

CLUES TO THE AMAZING STORY OF THE CHURCH IN NEPAL

ROD DENTON

The church in Nepal has grown from a handful of people in 1990 to around 1million today (out of a population of 27million).

The following are some clues to the amazing story of this country that resembles to me the New Testament Church.

1. CONTEXTUAL SITUATION

Great revivals usually occur within certain contextual situations. The following are some of the more common ones:-

- a. PERSECUTION: Many pastors experienced persecution from their families after becoming Christians. One pastor told me how at the age of 14 he began walking 12 kilometers to his nearest church to hear about Jesus Christ. Following his conversion at the same age, he was asked to leave home. He found a place to sleep in the factory where he began to work.
- b. HARDSHIP: Nepali pastors are not afraid to pay a great price for their calling and are introduced to such a lifestyle by the life of hardship they have to endure from a young age. One pastor who called me on a telephone this week walked 3 hours from his village to a market place to locate a phone. His wife who is about to have a baby will need to walk to the village a few weeks before the birth of her baby to be near to medical facilities.

A Nepali pastor is paid on average US\$60 a month. Average age at death is 53 (I was considered old).

- c. NATIONAL INSECURITY: Nepal people are living in a time of great change and uncertainty. In a local paper I read – “It’s hard to be optimistic in these gloomy times. Kathmandu Valley is smothered under piles of garbage, rumours are rife about 20 hour daily lode-shedding (electricity cuts), taps have long gone dry, transportation strikes are the norm and more alarmingly, the state of insecurity is worsening by the day Nepalis are understandably insecure ... People want to belong to something, some bigger entity they can identify with.

With 40% unemployment and a new constitution being drafted, these times of insecurity have provided great opportunities for the revival of Christianity. Nepali Pastors need to be like the men of Issachar and understand the times and know what to do.” Could it be that these are “the worst of times and the best of times”. (Tale of Two Cities, Dickens).

In many ways the country is delicately balanced and its future seems to be most uncertain. The robust and courageous church is well placed to see God sovereignly use a situation that is bad in many ways to bring something that is good to this nation.

2. PRAYER AND FASTING

Great revivals are usually born in climates of prayer and fasting. Many Nepali pastors fast and pray and Nepali churches give priority to prayer meetings. One pastor told me how his church has a prayer meeting each day of the week from 4.30am to 6.00am. Prayer walking by prayer teams of unreached villages occurs prior to evangelistic outreaches in these villages.

3. CHURCH PLANTING

Church planting is a way of life for pastors in Nepal. I heard of various stories of Nepali pastors who walked through jungles to remote villages to preach the gospel and plant churches. The result has been an amazing story of church growth where Christians now total 4% of the country.

One pastor who went to Bible College and then began a program of door to door evangelism shared his goals with me:-

- to plant 100 churches in every corner of Nepal by the end of 2020.
- to organize 10 pastor's conferences by the year 2015.
- to send 20 native missionaries to unreached areas of Nepal.
- to conduct 10 short term (one month) disciple training programs in village churches in order to train local leaders.
- to add another 50 orphan children to our orphanages by 2012.
- to reach one million unreached people with the gospel of Jesus.

The Asian Access leaders in Nepal (S and S) are now reaching out to over 160 churches in their own network.

4. LEADERSHIP (PASTOR) DEVELOPMENT

The development of pastors is based on great commission values. The training is practical and requires each leader in one mainstream network to plant 3 churches before they graduate. Many informal leadership programs are developed and an apprenticeship model of training seems to be widely used.

5. UNITY

There appears to be a strong sense of unity between churches and not such a strong emphasis on denominations. Churches are united around the dominant vision of reaching Nepal for Christ and much energy is spent on this major focus. They major on the majors and minor on the minors.

6. SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Nepal is a country of people who are very much aware of a spiritual world. Christians don't have to battle the spirit of secularism and materialism that we live with in the west.

I suspect that "power encounters" and spiritual warfare would be a normal part of the experience of Nepali evangelism.

7. SOCIAL CONCERN

Most pastors I talked with had social concern programs running parallel to their evangelism programs. Orphanages for children were a special part of the mission program in a number of Nepali churches and many children that came to Christ in those homes were continuing on to train up and serve as pastors.

8. FAITH INSPIRED MINISTRY

Pastors are forced to live by faith with the result that God is given much room in which to move. They simply don't have the finances and resources needed for the task before them. They get to see what God can do with their resources as they live and walk by faith. Most churches in the west only get to see what they can do with their resources, and rarely need to exercise extreme faith.

9. GREAT COMMISSION VALUES

The life and growth of the church in Nepal is built on Great Commission Values. They realize that they exist for the extension of God's kingdom, not for their own comfort. They are a young church and as yet don't seem to be bound by the traditions of the past. They haven't been able to accumulate a lot of "stuff", they have to rent buildings, so they are mobile, outward looking, people oriented.

10. YOUTH AND CHILDREN

The churches I saw had a high proportion of youth and (especially) children who participated with enthusiasm in the worship services. The background of poverty may draw a high proportion of youth and children to Nepali churches and their hunger for life in all its fullness makes them most responsive to the gospel.

ANNEXURE A

Questions asked of baptismal candidates in some of the churches in Nepal:

1. Are you willing to be expelled from your home and community because of your faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Are you willing to give up your family inheritance because of your faith in Jesus Christ?
3. Are you willing to give up your job because of your faith in Jesus Christ?
4. Are you willing to be persecuted and sent to prison because of your faith in Jesus Christ?
5. Are you willing to pay tithes and offerings to honor God regularly?
6. Are you willing to go back to your village to preach the Gospel?
7. Are you willing to die for Jesus Christ?

If a baptismal candidate agrees to these questions, then they are asked –

8. Do you willingly give consent to be baptized?

ANNEXURE B

From a missionary who traveled to visit Pastors in various villages:

I cannot adequately communicate the poverty and living conditions of the people we met. D... has a church of 400 people with 8 daughter churches. He lives in a very small 3 room cement building. His daughters sleep in the kitchen. However they do not complain and probably do not even think they are poor.

We visited another Pastor who literally lives alone the animals. His hut is next door to the buildings for the chickens and pigs. His wife was sick when we were there and without medicine or any kind of medical care.

The town D... lives in has about 50,000 people and about 200 churches in the area. One reason the Gospel is spreading so fast is their zeal to share the Gospel. They have very little materially, but are very bold to share Christ with others. The church takes mission trips regularly to areas that have never heard the Gospel. They go out weekly to share with non-believers in their city. They are even burdened to share the Gospel in other countries.