

To the Ends of the Earth

Fifty years ago a brave band of American missionaries ventured into the jungles of Ecuador to begin the difficult process of evangelizing the isolated Waodani tribe.

The five men didn't get very far. Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming and Roger Youderian were killed by the natives before they could build the first chapel or start the first Bible study.

When news of the tragedy spread in January 1956, the mission to the Waodanis seemed to be a miserable failure. Yet it soon became clear that these men did not die in vain. The witness of Elliot and his team eventually resulted in hundreds of conversions. The amazing story of sacrifice and redemption in a remote South American rain forest-a story now immortalized in the film *End of the Spear*-has inspired Christians around the world to make world evangelism a passion and a priority.

I'm praying that the film will reignite fresh missionary zeal in the American church, which has lost the kind of radical courage that leads people to forfeit money and careers in order to win souls in a hostile environment.

I wonder what happened to this missionary spirit? Many of us are so focused on claiming our financial harvest or overcoming our personal problems that we forget there are entire countries in the world that still haven't heard about Jesus. In our comfortable world of megachurches and claim-your-instant-promise conferences, the idea of braving insects, bad food, sickness and the threat of death is considered weird and

old-fashioned.

Some of us have either become too sophisticated to pay that kind of price or too lukewarm to believe that God requires it. We've forgotten that the gospel makes demands on us. We've forgotten that the Christian life is not just about blessings and personal breakthroughs but also about being willing to face impossible obstacles in order to take the gospel to the world.

I'm afraid that we have replaced raw missionary zeal with a happy-clappy, seeker-sensitive message of self-empowerment. Our shallowness has made us weak and irrelevant in a time when the church desperately needs more heroes like Jim Elliot.

I know those heroes are out there. I often meet them overseas—in places such as Egypt, Nigeria or China—any country where Christians have swallowed their fears and become willing to suffer when necessary.

I met one of these heroes in Indonesia in January. He is less than 5 feet tall, but he could be considered a spiritual giant. His name is Pastor Lucky, and he lives in Papua, the easternmost region of this huge island nation. Missiologists know Papua has one of the highest concentrations of unreached tribes in the world.

I met Pastor Lucky during a conference in Jakarta. After hearing me speak he slipped a wrinkled, handwritten note into my hand. It said in imperfect English: "Plese pray for Papua." It listed 14 isolated people groups who live in the jungles of his province.

Most of these tribes live in trees and do not wear clothes.

All of them are violent and cannibalistic. They don't have a written language and have no access to the Bible. They have no technology. But they do have Pastor Lucky.

I was drawn to this man partly because his short stature and slight frame made me feel an urge to protect him. He explained to me that he had an accident when he was 11 months old that left him crippled. Lucky's father rejected his son because of his physical impairment and even tried to strangle him when he was 9.

"I grew up very timid, feeling unworthy and useless," Lucky told me through a translator. But because of his mother's prayers, he became a Christian at age 12. Today, at age 32, he pastors a church in Papua. But his ultimate goal is to penetrate the jungle.

As Lucky told me of his plans to reach these hostile tribes, I couldn't help but think of those Christian martyrs who died in 1956. I wondered if Pastor Lucky might join them. And I wondered if many of us would be willing to pay a similar price.

Not all of us are called to dangerous jungles. But Jesus told all of us to go. If the word "go" is not in your gospel, I dare you to ask God to give you the heart of a missionary adventurer.

You may be surprised where that prayer may take you.

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