

LEGACY WORDS

YWAM'S FOUR LEGACY WORDS

(September 2020)

I found myself facing a dilemma in 2015. Loren was turning 80 at the end of June and I knew that YWAMers around the world would want to celebrate this milestone – but Loren would NOT! It's not that he was in denial about getting older, but he would not want to be the center of attention. He would much prefer to let the occasion slip by with just a family party and an ice cream cone!

Fortunately our good friend David Hamilton knows Loren's heart well, and he understood the dilemma. So he came up with a creative plan: in September of 2015, approximately 1,300 staff and leaders from 72 nations converged on Townsville, Australia for YWAM Together. As a birthday gift, at the end of the event, we honored Loren by reflecting on four key, directional words from the Lord that he brought to Youth With A Mission throughout our history. They came to be known as the "Four Legacy Words."

Each Legacy Word was presented to Loren in story form, recalling how God gave the word, in front of the whole congregation, complete with fanfare and related gifts. The time ended with a mammoth birthday cake, carried in on the shoulders of six Pacific Island "warriors." It was shaped like a Bible, representing the fourth legacy word, End Bible Poverty Now. The whole process was filled with joy and laughter, alongside awe-filled ponderings of the magnitude of the words God had given both to YWAM and to the body of Christ through Loren. Thus, he was able to fully enjoy and enter into his "party," focusing on Jesus and His words to us!

- Darlene Cunningham

LEGACY WORD #1: The Vision of the Waves – 1956

YWAM'S FOUNDATIONAL COVENANT It was June of 1956. Loren Cunningham was in the Bahamas with four other young men to evangelize and gather young people together using their musical gifts. On a Wednesday at 3 PM, a few days before his twenty-first birthday, he was kneeling by the bed in the simply furnished guest room of his missionary host. He was asking the Lord about the message he was to speak that evening. Then, as he looked up at the white walls, something unexpected happened.

He says, "Suddenly I was looking at a map of the world, only the map was alive and moving! I could see all the continents, and waves were crashing onto their shores. Each wave went onto a continent, then receded, then came up further until it covered the continent completely. The waves become young people – kids my age and even younger – covering all the continents of the globe. They were talking to people on street corners and outside bars. They were going from house to house and preaching the Gospel. They came from everywhere and went everywhere, caring for people. Then just as suddenly as it had come the scene was gone." (Excerpt from *Is That Really You, God?* by Loren Cunningham with Janice Rogers, YWAM Publishing.)

God had spoken to Loren through this vision of the waves. This remarkable initiative by God to share his dream with Loren would lead to the launch of Youth With A Mission four years later. Within a generation millions of young people would have their lives touched by God because of this vision of the waves.

We are some of those young people. Our lives have been changed because of how God met Loren that day in the Bahamas. As we reflect back on that event, we realize that that moment had significant parallels to other moments throughout history; moments when God stepped in to share His heart and His purposes for the world. Indeed we have come to realize that this vision, this unexpected encounter, was a God-initiated, destiny-defining, foundational covenant that God gave Loren in order to birth a new missions movement.

What should that movement look like? What were the major elements of this covenantal vision?

First of all, it was about youth. This was both a concrete reality and it can also serve as a metaphor for something more. Concretely, if we ever move away from championing young people we have moved away from the call of God upon us as the YWAM tribe. Metaphorically, this is the language of missional de-regulation and innovation. Young people were not considered candidates for missions in the mid-twentieth century. It was simply not something that was done when Loren saw this vision. And so it is today that this covenantal vision continues to call us to do what is not being done by others in the church. It calls us to lead out apostolically to birth fresh, entrepreneurial initiatives in the Spirit in order to accomplish Great Commission goals. It calls us to a lifestyle of viral pioneering, co-creating with God, doing and encouraging others to do new things in new ways.

Secondly, it was about all and every. The waves of young people covered every nation in all the continents. It is about being global, comprehensive, inclusive. If we ever lose sight of the alls and the everys we have lost sight of God's vision for us as a movement. This is not limited only to the geographic alls. It also includes every thematic all, as we move redemptively into all the spheres, all the languages, and all the other various categories of human life and experience. As we do so, this covenant compels us to growth. It is about recurring and ever expanding waves. This speaks of multi-generational re-iterations of the vision that expand in fractal-like multiplication. Each wave builds on that which has gone before. Each one makes fresh impact in new ways, reaching heights not previously achieved. It's never static. It's always dynamic, focused on going where we are not.

