

MURSI

Reaching the Unreached of Ethiopia



Howie Shute

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PREFACE

The stories in this book will challenge you to be involved in missions both at home and abroad. It is my hope that the reader's commitment to making disciples will be deeper and stronger as a result of reading them. All of us need to focus on leading our families to Jesus Christ, along with our neighbors, our communities, and even those who live thousands of miles away. God can use each of us!

To allow the Mursi [MUHR-see] story to have maximum impact on your life, I have provided questions at the end of each chapter for your personal study and reflection ("Act On It"). Read the chapter then consider the "Act On It" points before proceeding to the next chapter.

As I wrote this book, I prayed for you. As I submitted the manuscript to the publisher, I asked God to do new and fresh things in the lives of every person who reads this book. It is my prayer that God will lead you to become a soul winner and a multiplier of Jesus-followers.

INTRODUCTION

Developing a Context for the Story

My wife, Bev, and I arrived in Ethiopia in December 1997, serving as global missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene for the next 15 years. For the first 11 years, we served as the mission leaders for the Horn of Africa. In our final years as missionaries, we served out of the Africa Regional Office in Johannesburg, South Africa. During that time, Bev served as the regional personnel coordinator, and I was the assistant to the regional director. The context of this book, however, concerns our leadership assignment in the Horn.¹

The Horn of Africa is an amazing mosaic of a multitude of diverse cultures and languages. There are more than 600 languages spoken in the Horn, and all of them represent people groups² with distinct cultures. From a mission

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- 1 The Horn is an abbreviated way to designate the northeast region of Africa, known as the Horn of Africa, which consisted of the countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, and several Creative Access Areas. A Creative Access Area (CAA) designates an area where it is not safe to publicize our team members' work.
 - 2 A "people group" is a group of people who share a common identity and characteristics (for example, language, common customs, rules, and practices that help define who they are).

perspective, reaching these people groups with the gospel requires a different strategy for each group. So, reaching the people of a country demands more than one strategy to reach the country, and often this means that different strategies must be developed for each people group within a country. You can see how complex mission becomes when considering the task of reaching the 600 people groups in the Horn.

Ethiopia has 90 people groups within its borders. This means that each of the 90 groups potentially could require a different strategy when the gospel is taken to Ethiopia. The Mursi is one of those groups.

Many of the people in Ethiopia belong to unreached people groups, groups without an indigenous, self-propagating Christian church movement. Any ethnic group without enough Christians to evangelize the rest of the nation is an “unreached people group.” This book tells the story of reaching the Mursi people, who are by very definition an unreached people group. In fact, when we began our mission to the Mursi we did not know of one single indigenous believer in the tribal group.

My leadership role in the Horn of Africa was to coordinate and direct the mission for our denomination to the six countries of the Horn and to make disciples of all 600 people groups in this exciting, complicated, and sometimes dangerous area of the continent of Africa. I served initially as the mission coordinator of the Horn and later as the field strategy coordinator (FSC) for the countries when they became a field of their own. An FSC coordinates all missionary

personnel, mission finances, compassionate ministry, church planting, church development, and resource utilization. This person has the goal of emphasizing the responsibility of developing and implementing strategy to reach all people groups living within the boundaries of the field and to develop strong churches, producing Christ-like disciples of all of these people groups.

I saw some amazing things during our 11 years in the Horn of Africa. An explosion of churches and new believers took place that could only be identified as a Movement of God. Lives were transformed, and miracles took place daily. A mission leader could not ask for more! Right? The problem was that where the church was expanding the most was in people groups that had already been reached. I was glad for a multitude of new believers coming into the Church daily and for new churches being added to the districts in phenomenal numbers. However, as long as there were people groups still unreached, there was a longing in my heart to take the gospel where it had still not gone.

And so the weight of reaching the Mursi fell heavy on my shoulders. My heart longed to reach these lost people. Their culture and language was so different from all of the other people groups in the Horn that it would take a unique strategy and a real movement of God to reach them. This book tells the story of how God gave us a strategy to reach the Mursi and how He used us to take the gospel to them.



CHAPTER 1

A Journey to the Unknown—1999

“*Ayzo* [IE-zoh]!” cried the young Ethiopian, riding on the passenger side of my Toyota Land Cruiser. It was Getahun’s [geh-TAH-hoon] way to say, “Keep your head up!” It was a warning. I was about to make hamburger out of a cow claiming rights to the center of the road in front of me. This was not unusual; driving the roads in Ethiopia in the 1990s was a challenging event.

We had left the capital city of Addis Ababa [ah-DEES AH-bah-bah] early that morning on a journey to the far southwest corner of Ethiopia. The first part of the day, we drove along the side of the road going south to Awassa [ah-WAH-sah]. It was a paved road, but the asphalt was so broken up that we discovered it was faster and more comfortable to drive in the fields alongside the road. It was a relief to leave that “road” behind us in the Oromo [oh-ROH-moh] people’s town of Shashamane [shah-shah-MAH-ne] and make our way toward the Wolaita [woh-LIE-tah] people’s town of Sodo [SOH-doh].

After a quick lunch of injera¹ [in-JE-rah] and tibs² [TIBS] at the Bekele Mola [BE-ke-lah MOH-lah] Hotel, we were on our way to the city of Arba Minch [AHR-bah MINCH] in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region of Ethiopia. In just one day, we were traveling through a number of tribal areas with tremendous cultural diversity and spoken languages.

It is easy to quickly become mesmerized by the beautiful landscape, the friendly faces of the people, and the drone of the heavy duty tires beating against the hundreds of kilometers of roads. I was in one of those mesmerized states when Getahun yelled out his “Ayzo” warning. I had been dodging cows, goats, sheep, and chickens all day long—to say nothing of the myriad of donkeys, which absolutely refused to give up any part of the ground they were standing on. (Even though these domesticated animals denied it, it was my road, not theirs.) Getahun’s warning came through just in time...I swerved away from the stubborn cow refusing to give ground to my oncoming Land Cruiser.

