

Faithfulness to God's Call can touch the World

By Glenn and Jeanine Boyd, music missionaries to East Africa

The first assignment for nearly any missionary is to learn the new language and become familiar with the culture of the people he is going to be working with. After **Jeanine** and I and our two young daughters arrived at the airport in Nairobi, Kenya, East Africa, we were met by fellow missionaries, given breakfast and whisked to our small apartment at Brackenhurst, a conference center twenty miles northwest of Nairobi. We were to live there for the next seven months. We immersed ourselves into learning African culture and Kiswahili, the national language of Kenya and Tanzania.

One afternoon I was practicing the use of Kiswahili out in the nearby village of Tigoni when I was able to visit with an old man who told me this: "If you are using music to help people know about the Bible and what it says, remember this-- If an African is not singing it, he does not know it." He believed this, whatever the subject might be.

After seven months we had finished the formal culture and language study and moved into our first work assignment. We lived on the compound of the Baptist Seminary of East Africa at Arusha, Tanzania, located at the foot of Mount Meru, about fifty miles west of Mount Kilimanjaro--a most beautiful and picturesque spot in which to live. Jeanine and I taught various music courses there at the seminary, including voice, conducting, music theory and choir. The choir was one of my great joys. They loved to sing and particularly loved to learn new songs.

One day after I had finished a rehearsal of our seminary choir, the thought came back to me of what the old man had told me months before: "If an African is not singing it, he does not know it." I did not hear anyone singing John 3:16, so the thought came to me, maybe they didn't know it. Immediately I thought of a very musical student whose name was **Eliud Fungameza**. I invited him to come to my office; I had something I wanted to ask him. I asked him if he could sing for me John 3:16. He said to give him a few days. Sure enough, in a few days he came to me and said, "I'm ready to sing that song for you". The next day I had him introduce the song to the seminary choir, and it took off like the wind.

We started singing this simple song at the school and in the churches in the area, and as the students returned to their home villages at periodic break times they would share the song with their own people. I think it important to remember that in their culture, they love repetition. The song translates by verses, followed by the repetition of the scripture in the chorus:

1. The love of God is awesome, because (chorus) God loved the world so much that He gave His Son, that we might not be lost.
2. If you read John chapter three, verse sixteen, you will read (chorus) God loved the world so much that He gave His Son,...
3. All who believe in Him will have wholeness because (chorus) God loved the world so much...
4. Hey, Brother, believe in Jesus and receive wholeness because (chorus) God loved the world so much...

A few weeks later, after the song was introduced at the seminary, I was asked to teach music in a neighboring Bible school. I spent some time every day for a week with the students in that school, and one of the songs I taught them was the song, John 3:16 in Swahili.

Just a few weeks after teaching in that Bible school, during our month of break time from classes I was invited to help with a choir festival in a very remote village on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. The invitation came from one of our missionary doctors who served the people up and down Lake Tanganyika. The lake is located clear across the country of Tanzania in the far western edge, between Tanzania and the Congo. We were blessed to have the use of a four-wheel-drive Landrover. Traveling through the Serengeti plains, it took us two twelve-hour days over very rough and sometimes washed out roads, to arrive in Kigoma, which is on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, but north of the village where we were going. The day after we arrived in Kigoma we traveled six hours south by outboard motor to the small village where we had the festival.

On the fourth day after leaving our home near Arusha, we were in this small mud church building for the festival. The church building had a small door and two small windows--no light inside, making it, even in the day time, very dark--so dark that the choir members' faces were difficult to see. The first choir to participate in the festival stood and sang "John 3: 16" for its first selection. I was shocked and overcome because I knew we did not have any students from that village, so how did they know this song? Where did they get the song? They sang all the verses in four-part harmony. Needless to say, it was a very emotional experience for me, and still is today.

After they finished singing, I asked them where they got the song. A young man on the back row of the choir spoke up and said, "You probably don't remember me, but I am a student in the Bible school near Arusha where you taught me this song. I arrived home last night and taught the song to the choir." It had taken this young man six days of travel to reach his home village from Arusha--four days by public transportation and two days down the lake by boat. They probably had stayed up most of the night preparing to sing for the festival. Not unusual, because they were so excited to learn a new song. Remember what the old man said when I was visiting with him while still in language school, "If they aren't singing it they don't know it, because they have a song for everything they know."

I was reminded that being faithful to our calling is one of the most important aspects of the work. **If we are faithful, God will take our efforts and magnify and extend them to the corners of the earth.**

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