LEGACY WORD #2: The Spheres of Influence – 1975

The legacy word about engaging with the seven influential spheres of society came through hearing God's voice, as this important story relates.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REVELATION

The phone call was received by the ranger's station in the Colorado Rockies as the Cunninghams were enjoying a family vacation. Would Loren and Darlene join Bill and Vonette Bright – founders of Campus Crusade – for dinner later that week? Loren eagerly accepted the invitation, eager to share with his friend the fresh insight God had given him. He had been asking God for understanding on how to see a nation discipled and God had just spoken to him about seven influential spheres of society that shape the worldview, beliefs and values of a culture. This was a breakthrough insight! He thought, "If we could simply teach the principles and practices of God's kingdom in each of these seven arenas then we could see the transformation of our communities and nations"

As they met for dinner, Loren had this new understanding scrawled on a yellow sheet from a legal pad tucked inside his jacket. After shaking Bill's hand he was reaching for the paper in his pocket when Bill blurted out, "Loren, you won't believe what God has just shown me. If we are going to see our nations changed, we have to impact seven different spheres of society" Initially deflated that Bill had beat him to the punch, Loren was soon encouraged by the fact that God was confirming through his friend the word that he had received from God only a few days earlier.

Within a month after that encounter in the summer of 1975, Darlene heard Francis Schaeffer – founder of L'Abri – speaking on the radio. He too spoke of how we could see nations changed by shaping seven different areas of society with Biblical truth. God certainly had their attention. He was clearly saying something which had great implications for Great Commission strategies.

A couple of years later, based on this new understanding, the Cunninghams together with their dear friend, Howard Malmstadt, would launch the University of the Nations. It would be a new kind of Christian university,

designed to be a multiplier for missions in a digital, globalized age, eventually equipping young men and women from over 200 different countries in the ways of God. The goal of this new kind of live-learn training? To bring transformational change to nations by intentionally applying kingdom principles in each of the seven spheres of influence!

THE SEVEN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE Once you read the last chapter of a well-crafted mystery novel, all of the clues – which previously may have eluded you, the reader – fall into place, revealing an unmistakable pattern that leads to the solution of the mystery. It's all so obvious once the great detective explains the compelling evidence. Then when you re-read the novel, all that which was once obscure becomes amazingly clear. In a similar way, an understanding of the framework of the seven spheres of influence allows us to be able to re-read the text of the Scriptures and grasp essential, God-inspired concepts, which we might have easily glossed over without first being aware of this framework. But once we see the pattern, we see it not just here or there, but everywhere through Scripture. It becomes apparent to the student of the Word that God has been concerned with the discipling of nations throughout all of human history.

A MESSAGE FOR THIS GENERATION The time is now ripe for this message. Even though several variations of the theme have emerged in recent years – some with 7, others with 8 or even 12 spheres – the foundational principle is the same: God created individuals (Genesis 1:26-27) and loves them, wanting to redeem them from brokenness and sin. In the same way God created nations (Acts 17:26-27) and loves them, and wants to bring kingdom transformation into every dimension of their societal interactions. So whether you call this reality a “sphere” a “mind-molder” or a “mountain” – it points to a God who cares for both individual and corporate humanity. This same God sent prophets of old to speak the word of God at times to individuals (a king, a general, a widow) and at times to corporate expressions of humanity (a tribe, a city, a nation). God has a heart for lost individuals and lost nations and invites us to collaborate with him to bring a transformative impact of the kingdom of God into every area of life, both private and public.

These seven spheres exist in every society from the most primitive stone-age tribes to the most sophisticated megacities. They include the areas of family, economy, government, religion, education, media, and celebration. The seven

spheres are to every society what the basic biological systems are to the human body – an intrinsic part of God’s design, which give life when they are functioning in a healthy manner. Since God is the designer of these spheres, it would be good for us to dedicate effort to understand his purposes for each of them.

No part of the human experience is to be lived outside of the bounds of God’s kingdom. We are to do all that we do coram deo – intentionally living our lives in the presence of God. This is because Jesus is and intends to be Lord of all dimensions of our life, both private and public. Therefore, let us pray that God will teach us how to rightly represent Him in all of these different arenas of society. May these new understandings help us all discover how we can faithfully walk in God’s purposes for every societal sphere of influence.

LEGACY WORD #3: The Christian Magna Carta – Loren Cunningham 1981

It was late in 1981 when YWAM leaders from around the world gathered in Kona, Hawaii, for the First International Strategy Conference. YWAM was 21 years old and there was a sense that we had “come of age.” There was great anticipation for what the Lord would say and how He would lead us.