As much as the many farm animals that occupy this stretch of road are in love with it, the people are even more infatuated with the road. You will find men, women, and sometimes even children in the road as they drive their animals to market. In fact, on market days, road travel slows remarkably in Ethiopia. Even on non-market days,

1 Injera is the Ethiopian staple eaten at every meal. It’s a pancake-like bread used to pick up other foods, instead of using silverware. The bread is eaten along with the variety of Ethiopian foods upon it.

2 Tibs is a dish of small pieces of fried meat that is placed on top of the injera.

the rural people of Ethiopia will gather on the road to catch up on the prior night's activities and to discuss news from the big cities.

Ethiopia's population is highly diverse with 90 ethnic groups. Their cultures vary from one people to another, and they speak in a multitude of languages and dialects. I fell in love with the Ethiopian people from the very beginning of our time as missionaries there. They are a beautiful people with warm and loving hearts. I still consider meeting the people of Ethiopia as one of my highest privileges in life.

The purpose of this journey was to meet one of those tribal groups for the very first time. I had heard about the Mursi Tribe when reading the *National Geographic* magazine prior to our arrival in Ethiopia. An article in the magazine caught my attention when I came across some amazing photos of the Mursi women. The photos showed the women wearing huge, highly decorated lip plates. The article explained the custom.

Mursi women cut away the lower lip from the jaw, leaving it attached only on the sides of their mouths. A simple wooden peg is inserted into the incision, holding the lower lip away from the mouth. The young girl's mother (or another female relative) performs the homespun surgical procedure that usually takes place before a girl's marriage (as early as 14 years of age). The young girl continues to insert progressively larger wooden plugs into her lower lip during the coming months and years, eventually replacing the plugs with decorative plates. The lip plate is a sign of female

strength and beauty. Some have said that *the larger the plate, the more beautiful the woman*.

It was a three-day over-the-road journey to get to the area where the Mursi lived. We spent the night in Arba Minch before departing early in the morning to a sometimes-hazardous journey through the South Omo [OH-moh] area of Ethiopia. The road wound through a multitude of dry riverbeds, taking us to the town of Jinka [JEEN-kah], the last town of any size in the southwest corner of Ethiopia. The desert-like terrain was deceptive—rain in the mountains usually went unnoticed by travelers in the desert below. One moment the riverbed was dusty and dry, and moments later a flash flood rushed through, carrying any



This young Mursi woman allowed me to take her picture on one of my encounters with the Mursi people. It was seeing a photo such as this that piqued my interest to visit this amazing people.

unsuspecting vehicles away with it. More than one Land Cruiser and its occupants fell victim to the flash floods in the South Omo Valley. We prayed as we motored on that we would not be in that number.

After a long day of dodging potholes, people and animals, and a second lonely day of hot desert travel, we arrived in Jinka. After a welcomed night's rest at the Orit [OH-rit] Hotel, we continued travel into one of the most remote areas of Ethiopia. Our journey took us through the Mago [MAH-goh] National Park, which was primarily savanna with forested areas here and there along the rivers. A variety of wildlife roamed the national reserve that extended over a 2,000-square-kilometer (772-square-mile) area of remote bush country. We had seen a variety of antelope and zebra along the way. Topi [TOH-pee], hartebeest [HAR-tuh-beest], and kudu [KOO-doo] would runaway from our vehicle as we proceeded deeper into the homeland of so many tribal groups. The Aari [AH-ree], Banna [BAHN-nah], Bongoso [bohn-GOH-soh], Hamar [HA-muhr], Karo [KE-roh], Kwegu [KWE-goo], Male [MAH-le], and Mursi peoples all lived in this region.

Wildlife can often be evasive in this region of the country. You may not see them, but they are there. Buffalo, giraffe, and elephant can sometimes be seen. It's the lion and the leopard that you hope not to see, especially when you are changing flat tires that occur frequently on such journeys. The remote peoples of this region of Ethiopia live openly among these roaming man-eaters.

As our journey continued, we knew that finding the Mursi would not be an easy task. The Mursi are nomadic people. They dwell where their crops will fare best. If one area experiences draught, they seek another area that may have received rainfall. Their primary crop is maize (corn). They eat maize as their primary vegetable. They also feed their cattle maize to strengthen their herd when grass and hay are in short supply.

Cows are extremely important to the Mursi people. They provide meat and milk for their meager diet. Their cows also provide the blood for their customary drink of milk and blood mixture. They tap a vein in the cow's neck to draw blood for this purpose. They take only enough blood that will leave the cow still healthy and strong. If you want to build a relationship with this people, drinking their blood and milk mixture is sometimes necessary. I hoped that I wouldn't get that close to these people on my first trip into their homeland.

Act On It

- What actions are you taking to make contact with people in your community, neighbors, or family members who have not yet been reached with the gospel?
- How can you develop meaningful relationships with the people mentioned in the previous question?
- Many people have heard the gospel but have not really understood it. How can you make the gospel better understood to those around you who are either ignorant or misinformed about the good news that we have in Jesus?
- What steps have you taken to receive training in sharing your faith?
- Many people are held back from being a witness to their relationship with Christ through embarrassment, inconvenience, or fear. If you are one of these, pray now that the Holy Spirit will give you confidence to share your faith.
- Ninety percent of Evangelical Christians never share their faith in their lifetime. With whom will you share your faith this month?



CHAPTER 2

The First Encounter—1999—Three Days Later

Eventually we came upon a mission station where an American couple, serving with SIM (Society for International Missionaries), was trying to make inroads to the Mursi people. SIM had been active in teaching and curriculum development, health care, agriculture programs, water development, and animal husbandry. The wife was at home, and I asked if she could assist us in finding the Mursi that day. She pointed toward a trail that led into a forested area and told us that there was a group of Mursi who were presently living some kilometers off in that direction. So at this point, the journey would continue on foot.

Knowing that leaving an unguarded vehicle in such a remote area would be foolish, so I had to find someone who would take on the responsibility of guard while Getahun and I continued our journey. Just then, a Mursi man walked by with an AK-47 strapped to his shoulder. Since we did not know his language (Mursi), we had to communicate through body language. We were convinced of our success

when the Mursi warrior climbed to the top of my Land Cruiser and sat there on the roof, clutching his automatic rifle in his arms.

