

Loren Cunningham Reshaped the Glorious Field of World Missions

On Friday (Oct. 6), when I heard that Loren Cunningham had gone home to be with Jesus that morning, I instantly thought of how he had reshaped the face of world missions. I also flashed back to the day he had helped reshape my life.

The year was 1985 or 1986—I do not remember for sure. But I do recall sitting next to Loren at a church conference and what he told me. His words were prophetic and exactly what I needed to hear at a pivotal point in my life and ministry.

At the time, I was pastor of a local Foursquare church, but had been struggling with a growing call to make myself available to international ministry and the development of young leaders. A change in direction would mean leaving a secure position and taking a big step of faith. Loren knew nothing of my quandary. Yet as certainly has happened thousands of times over the years, Loren heard from God and spoke specifically into someone's life—that time it was my life.

Loren reached over, put his arm around me and said, "Dan, I believe God has called you to the world and I want to be part of releasing you to your prophetic call."

That was all the confirmation I needed. In the ensuing years I moved into a global ministry with the Foursquare denomination. I was never on staff with Youth With a Mission—the organization Loren founded and for many years led. But I did have the privilege of teaching at numerous YWAM discipleship training and leadership schools around the world, and counseling many missionaries.

With this back story, I offer here my tribute to Loren Cunningham:

Loren believed that the Great Commission—to go to every nation, tribe, community, to every person with the message of Jesus was for every believer, not just a specially-trained clergy class or individuals with special gifting. Just prior to his 21st birthday, while he was looking at a world map on the wall, this vision suddenly seemed to come alive.

As he tells the story, he saw wave after wave crashing on the shore of every continent then receding before another wave came until the entire earth was covered. In the waves he saw the faces of young men and woman taking the message of Jesus to every nation. That vision became the catalyst that birthed YWAM in the early 1960s.

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Today YWAM has bases or outreach work in more than 2,000 locations spread out in almost 200 nations. In more than half a century, millions of men and woman have attended discipleship training schools and even more have been involved in outreaches around the world. It has been said that YWAM has become the largest mission sending organization in the world. And as one who has ministered around the globe, I do not doubt that.

Loren was an amazing man with a heart after God and a huge love for people. He was always far more interested in championing others than promoting himself—as I discovered firsthand. He was a man of great spiritual authority, but moved with amazing humility and grace.

Loren was a man of integrity, always approachable with a great sense of humor. Anytime I was privileged to be with him or even hear him speak I felt valued and cared for and always

challenged to become everything I could be.

Loren had a way of inspiring a can-do spirit. He knew nothing is too hard for God, and that is the way he lived his life. His answer to difficult situations was “expand your vision.” He believed in young men and woman and invested his life in them. Even at 88 years of age, he embodied what youth with a mission is about. I guess in the light of eternity, 88 is just the beginning!

When I think of Loren I’m reminded of what God can do through one person who is totally yielded to Him. Loren’s passion was to humbly be that person and inspire others to join him. His message to a new generation is loud and clear: Let’s go for it! And as we respond in obedience, watch what God can do.
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