

The accidental Tentmakers from Canada to Asia

We lost our bikes!

Arriving into the humid heat of Asia after a long 14 hour flight with a 2 & 3 year old, was not a good time to be told by customs that our USA made Cannondale bicycles would need an import duty of US\$1000 each! Indeed, we had wondered if it was even a good idea to bring them with us in the first place. Perhaps this was God's way to show us they would not be needed. On the trip from the airport to our new home, it also became evident that the traffic was not for the faint of heart.

Little did we know that God was already setting the stage for tentmaking ministry. A few days later we received a call from the airport about the bicycles. After explaining yet again that we did not have that kind of money, the man on the phone said our bikes would be arriving the next day at the international school where my wife was teaching. "Now you must do something for me", said the man on the phone. Surprise, surprise thought I.

Forced into teaching ESL!

Our original plan had been for me to be a Mr. Mom while my wife taught at the international school. Looking for a job was not supposed to be a part of that plan. "I have done you a great favour, now you must come and teach in my English school for airline staff"
"How can I since our home is hours away from the capital city?" said I.
"No problem as my school is in your city", said the man.
"But I have to stay home with the children during the day" said I.
"No problem, I want you to teach only in the evenings" said the man.

The bikes arrived as promised, and now it was my turn to fulfill my promise. Thus I, a former flight attendant began teaching evening classes for future airline staff. I felt right at home and my students were eager to learn English from a Canadian flight attendant. From my experiences back home also came the expertise to draft a training manual for the school, much appreciated by the owner.

The church that met in our home

Soon many of my students began visiting us, mostly out of curiosity and for a chance to practice their English. We cautiously asked them if they would like to visit regularly to learn about the Bible as well, and so a Bible study group was born. Our home became a hangout for our many new friends. Cooking meals together, going on scooter rides to the nearby mountains, singing praise songs with the Karaoke machine (glorified boom box), studying the Scriptures, answering the myriad of questions by our friends became the modus operandi of our God given tentmaker ministry: "The church that met in our home"
Having been told by senior missionaries that it would take years for someone to convert, our expectations were low but we were having fun with our new friends.

God was to surprise us once again as within a few months some of our friends were indeed accepting Jesus as Saviour.

Eventually a few of our friends moved to other cities and started Bible studies of their own.

One student went on to Bible school in the USA and the last we heard was that she was planning on going to Tibet as a missionary.

Update 10 years later...

A few days into the new year, we received an email from the one least likely to make it in her new faith. She excitedly shared her story of having started a number of Bible study groups and just before Christmas having led 30 members of her bible study group to the Lord at one time! Another told us about having attended Bible school in the US and now preparing to go as tentmaker to the Arab world. God is continuing to work through the small group we left behind, and indeed we rejoice in humility over the souls being saved.

What we learned

After our two years came to an end, we could reflect on God's incredible leading in our lives and identify what worked for us. These are not rules to "tentmake" by, just what worked for us. God is infinitely creative in using our specific personalities, characteristics and talents for His glory.

- Practice hospitality! Do not think your home must be spotless, but do make it available for guests.
- Invite everyone who stops to talk to you in everyday life to your home. Everyone will not come, but pray that the ones who do are real seekers.
- Hand out an outline of the Bible study with room for notes that your friends can take home with them for further study.
- Sing lots of songs, get a Karaoke machine if you have to.
- Share not only your faith but also your life, your family, your persona.
- Be there for your friends, make time for them.
- Ask & pray for real prayer requests making room for God's miracles in everyday life.
- Have books and tapes available for lending. (Our bookshelf was very intriguing to our friends.)
- When out in the community, make friends with people in the market, the bank, the police station, the post office etc.
- Interruptions to your schedule and busyness could actually be God moments. Learn from them.
- People love to have an opportunity to practice their English skills, let them!
- Spend special holidays with your friends, invite them to spend your holidays with you! Explain why you celebrate these days.
- Your passion, God's glory! - bring your hobby, sporting activity, handcrafts, musical instruments etc.

What about the bikes?

Well, there was a young man who had pedaled hard to catch up with me one night as I was coming home from teaching a class. When he did it was to comment on my bike and to ask where I was from. He invited me to join him in a Saturday ride to the countryside. During this ride we stopped by a thousand-year-old tree to study Scripture. He accepted the Lord a few weeks later.

Frequently as we were stopped at traffic lights people beside us on their scooters would start chatting, and many a time this led to our invitation to come to the church that met in our home. Would that have happened if we had been inside the cool comfort of an airconditioned car with tinted windows? We were also able to use our bikes for frequent outings along the quiet rice paddy field roads.

What is the moral of the story?

God can use your passions, in our case cycling, as a platform for His work. When we are doing what we love, we are also being truest to what God has made us. Nothing is less exciting than a Christian who does not have a passion for anything in life and thus they seldom attract seekers. What is your passion? Have you ever thought that God could use it for his Glory?

May this outline serve as a guide to your tentmaker ministry:

INTENT – as you go...make disciples

INTEGRITY – do your work in such a way that it demands an explanation of your faith

INTEGRATE – learn to integrate work and ministry seeing “work as ministry”

The book *Accidental Tentmakers* is coming out soon. Watch for it.