We walked through the forest for about an hour, following the well-worn trail. Surely, we thought, if we stay on this path, it will lead us to the Mursi. Traveling in the wild on foot might have been routine for the remote tribes in the area, but it could be a dangerous activity for a couple of newcomers. While Ethiopia was Getahun's home country, he was a resident of the capital city. He had never been in such a wild and remote area. We had not forgotten that lions, leopards, and hyenas lived in the area, plus there was often warfare between the tribes because of poached cattle (probably why the Mursi guard was carrying the AK-47). Our confidence was not in any physical weapon as we trudged through the bush, seeking contact with a Mursi village. Our confidence was placed fully in the God who pushed us toward contact with a tribe that was still basically unreached by the gospel. SIM had begun a relationship with the Mursi, but as yet the Mursi people had not put their faith in Jesus Christ. (We did not know it at the time, but they had led one young Mursi man to the Lord. I will speak more of him later.)

Suddenly the path led us out of the forest and into arid savanna. A makeshift village lay just ahead. We saw women and children scrambling from the fields back into the village. The women ran to their temporary shelters to prepare themselves for unexpected company. As they ran toward their huts, we noticed their naked lower lips hanging down below their chins. When we next saw them emerging from

their huts, they were wearing the decorative clay plates inserted into their previously sagging lips. We discovered that the women do not wear the lip plates when they eat, work, and play. But when company comes, they insert the lip plates much like other women put on jewelry when they dress up.

Getahun was not so much a spectacle as was I. They had seen Ethiopians from other tribes before, but rarely had they seen white men walking into their village. They did not appear to be afraid of us at all, but why should they be? Almost every one of them, men and women alike, were carrying AK-47s; and here we were, walking into their village like we were going to a Sunday School picnic.

Their homes were nothing but lean-tos constructed out of maize stalks. I could



The children from a remote tribe were very interested in seeing me. Rarely did they encounter white men in their village. Although we did not speak their language, we had some precious minutes trying to communicate through gestures and facial expressions.

see that their fields were almost picked clean of maize ears; the stalks in the fields were few and far between since they used them as construction materials. In later trips to the Mursi, I discovered that maize stalks were only used to construct their homes in temporary villages near harvesting fields. In their more permanent villages, they built traditional mud and thatch huts.

I noticed that they became very agitated when I brought my camera out. I remembered that the Hamar tribe, who neighbored the Mursi people, would not allow their photos to be taken for any reason. They believed that a photo would capture their soul, making the soul a prisoner to the one taking the photo. Actually, you would put yourself in danger just having a camera in the vicinity of the Hamar. Once a friend of mine took a photo of a cow's skull that was hanging on a fence surrounding a Hamar man's field. All of a sudden, a Hamar warrior came running toward us waving his club in the air. We jumped into my Land Cruiser and drove away just before the enraged man reached us. We barely escaped his retribution that day. I discovered later that they hang the skulls of dead animals on their fences because they believe this will make the fields fertile. They also believe that the one who takes a photo of the skull will rob the fertility blessing from them and take it away with their photo.

It took me some time to realize that photos were okay with the Mursi, as long as they were compensated appropriately. I could see that they were not going to allow me to take their photos without some kind of payment. Apparently

this clan of Mursi had encountered tourists who paid them for allowing their photos to be taken. I became pretty adept at taking photos with my camera hanging down at my waist, shooting from the hip. Some of these photos were complete failures; but with practice, others came out as if taken by a professional.

Our time with the Mursi on this trip was brief. Since hand gestures were our only form of communication, little could be accomplished in our first meeting with these very unique people. As we headed back to our vehicle on foot, I began to pray and plan for another meeting with the Mursi.

On our arrival back at the vehicle, we found the guard still perched on top of the Land Cruiser, weapon at the ready with a very menacing look on his face. Now it was time to pay up; he had completed his duty. He waited patiently on top of my vehicle, while I searched my pocket for some Ethiopian birr [BUHR], their currency.

In the capital city, one birr was adequate for a young boy to guard your vehicle, if you were leaving it parked on the street for an hour or two. Out here in the bush, one birr would be an overpayment, or at least that was what I thought.

I handed the one birr note up to the Mursi guard; and with scorn on his face, he refused the money. He sat there defiantly. What could I do? He held the weapon. I doubled the offering; again, his head moved from left to right and back again. So with great confidence that a five note would settle the score, I extended it to him with a smile on my face. I could not believe it! He wouldn't even take a five-birr

note. Now I was beginning to get tired of this whole affair. I held high a ten for him to take; shaking his head again in defiance, he stubbornly refused to take my generous wage.

At this point, I became so frustrated that I told Getahun to get this man off my roof. I refused to be taken advantage of in this way, even if he did have an automatic weapon in hand. Somehow the man understood my displeasure and that I was refusing to pay him more. He bounded off the roof of my Land Cruiser and ran down the path-like road on which we would drive out. I saw him disappear into the brush just off to one side of that road. His AK-47 was still with him, of course. I realized that this was the only road out of the area and that this angry warrior would be lying in wait. As Shakespeare wrote, "Discretion is the better part of valor." I was either going to pay more or risk automatic gunfire peppering my vehicle as I drove out of this location.

Getahun did not look very happy when I asked him to go and bring the man back, but he understood our dilemma maybe better than I did. He returned a short time later with the not-so-friendly Mursi guard. I reached in my pocket and gave him a hundred birr. A big smile broke out on his face, and all was forgiven. The equivalent value of that 100-birr note was about 14 US dollars. Although that was not a budget breaker for me, it was a good week's wage for the average Ethiopian worker living in the city, even more for a bush dweller.

It was time to return to Addis Ababa. We filled our gas tank by siphoning gasoline from cans we carried on the roof

rack of my vehicle. Because fuel is not always for sale in remote locations, we never drove away from a fuel source without having sufficient fuel to return to that same fuel supply. At the time, fuel was being rationed because of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. So for long distances into remote areas of Ethiopia (like this one), we carried additional fuel to get us back where fuel would again be available.

After refueling, we began the long journey home. Three days to return to my own bed, if we drove most of the day each day. It also meant that we would need to avoid flash floods, flat tires, and mechanical breakdowns on our return trip to arrive on schedule. Such was the life on journeys through rural Ethiopia.

