 1,000 missionaries around the world through this church.

As a result of those words, Whetstone launched Bible training courses on what was an emerging medium at the time—videotapes.

“This came about when there were no video stores, and a video recording machine cost somewhere around \$2,000,” he said. “[God] told me we would cover the earth with Bible training, developing the leadership of the body of Christ.”

Heeding the words, Whetstone returned to Delaware and began Victory Christian Fellowship Church. “We began in August 1984 with only three people,” the pastor said. “Not everyone was enthusiastic about going forward with the video Bible training because of the lack of video stores.” In 1985 Whetstone began the Bible school, teaching courses “live.” Two years later he had made major progress in the Bible school.

“We finally were able to use television equipment and videotaped the school,” Whetstone said. “We had 50 students in

school, and that was our first effort that we put onto the tapes, which we sold around the world. Video Bible schools were placed in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Ireland, Scotland, England, America and Canada.”

The schools did relatively well, despite the less than perfect quality of the videotapes. “During our first attempts to make the videotapes, we did not have professional equipment. We used the old three-quarter-inch tape and duplicated it into VHS format.”

Some of the people in the countries he visited stayed with him in order to make copies of the videotapes.

“There were no high-speed duplicating machines for us to use,” he said. “So people spent many hours duplicating tape after tape. A lot of patience was involved in the process.”

In 1990 he realized that the quality was very poor and that he needed to make improvements so that more people could benefit from the tapes.

“I taped the training sessions again, this time using more sophisticated equipment. We felt that the material was adequate and strong, and we had placed over 150 schools around the globe,” he said.

A change began to occur in the ministry when Whetstone realized one day that the attitudes of some of his students were not Christlike.

“I asked God what the problem was, and He said that if you

don't like the fruit, the problem is in the root," Whetstone said.

As a result, he re-examined the focus of the training materials, which included 540 hours of video instruction. Believing God was instructing him to reduce his activity level, Whetstone spent the next two years fasting and praying.

"I needed to evaluate the effectiveness and the thrust of the Bible schools on a global basis and identify whether I was willing to make the sacrifice to produce the highest quality schools and to place every outline in a study guide," he said.

Whetstone then embraced the decision to move forward and increase the number of hours he and others devoted to making the Bible schools more successful. "I spent many hours on this project making sure everything would be perfect," he said.

He hired a professional television staff to assist in making the new videotapes. He also produced 32 study guides, each of which are about 200 pages. Within the next year he aggressively started planting new Bible schools in other countries, including Cambodia, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Philippines, India, China, Turkey, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and dozens of others.

Whetstone says he will continue to reach everyone who needs training. "God's concern for the spiritual development of His church surpasses the effort of man," he said. "The greatest passion in the Word of God is that you live what you are taught. Your life becomes a light of the experience of the Word, and then you can transfer that experience to others."