

Expanding the Borders of Education and Training

You may have heard the analogy of the island of knowledge and the sea of ignorance. It goes like this: “We live on an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance.” In other words, the more we learn, the more we become aware of how much we don’t know. It’s an honest acknowledgment of our limitations and the vastness of God’s creation. The thought is credited to John A. Wheeler, a physicist who worked with Einstein. The more he learned, the more questions came up. Has this ever happened when you taught a new convert a Bible study?

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33, New King James Version). Our human efforts at uncovering wisdom and knowledge are feeble. In the end, people joke, “An expert is one who knows more and more about less and less until he knows everything about nothing.”

None of us can ever learn enough or know enough to be ready for every ministry challenge and opportunity. Despite our limitations, God enables us all to sharpen our sickles and be more profitable servants in the field. As saints of God and as ministers of the gospel, it is our responsibility and privilege “to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18, NKJV). Around the world, our missionaries are educating and training believers for the harvest.

William Turner recently traveled with **Mark Shutes** and **Ray Nicholls** to the central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan. As a result of a ministerial seminar they taught, twelve leaders were baptized in Jesus’ name, six of whom were pastors. Brother Turner wrote, “One young pastor, whom I baptized that week in Jesus’ name, was so inspired by Bro. Shutes’ teaching on how to pray for the sick that he went one evening to the home of a woman whose arm was paralyzed from a stroke and prayed for her in Jesus’ name. The Lord instantly healed her!” One couple, who gave up their university educations and careers to pastor in a small village for a handful of people, had become frustrated in their ministry for many years. This training seminar restored their hope and enthusiasm for their calling.

The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV). Study is certainly involved in this diligence of a Christian worker who correctly handles Scripture. Whether formal or informal, through scholarship or mentoring, God can use the Pauls and Peters of our generation to do His work effectively.

I’m very happy to report to you that as of 2011, throughout the 195 nations of the world where the United Pentecostal Church International is operating, we have 4,773 students studying in 222 Bible schools. Additionally, 36,377 people were trained in 471 seminars last year, and 1,605 students studied through correspondence. God is helping us to train and educate great numbers of men and women for apostolic ministry. From the 1,722 students who graduated from overseas Bible schools last year has come a fresh army of laborers in the harvest.

Part of our mission statement for Global Missions is to “train messengers.” As we endeavor to fulfill that part of our mandate, a healthy humility about our limitations helps keep us useful to God. None of the New Testament heroes just received training or education as an end to itself. They took what they learned and put it to use in the field. No matter how much the Lord teaches us in practical and spiritual matters, we all strive to keep our focus fixed on the purpose of it all: the seeking and saving of a lost world. That balance of study and action is what keeps our ministry effective and fruitful.

Ken and Ginny Cantrell recently illustrated this balance: “The church in Burkina Faso is aggressively sending the gospel to the north of the country. We have just purchased our first piece of property in Kaya. Pastor John Bapste Nabaloum has begun construction of the church...and will begin services in the city following his Bible school graduation in April.” **Richard and Pamela Smoak** in Tanzania recently pointed out, “Bible school training is essential to establishing a strong ministry and vital, growing apostolic church.”

I’m confident that the investment of seminar training and Bible college education will continue to produce great fruit. If you’ve never tried it, consider sponsoring an overseas Bible college student this year or help provide resources for training. Investing in training and education in Global Missions is investing in gathering the harvest. As you expand your own island of knowledge for use in the work of the Lord locally, know that your brothers and sisters of like precious faith around the world are doing the same, all for the glory of God.