For three days, we rumbled along in a vehicle that had, on numerous occasions, taken me successfully through many challenging trips across my adopted homeland. We talked less on the way back to Addis than we did on the way to the Mursi.

I'm not sure about Getahun; as for me, I could not get my thoughts off the Mursi. They fall into the religious category of Africa Traditional Religions (ATR). ATR tribal groups are very difficult to reach because they are animists. Since animism makes no separation between the spiritual and physical world, plants, animals and even the rocks, trees, and rivers all have souls. This leads animistic people to seeing many gods in the creation. The Mursi and other animistic peoples know nothing of the one Living Creator God. They are lost and face eternity without Christ unless the gospel is taken to them.

Over the hundreds of kilometers on our return journey, my thoughts were filled with the need to make contact with these people again. How would we reach them with the gospel? There are so many barriers—language, culture, lack of real relationship with the people, a key to open the door of their minds and hearts to the gospel. The barriers seemed insurmountable.

And so I prayed, “Lord, open the door to the hearts of these people. Remove the barriers. Give us opportunity to make the gospel message clear to them. They need Jesus.” Then I ended my prayer to the Lord with a hopeful “amen.”

On my return to Addis Ababa, I published a newsletter, asking our partners and supporters to join me in this prayer. I urged the church at home to pray for God to give us a strategy that would be effective in reaching the Mursi and to open the door for us to proclaim Christ to them. Then I left it with God.

Act On It

- How do you think God wants you to share your faith with others who are very different from you, and does that differ with how you would witness to those who are like-minded?
- Often we have to go out of our way to share Christ with the lost. You may not need to travel for days to make contact with a lost person. You may not even have significant cultural differences with the person you are trying to reach. However, some people are quick to rebuff those who approach them to share their faith. How can we build meaningful relationships with such people so we can share Christ with them?
- It often helps to have a partner when taking the gospel to others. What impact do you think it would make on reaching someone if another person was praying with you for the person to whom you witness? Would it help if that partner were holding you accountable to your commitment to witness to others?
- When is the last time that the Lord gave you a burden for a specific person? If it has been a long time, what action should you take to begin that journey?



CHAPTER 3

Behind the Scene—Late 1999/Early 2000

And God began to work! I did not realize it at the time. In fact, I had no idea that God was taking my newsletter and infecting the heart of a businessman in Roanoke, Virginia, with a passion for the Mursi.

My first contact with Glen and David Argabright [AHR-gah-BRIET] was late in 1999, the same year that I met the Mursi people. The Argabright brothers were building contractors who turned much of their business income into opportunities to reach the lost of our world. At the time, they had been involved in Work & Witness in many areas of the world for nearly 20 years. However, they agreed to enter into a new ministry the year that I first met the Mursi. They began to use profits from their business to sponsor JESUS Film Harvest Partners (JFHP) teams that year. By the middle of 1999, they were sponsoring JESUS Film teams in the Philippines and in Ecuador. Glen and David worked as a team with Glen focused on the JESUS Film ministry and David following behind Glen's teams

with Work & Witness teams to build worship facilities for new churches spawned by the JESUS Film.

As Glen and David saw thousands of converts coming to Christ through the JESUS Film and Work & Witness, they began to see how God could use their business and their lives to impact the Kingdom in significant ways. Glen said, “God really gave me a passion for this ministry; and we soon wanted to sponsor, pray, and be involved with more teams.”

In November 1999, they began to sponsor teams in the Amazon jungle of Peru. They were now sponsoring a number of teams in three countries. Again, Glen said, “We couldn’t get enough and soon wanted more.” God had set a fire in these two brothers for reaching the lost.

By the close of 1999, the Global Mission Department for the Church of the Nazarene put the Argabrights in touch with me in the Horn of Africa. By January 2000, they sponsored their first JFHP team in our area, working in the Gambella [gahm-BE-lah] Region of Ethiopia. The Nuer [noo-EHR] people of Sudanese descent responded in great numbers to each JESUS Film showing.¹ We would count the crowds in most showings in the thousands. Every night, hundreds would respond to the call to pray and give their hearts to Jesus.

Glen and David dug deeper into the pockets of their business and sponsored additional teams in the Horn. Their involvement grew to the sponsorship of more than 10 teams in several areas throughout the Horn. The Argabrights were

1 The forebears of the Nuer people immigrated to Ethiopia a number of years ago through a number of factors: drought, war, etc.

passionate about their support of this ministry, and their support went beyond financial giving. They became prayer warriors for the Horn and visited the teams. Sending many Work & Witness teams to construct training centers in the districts, they also provided funding toward the completion of the training facilities, assisting us in equipping new believers and pastors.

They kept meticulous records. From January 2000 through July 2007, their reports indicated that 6,854,257 people in the Horn of Africa viewed the JESUS Film with 2,032,015 people professing faith in Christ. Significant spiritual growth occurred throughout the Horn through this valued tool of evangelism.

It was the second JFHP team that Glen sponsored in the Horn that would work in the South Omo area of Ethiopia. The team became active by November 2000. The Mursi was just one of the many unreached peoples in this area. I had not given the Mursi a thought when I suggested to Glen that we place a team in South Omo. In fact, I wasn't even sure how effective the film would be for a people who had no concept of one sovereign, creator God. My considerations were more for the people living around Jinka, the major town in that remote area, to receive the gospel. Little did I know that God was up to something when I suggested South Omo as the strategic area for the next JESUS film team.

And little did I know that God was reaching out to Glen regarding a lost people with a strange (to him) culture and a language that no one in our church could speak.

John Cunningham, who was the field strategy coordinator of the Africa East Field at the time, had read my newsletter published the prior year.² After reading my cry for our partners and supporters to pray for a strategy to reach the Mursi, John sent an email to Glen. John wrote that he was praying that God would put on our hearts a burden to be involved in taking “Jesus” to a remote people in the South Omo Valley of Ethiopia, called the Mursi tribe.

