



Director's Update

LAWRENCE TONG



The dangers of entitlement

We should see our calling to serve in missions as a privilege, not a right. The God of the Universe, all supreme and powerful, considers us—broken and sinful, yet forgiven—as, through His Son, worthy to serve Him. This is an awesome privilege. Those of us who have been around for a long time must diligently guard against a sense of entitlement that can creep into our thinking. It is a destructive mindset that will lead to toxic behaviour. Deal with it: We are not the centre of the Universe.

As followers of Jesus, we are showered with blessings, purpose, significance, and gifts based not on our merit but on the character of the giver: God Himself (Eph. 1:3, NIV). Yet, over time, we can presume that we have merited these blessings. Such an attitude dishonours God and devalues our own character. Living with a sense of entitlement is common today, but it is odious to the Lord. If anything, experiencing His bounty should result in deep humility and, frankly, surprise: "Imagine: God has blessed me!"

All of us in OM have volunteered to serve; God owes us no favours for our service or leadership. Looking at myself, I might see God's sense of humour. But He makes no mistakes in whom He equips for different roles. God has specific tasks for me to do; when they are completed, He will call someone else to lead and I will look for other ways to contribute.

Our personal relationship with Jesus is one of master and servant/slave. Jesus points out, "Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (Luke 17: 9-10, NIV) That is seldom preached or modelled today. It's not up to

us to determine the limits or parameters of how we serve. I once invited an OM leader to speak to a team; he responded that he only speaks to a minimum of 500 people! This was how he exercised stewardship of his time and supported his ministry strategy. He probably could have been more effective to speak with five people, but his sense of entitlement warped his metrics.

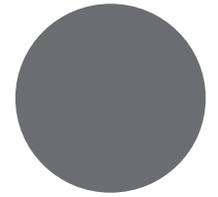
A better blessing

We have not consciously affirmed our people enough in OM – in part because we have had a self-effacing culture. Often, we showed affirmation through promotion, which was unwise because it placed people in roles they weren't suited for. Getting past that dark hurt of feeling unnoticed is possible. Eliminating a sense of entitlement through gratitude to Christ will lead to greater contentment and peace. Once I accepted that positions should come to me instead of seeking them, as I continued to serve, joy returned to my daily life. No one owes me anything.

Paul says that we have been appointed as Christ's ambassadors: a role with dignity, authority, and gravity (2 Cor. 5:16–21), "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4). We represent the kingdom of heaven on earth (John 18:36), and it is our responsibility to reflect the official position of heaven. Our role as ambassadors of Christ is to take the message of our King to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), imploring men and women everywhere to be reconciled to God. Being a child of God brings us the ultimate entitlement as we await Christ's return. In the meantime, keep Christ first, for He knows our every thought, word, and deed. You cannot please everyone, but you can please one, and He is Christ.

The way I see it

BY IAIN



*no photo due to security

Integral mission

In May of 2011 I was meeting with the leadership team of OM Near East. We were discussing the situation in the area – which was clearly heading towards all-out civil war – and we agreed quite clearly that we were not going to get involved in relief work. We had teams in the region with strong discipling relationships with some local believers, and we were working on training and equipping – and working alongside – some of those believers in church planting initiatives. Getting involved in relief would be a distraction from that, and besides, previous experience reminded us big relief efforts can become never-ending and all consuming. We just weren't going to get involved.

Within a year we were running a large relief project serving both locals and those in the neighbouring countries.

Why this dramatic change in our thinking and actions? Well, we had good relationships with a number of local believers and churches, and the biggest thing happening in their lives was the war. They had to respond to the needs around them. Could we have really said, 'we'll help with discipleship training, but about the biggest thing happening in your life right now, we won't get involved'? What kind of gospel would we have been proclaiming or demonstrating? So, we got involved, working in partnership with local believers and churches who had a passion for their community and for the communities around them.

Being different

We sought to work together with certain distinctives, however. In the Near East you help your own people: Sunni help Sunni, Shi'ite help Shi'ite, Catholics help Catholics, Evangelicals help Evangelicals. We were set on being different, because the gospel is different.

Together we designed relief projects with different distinctives, and we wanted to be truly holistic. As we designed and regularly reviewed the projects, we asked a number of questions: Are we providing relief where it is most needed? Are the projects being run with transparency? Is access to relief being provided according to need and regardless of religious affiliation or spiritual openness? Are our projects providing opportunities for local, Christian-background believers to engage with people of other religious backgrounds? Do people have the opportunity to hear the gospel – in its fullest sense – through our projects? Do those that are spiritually open

have an opportunity to join a Bible study (or some other follow-up possibility) which could potentially lead to them being part of a new community of believers?

There were many other questions we asked. We felt that if the project design and implementation was not integrated in this way, our work would not be holistic, and it would not be a demonstration and proclamation of the gospel. That the assistance was given according to need and regardless of someone's spiritual openness, and that there was a clear pathway between the project and potentially vibrant local fellowships of Jesus followers was fundamental. In fact, if that were not the case, we believed that we would be doing a disservice to those we were seeking to serve and to the gospel itself.

Where we see VCJF

I am really encouraged that we as OM are increasingly wrestling with what 'integral' or 'holistic' ministry means in the light of our mission statement. I think it is a bit of an untold and unknown story in OM that where we are seeing VCJF fruit, the context is often a holistic approach. I believe this is true in the majority of the cases. That may include development projects in Central Asia, sports coaching and self-help groups in Africa, relief projects in Europe and the Near East, or simple community engagement in a whole range of other ways – and there are often many advantages in simple community engagement over big projects.

We need to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel and live it out vibrantly in our own lives among least-reached peoples and communities. Our prayer is that the new communities of Jesus followers that emerge will themselves be a witness to the transforming power of the gospel, making a tangible and sustainable difference in their societies.

Author's bio: I first went with OM to the Middle East as an 18-year-old. I have since spent most of my adult years in the MENA region, as has my wife. I presently serve as the Associate International Director for Field Ministries and with the changes happening in our organisation, it is an exciting (and daunting) time to be involved in this kind of leadership. We have a daughter who enjoys opportunities to correct my Arabic.

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