As the leaders gathered for their initial meeting they had a profound time of worship. When that time drew to a close, Loren said, “Our goal is not to pursue our own agenda, but to hear from God. Before we do anything else, let us each seek God alone. Ask Him what He wants to tell us and then we will come back and share that with one another.” Everyone dispersed to listen to God individually. As soon as Loren was alone, he sensed God began to speak to him. He reports, “I wrote as fast as I could on what I understood to be the Christian Magna Carta.”

Now, the original Magna Carta is a famous historical document composed in England in the year 1215. It is one of the first political documents that details basic human rights. In a similar way, the Christian Magna Carta details the Gospel rights that every human being has. It expresses all that which is implied in the Great Commission, as seen through the eyes of all those who should benefit from the Good News of the kingdom. What can those who do not yet know Jesus expect from Jesus followers? The six points lead to a compelling, holistic answer that echoes both the actions and the words of Jesus, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Mat 25:40).

The Christian Magna Carta Loren Cunningham - 1981

Everyone on earth has the right to:

1. Hear and understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
2. Have a Bible available in his/her own language,
3. Have a Christian fellowship available nearby, to be able to meet for fellowship regularly each week, and to have Biblical teaching and worship with others in the body of Christ,

4. Have a Biblical Christian education available for their children,
5. Have the basic necessities of life: food, water, clothing, shelter, and health care,
6. Lead a productive life of fulfillment spiritually, mentally, socially, emotionally, and physically.

We commit ourselves, by God's grace, to fulfill this covenant and to live for His glory.

Committed to by YWAM international leadership 1981.

LEGACY WORD #4: End Bible Poverty – 1967

The fourth Legacy Word was passionately embraced in the early years of Youth With A Mission as young people went about sharing the Good News of Jesus. In 1967 Loren was leading one group of young people on an outreach. He tells us,

“I was with a YWAM convoy traveling through Mexico to Central America. We had stopped in a dusty Mexican town to repair a flat tire. While some worked on that, the rest of us delivered a Gospel of John to every home, then held an open-air preaching service.

After our meeting a woman in a faded red dress came up to me. My Spanish wasn't very good, but I understood her to say, 'There's no place in my town to get a Bible, and there aren't any in the towns around here. Do you have a Bible in my language?'

I managed to find a Spanish Bible for her. She grasped it to her chest. '¡Muchísimas gracias, señor!'

As we drove away, the woman's question continued to haunt me. 'Do you have a Bible in my language?' Then, a picture suddenly came before my eyes – I believe it was what the Bible calls a 'vision.' I saw a big truck – not a semi, but more like a large moving van. Painted on the side was, 'Sólo los deshonestos temen la verdad. Santa Biblia, gratis.'

I didn't know Spanish well enough to think in the language, so seeing these sentences was a complete surprise. I translated them slowly in my mind. They meant, 'Only the dishonest fear the truth. Free Bibles.' What an exciting thought! The phrase 'Only the dishonest fear the truth' was completely new to me, and it rang in my mind. It was especially pertinent at the time, as communists were spreading their cause across Latin America.

As the vision continued, I saw young people standing in the back of the truck handing Bibles into eager hands as fast as they could." (Excerpt from *The Book That Transforms Nations*, Loren Cunningham, (2007, YWAM Publishing) pp 184-185.

The vision starting to become reality as those young people distributed 50,000 New Testaments to university students in Mexico that summer. That encounter with the woman in the faded red dress eventually led to the launching of “Bibles for Mexico,” which in turn birthed many Bible distribution projects in dozens of countries all around the world.

Then at the UofN Workshop in Singapore in 2003, Loren issued a compelling challenge to the mission which he had received from the Lord. This was a time when YWAM recognized that there had been mission drift in our midst and we were intentionally realigning with our Godgiven DNA in order to see a new wave of apostolic initiatives around the world. Loren said, “I urge you to put a Bible in every home in the world by 2020. The Bible needs to be in their heart language and available in a means which they can easily understand.” As Loren turned 85 years old in 2020, this cry of Loren’s heart is like that of Caleb when he too was 85, “Give me this mountain” (Jos 14:12). This challenge to end Bible poverty gripped the hearts of many.

In late 2014 Loren, together with Darlene and several other YWAM leaders, visited key Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and Evangelical leaders around the world, urging them to do all they could to help end Bible poverty. There was great unity of purpose around this theme among these influential leaders. As a result, “The Covenant to End Bible Poverty” was written, calling on Christians everywhere to pray, translate, publish, distribute, educate and motivate people for Bible engagement.

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“YWAM’s Four Legacy Words.”