Glen’s secretary printed the email and put it in his hands as he left the office that day for lunch. As he read the message, Glen was so moved that he went to the library, instead of going to lunch. Asking the library assistant to find anything they had on the Mursi, Glen began a search that would grip his heart in unexplainable ways. The assistant found a book with some pictures of the Mursi people. As he glimpsed into their faces, he was overwhelmed with the need to reach them. Glen wrote to me later, saying, “We caused quite a scene in the Roanoke County library that day, because my emotions got the best of me as I began to anticipate these people (with clay plates in their lips and unbelievable customs and beliefs) bowing to Jesus.”

That day Glen began to pray for the Mursi people. He prayed for them every day year after year, believing that the burden God had put on his heart would result in a miraculous harvest of souls.

As I continued making information-gathering trips into South Omo, I would update the Horn of Africa partners

² This was before the Horn of Africa was separated from the Africa East Field and became a field on its own.

and supporters of our mission by newsletters, usually with photos of the peoples in the area. I was unaware of what was going on in Glen's heart and his burden to reach these people. He later told me that his passion for the Mursi people was further fueled every time that I sent out photos of the South Omo tribes. Little did I know that God was working in the life of a businessman from Roanoke, Virginia, to help reach a group of lost people in a remote section of southwest Ethiopia.

Act On It

- How important do you think it would be to have Glen (living in Virginia) carry a burden for the Mursi people (living in Ethiopia) and praying for their salvation? How important is it for you to pray for people, either nearby or far away; and how willing are you to let God use you in a prayer ministry?
- Glen and David Argabright made significant sacrifices to reach people for Christ. What sacrifices are you willing to make that might result in people's salvation?
- How do you spend your resources of time, talent, and treasure? Are they making a difference in how others will spend eternity? Your participation in the World Evangelism Fund allows you to reach others who need the Savior, and its cooperative genius helps each of us to do more working together than could ever be done by working alone.



CHAPTER 4

The Early Stages of a Movement of God-2002

Within two years, signs of God's moving began to surface in the Horn of Africa. Thousands had come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Hundreds of churches had been planted. The JFHP teams had journeyed into cities, towns, villages, and the seemingly unending tribal areas deep into the bush. Many people groups were hearing the gospel for the first time through the JESUS Film.

JFHP teams traveled to a remote village, showing the film on several consecutive evenings. At the conclusion of each showing, team members would present the gospel and call for those seeing the film to make a commitment to follow Jesus. Many prayed to receive Jesus as their Savior. Nazarenes from nearby villages, trained by the teams and other district leaders, would go into the same villages during the days following the showings for personal evangelism. Many, many more sought Christ in response to neighbors visiting their homes, sipping coffee together, and most importantly sharing Jesus with them.

By 2002, the multiplication of believers and churches in the Horn of Africa had caught the attention of denominational leaders. They reorganized the Africa Region, moving the Horn of Africa out of the Africa East Field and establishing the Horn as a field of its own, and I was named field strategy coordinator of the exciting field.

By 2004, the multiplication of believers and churches had exponentially exploded. Horn of Africa Nazarenes were living the kind of movement that had rocked the First Century world. The Book of Acts became the present-day experience for the Church of the Nazarene in the Horn. Nazarenes were prioritizing the Mission of Christ over their personal agendas. Witch doctors were coming to Christ on a regular basis. Thousands of people from other faiths were turning to Jesus, and places of worship for those faiths were becoming Nazarene churches.

As thousands came to Christ annually, we were left with the daunting challenge to equip lay leaders, pastors, and district superintendents. A teach-reteach strategy was developed with formal training taking place at field, district, and zonal centers.¹

In order to provide adequate venues for this training, we began constructing training centers throughout the Horn. David Argabright stepped in to provide leadership for the field in coordinating Work & Witness teams. He also brought some of his own teams that had constructed buildings in other countries on the field. When it came to the

1 See Appendix for the Strategic Principles for the Horn of Africa.

construction of training facilities, David was the mover and shaker to make it all happen. Consequently David was often in the Horn, supervising building construction. Glen would joke with me from time to time, asking me if I could send his brother home, so he could attend to his responsibilities in their business.

Both Glen and David made significant contribution to the mission of reaching the lost in the Horn of Africa. Many people groups were being reached, but the Mursi were still lost in their sins, without hope for eternity. I was still praying for an open door to reach these people and still unaware that Glen was carrying a heavy burden for the Mursi, a people with a unique language and the unusual custom of lip plates for the women of their tribe.

Act On It

- God's moving in the Horn of Africa required much from many people. What do you think would be required of you to have a similar experience in your community and nation?
- Much of what took place in the Horn was because Nazarenes prioritized the Mission of Christ over their personal agendas. Where do you put your priority? What must you do to make Christ and the Kingdom first in your life?



CHAPTER 5

Disaster in Hilao—November 2004

In November 2004, David was in Ethiopia on one of his many visits, supervising the construction of training centers throughout the country. One of those projects was in Arba Minch in the North Omo Valley of Ethiopia. We were together inspecting the progress of Elias [EL-ee-uhs], the Ethiopian building contractor, and reviewing needs for further Work & Witness teams. From there, we planned a visit to Jinka, where we were considering the possibility of constructing a zonal training center. A visit to Jinka would put us about a half-day's journey from the Mursi people. I had not made a return trip to the Mursi—although I continued to pray fervently for them—and my heart longed for a second visit.

So we set out on another venture to reach these people. We wanted to know them better and maybe find the key that would open the door to reaching them for Christ. I invited some of the other Nazarene leaders to travel with us—Friday Ganda [FRIE-day GAHN-dah], a Kenyan

missionary responsible for the work in southern Ethiopia at the time; Terry Barker, our field education coordinator; and Gelaye Ganta [ge-LIE GAHN-tah], who served as the Omo District superintendent. These people bounced through dry river beds and hot desert terrain with Dave and me as we motored between Arba Minch and Jinka. In Jinka, we met Adamo Adelo [ah-DAH-moh ah-DEL-ah], the zone leader for the South Omo area. Adamo joined our team at that point. The plan was to visit the more permanent Mursi village of Hilao [HIE-loh] deep into the wild territory beyond the Mago National Park.

After an overnight in Jinka, we journeyed through the park, encountering many people groups on the way. Besides David's skill in construction, he is a self-taught professional photographer. I often told him that he should work for *National Geographic*. He had a tendency to take photos of everything; his camera shutter continuously clicking away. I noticed, however, that he grew speechless and his camera was quiet as we passed a group of men wearing nothing but paint head to toe. David was receiving a crash course in cultural diversity.

Eventually we arrived in Hilao. The women scattered to prepare for guests; lip plates were inserted, and babies were gathered up in their arms. The men continued to play *Huroy*¹ [HOO-roy] excitedly, moving their pieces from hole

1 Huroy is a mancala game played by the Mursi people. Mancala is a family of board games played around the world, sometimes called "sowing" games, or "count-and-capture" games, which describes the gameplay.

to hole. As they moved about the board with their pieces, advancing toward the head and capturing opponents' pieces on the way, they laughed and poked fun at each other in good-natured competition.

Other white people had visited their village in the past, since the lip-plated women attracted visitors from around the globe. People toured Ethiopia to experience the rich diversity of cultures and visit the vast historical sites, and it was obvious that our arrival was considered just another group of tourists looking for photos to take home to amuse their family and friends. It wasn't until the men's game finished that they joined the women in peering into our faces.

For a price, you could take photos of these remarkable people. Allowing their photos to be taken became a source of income (thanks to the tourists who were corrupting their cultural traditions).

I paid a few Ethiopian birr for a photo of a Mursi mother and her baby. If a woman was holding a baby in her arms, it usually costs double.

The homes of the Mursi are simply constructed, using available materials of sticks, mud, cow manure, and dried grass. Many of the Mursi women also carry AK-47s, baby



on one shoulder and their automatic weapon on the other. It would be very unusual to see a man without weaponry.

David, being an avid photographer, was in his glory, capturing in digital format this remote people in all of their incredible ways. He gave Friday a wad of Ethiopian birr and convinced him to be the negotiator for photo pricing and payment. Friday reluctantly accepted the responsibility, and David moved his camera from side to side, catching not only posed images, but as many candid photos as possible.

One of David's photographic secrets was using the burst feature on his camera. This assures capturing people in a multitude of spontaneous postures. Friday had negotiated with a woman holding her baby in one arm and an AK-47 draped around the shoulder of the other arm. David took the photo using the camera's burst feature. Friday then approached to make payment for the negotiated price. As he reached his hand out toward her with the promised amount, she defiantly refused payment with her head moving back and forth, making it clear that the payment was not acceptable. She pointed to the baby; it was clear that she was doubling the price because he had photographed two of them, not one. Friday had no choice but to pay the increased demand. As Friday doubled up the payment, she again shook her head from side to side, refusing payment again. She looked Friday square in the eyes and, with her tongue rapidly firing against her teeth, sounded the unmistakable sound of *tet-tet-tet-tet-tet*. Clearly she had noticed the rapid fire of the opening and closing of the shutter as

David fired away in a burst of pictures. She had actually counted the times the camera had captured her photo and was demanding full price for each photo taken in the burst mode—times two—don't forget the baby.

Friday's cash was running low. Fortunately, we brought an abundant supply of double-edged razor blades. The women covet these blades, since they are unable to obtain them where they live. They need the blades to shave their heads bald, as is their custom. By this time, Friday was passing out blades. The women became very excited and began to circle Friday with their hands flailing outward, begging for this precious commodity.

Unfortunately, Friday could not keep up with David's trigger finger. David was pumping that camera trigger faster than Friday could negotiate pricing and make the payments. Friday had run out of cash, and the razor blades were nearly gone. David was oblivious to this in pursuit of the perfect photo. Friday began moving backward as the crowd of women began to push forward.

I stood there for just a moment, then noticed the demeanor of the people had changed. They were becoming frustrated that their demands were not being met. The chatter was no longer friendly. I sensed that a tragedy could take place at any moment and knew that we had to get out of there quickly.

"Get in the truck!" I yelled. "Get in the truck now!"

Everyone seemed to be frozen in place, except for David who was still flashing away with that camera and Friday who was backpedaling rapidly. Things were out of

hand, and we had to move fast. I continued barking orders for the team to get into the truck. Some started that way, but Friday could not free himself from the pressing crowd of frenzied women.

I realized at that moment that I had to get behind the wheel and get my vehicle in motion. That would surely motivate the team to run to the vehicle. As I jumped behind the wheel, I noticed Terry was already in the back seat, his face reflecting that he fully understood what was about to happen.

As I revved the engine to warn Friday that we were leaving, he continued backing away from the now very aggressive women. By this time, we were all in the truck, except him. I would never have left Friday in that village alone. However, I had to make it appear that his only chance to run to the truck was *now* or he'd find himself alone facing an angry mob. So, I drove away from Friday, watching carefully in my rearview mirror. It worked!

Friday turned and ran after the truck, screaming over and over again, "Howie, don't leave me! They are going to kill me!" Friday was able to outrun his pursuers and pile into the back seat of the moving Toyota pickup. Wow! We had dodged a bullet and escaped just moments before an impending tragedy.

We were safe and on our way home. We would be back in Addis Ababa in three days. Laughter eventually replaced the sighs of relief. It was a serious situation that we had just escaped, but our nervousness was relieved by our comical telling of the story we had just lived. Light-hearted chatter filled the vehicle, and then there was silence.

I did not know what the others were thinking, but I was deeply discouraged and saddened by a lost opportunity. I was embarrassed that our attempts to find an open door to the Mursi had been squandered. What had we done? Instead of developing a relationship with the people, we had become a stench in their nostrils.

My hope to reach this people group was diminished, but the burden for them gripped my heart stubbornly. I challenged Gelaye to develop a strategy to evangelize the 18,000 people, who for all practical purposes were an unreached people group. And I continued to pray and to encourage our supporters and partners to pray that God would find a way into the hearts of the Mursi people.

On David's return to Roanoke, he met with Glen for dinner and to report on his most recent visit to Ethiopia. They discussed the progress on the construction of the training centers, David's primary purpose for that visit. Then David went on to talk about his trip to the Mursi, and Glen became riveted to David's account.

"When he showed me the photos of the Mursi people he had taken," Glen wrote me in an email, "I was totally overcome with excitement and the anticipation that these people would soon be introduced to Jesus. I openly wept and prayed for the Lord to allow it soon."

Act On It

- You have probably had an experience like I did when I left Hilao—trying to do the right thing for God, but bungling the whole thing. How did you feel afterward, and what did you do as a result? Was that the appropriate response?
- How important is the burden that God puts on your heart when your hope is dashed by failure? How can knowing the will of God for your life get you through discouraging times?



CHAPTER 6

The Long Road to the Mursi—April/May 2005

Five months later Glen was in Ethiopia. I had invited him to come to Ethiopia for a two-week tour of the areas where many of the JFHP teams, which he had sponsored, were working. Glen had made at least two earlier trips to Ethiopia, anticipating travel to the South Omo area, so that he could meet the people that God had placed so strongly on his heart. On each of those earlier visits, Glen left Ethiopia disappointed that meeting the Mursi people was scrubbed from the agenda because flooded rivers raged during his visit.

He had been praying for five years for this opportunity and for the salvation of the thousands of Mursi people. We had a plan that would take us across many kilometers, visiting a multitude of people groups; but foremost on his mind were the Mursi.

Even at this time, he had not told me about his interest in the Mursi. As we began our journey, I had no idea that his heart was focused on the tenth day of our agenda. On

that day, we were scheduled to travel to Hilao, the same village from whence we had so narrowly escaped disaster five months previous. Don't get me wrong—Glen was interested in every tribe, every people. He hungered for all to come to the Lord Jesus, but the Mursi had been occupying much of his thoughts and prayers for five years. He still believed that they would one day come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And I had no idea that God had moved in Glen's heart like He had.

For two long weeks, we traveled dusty, broken roads. We visited some of the most remote areas of the world. At other times, we were in ancient, historical cities filled with religious sites—some Christian, some Muslim, and some of Traditional African Religion backgrounds. Each night we would show the JESUS Film in a different language to people of diverse cultures.

Glen provided a remembrance of this two-week journey:

Wow, what a grueling, but rewarding, journey with many flat tires! We traveled long and hard throughout Ethiopia, and it seemed like every stop held its own miracle from the Lord. We saw so many people come to the Lord—tens of thousands! We met with “underground” churches. We trained people with the film and discipleship. We showed the film to crowds as small as 138 people and as large as well over ten thousand.

I remember Yohannes [yoh-HAH-nes] (the JESUS Film leader) showing the film by personal

DVD player to a crew of workers (in the middle of the night) at one hotel we stayed at when we were in a city. I remember people throwing rocks at us at a showing in Bahir Dar [bah-HAH-dahr]. I remember showing the film to more than 10,000 people at a soccer field in Chano Mille [CHAH-noh MI-le]. That night we had to break up many fights while we were setting up the equipment to show the film, but once the film started, it was all about Jesus!

During our journey south, I remember many rivers and water holes that you [Howie] drove the truck through. I have repeated many times the words you would say just before you would drive through the water...“Lord, we commit this to you.”

At one point, we rearranged our schedule a little and drove all the way up to the North to the Eritrean refugee camp. (Remember all those burnt up war tanks?) I think we drove for about 12 hours from wherever we were and showed the film that night, but we had to leave immediately after the showing, due to the threat of war breaking out. When the war broke out, these people would be considered spies (so sad). We left an underground evangelist there named Kifloom [KIF-loom].

Wow, what a trip! God helped us and the timing was right.

We called our journey a “Cape Town to Cairo” road trip. It felt like we had, in fact, crossed the entire continent in

those two weeks. We had not yet, however, made the journey to where the Mursi lived, but we had arrived in Jinka, just a half-day journey from Hilao.

We had shown the JESUS Film the night before in Chano Mille, a half-day east of our present location. Thousands of Gamo [GAH-moh] people had assembled to watch this film in their own native language. A multitude stepped forward that night at our invitation to believe on the Lord Jesus. We had a strong Nazarene Church in that village, so there were many Nazarenes trained to follow up on these new believers.

We were sitting in a shop in Jinka the next morning, enjoying a cup of buna [BOO-nah], the Ethiopian Amharic¹ [ah-MAHR-rik] word for “coffee.” (By the way, I believe that Ethiopian coffee is the best in the world, especially when it is prepared the Ethiopian way.) As we sat there, sipping buna and reminiscing of the great harvest the night before, it finally happened. Glen told his story about doing research on the Mursi tribe in the public library in Roanoke, Virginia, five years earlier and how he had prayed for them daily ever since. Tears ran down his face as he shared what was on his heart about reaching the Mursi people for Jesus.

1 Amharic is the official national language of Ethiopia. There are 88 individual languages of Ethiopia, according to *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, a comprehensive reference work cataloging all of the world's known living languages.

Act On It

- What do you think my reaction was when Glen told me about praying for the Mursi for years in response to the burden God had given him for these people? How important is it to you to have a partner in ministry who can encourage you during tough times?
- For a variety of reasons, Glen and I both had to wait to effectively reach out to the Mursi people. How do you patiently wait on God to fulfill your vision for ministry? What actions do you take in order to accomplish God's will without giving up through difficulties and hardships?
- Have you been praying a long time for a lost friend or family member? Don't give up. The answer may be right around the corner.



CHAPTER 7

The Open Door—May 1, 2005

As I sat listening to Glen pour out his spiritual passion for the Mursi, I knew that we had to make our way southwest, another half-day further into the bush. At the same time, I knew that we had not yet developed a relationship with the Mursi. In fact, there could still be a bad taste in their mouths from our visit five months earlier.

We had the JESUS Film with us, but how would we even get an opportunity to show it to them? And if the opportunity came, how would they understand the good news of Jesus Christ when they lived in complete ignorance of the One God, their Creator? How would they comprehend that God had sent His Son to die for them, when they did not even know the Father? Then there was the language barrier—none of our people knew the Mursi language. How would we communicate? The JESUS Film had not yet been translated into the Mursi language. These were just a few of the barriers we faced as we considered the possibility of sharing Christ with the Mursi that very night.

I looked across the table and spoke to Gelaye, asking him if he had developed a strategy to reach the Mursi. As Gelaye responded, a glimmer of hope emerged.

A young man named Zenabu [ze-NAH-boo] came from Hilao to Jinka to attend school. By the time this conversation took place, Zenabu had reached the equivalent of fifth grade in elementary school. This made Zenabu the most educated person in the Mursi tribe (as far as we knew). Since Zenabu had attained such a “high” education, he had been appointed as the security chief (head of the militia) for the whole tribe. To make matters even better, Zenabu had already come to Christ. Later, I wondered if Zenabu was the young man who had been led to Christ by SIM missionaries.

I was sure that our disastrous visit to Hilao had resulted in nothing that would help us reach this tribe. I did not realize, however, that there was one Mursi man, who had taken special notice of us while we were making such fools of ourselves in his village. Yes, that man was Zenabu.

Later, Zenabu went to Adamo, the zone leader for the area, and asked who the white men were who had accompanied Adamo on the trip to Hilao. Adamo explained that we were missionaries with the Church of the Nazarene. Zenabu said that he had received Christ, but had since backslidden and was no longer walking with the Lord. Adamo and Zenabu became close friends, and Zenabu got back with the Lord, became interested in the holiness doctrine, and joined the church.

As Gelaye told us Zenabu's story, I thought, "Wow! The plan is coming together." I was sure that Gelaye was going to say that Zenabu was at the center of his strategy, providing an open door to this unreached people group. He would be the key to access these people.

That's when Gelaye dashed our hopes by announcing that Zenabu was not in Jinka that day. He had traveled to another region of Ethiopia and had been gone for some time. Gelaye confirmed what I already knew—that we would need Zenabu if there were any chance at all of visiting the Mursi and showing the JESUS Film.

As we sat there, disappointed that the opportunity was slipping away once again, suddenly Gelaye jumped up and cried out, "There he is!" Wasn't that just like the Lord to have Zenabu pass by, just at the time we needed him. He had just returned to Jinka and was available for such a time as this.

Within a short time, we were on our way, excited about the possibility of sharing Jesus with the Mursi. After hours of bush travel, we arrived at our destination. We had a translator, because Zenabu could communicate with us in Amharic and with his people in Mursi. Once again the Holy Spirit breached the language barrier—this time through the interpretation of language through a Spirit-filled translator.

The villagers greeted us warmly, due to our association with Zenabu. It appeared that any friend of Zenabu's was a friend of theirs. Zenabu quickly excused himself from our team, leaving us alone with the villagers. Once again we were forced to communicate through gestures and facial

expressions. Staring into their eyes, we were left wondering how they would respond to the JESUS Film later that night. What would be the result of this opportunity that had finally come to us?

Our hopes were high. Zenabu had left us alone to talk with the village chief. He had to give the chief a reason for our visit and obtain his approval for our plan. When he returned to us, he explained the strategy he used.

The Mursi were a people almost totally cut off from the outside world. They knew nothing of modern-day inventions. In fact, they had just recently learned of a “new invention”...the television. They did not fully understand the new technology—there was nothing in their culture with which to compare it. It was a mystery to them.

Zenabu used this as a key to open the door to show the film. He told the chief that we had brought with us a “television” and wanted to show the whole village how it worked. He further explained that they would learn much that night about the God who created them. He told the chief that, when the sun went down, he should gather the whole village, and they would see for themselves, on this very day, a “television.”

Act On It

- If you were looking for an open door to share Jesus with a loved one, how have you prayed for God to provide that opening? If you are looking for the right strategy to reach a person to whom witnessing is a challenge, how should you pray?
- It's interesting that our open door to the Mursi people came in a Mursi man named Zenabu; and it is even more amazing that the contact with Zenabu came through the disastrous meeting with the Mursi on our second visit. We thought nothing was accomplished on that visit. In fact, we thought our relationship with the Mursi had worsened because of it. As it turned out, the door was opened because of it. What supposed failures in your life can God use to reach someone for Christ?
- Think of the experiences and interests that you and a person for whom you are praying share. Pray that the Lord would show you how to "tell your story" to that person. A simple thing like a television provided an opportunity to share the gospel with the Mursi. Is there something that interests that person that might provide an open door for you to share the gospel with him or her?



CHAPTER 8

Spiritual Warfare—May 2, 2005

As we set up the equipment that afternoon, we could sense the excitement spreading throughout the village. The word was flying from ear to ear that Zenabu and those strange companions of his had brought a television with them. Tonight the people of Hilao would see one for themselves.

Some could not stop staring at us as we prepared for the showing. It was not yet dark, but their curiosity could not wait until evening to be satisfied.

The sun was on the horizon. Soon it would be dark enough to show the film. Before darkness took over, it was important for us to power up the equipment and test it for proper functioning. The people began to gather while Yohannes powered up the equipment for a dry run. Yohannes, the JESUS Film field coordinator, had been traveling with Glen and me for two weeks. The young Ethiopian man had a great heart for people and was always looking for an opportunity to share Jesus.

Two days earlier we had spent the night at the Bekele Mola Hotel. While Glen and I slept, Yohannes had organized an unscheduled, after-hours JESUS Film showing in the hotel restaurant with some of the hotel staff. He always carried a DVD player that he used to show the film to an individual or small group. That night, a number of the hotel workers gave their heart to Jesus. He told us this good news while we were driving from Arba Minch to Jinka.

I could see that Yohannes was agitated. When I asked him what was wrong, he looked at me and said, “Howie, this is the same equipment we used last night. It worked then, but now nothing works.” That kind of a thing happened often. Either the generator failed—or the DVD player or the video projector—sometimes the sound system would go awry. The properly working equipment of one night would refuse to cooperate the next. Fortunately we had a spare set of equipment in my truck. Yohannes quickly replaced the equipment with the spare set, but still we could not get the equipment to operate.

Yohannes isolated the problem to the generator...or at least he thought it was the generator. Both generators did not seem to be putting out any power. At least, there was no power coming out of the extension cord leading to the state-of-the-art electronic equipment we used. However, when checking the output right at the generator where the extension cord had been connected, electricity was at full capacity. The extension cord was perfectly fine, but electricity would not pass through it. Even our spare extension cord would not work.

Yohannes finally stood, solemnly looked at me in a way I will never forget, and whispered, “Howie, this problem is not natural. It is supernatural. The enemy is messing with our equipment.” It was always a challenge to use advanced technology in a developing nation. The care of the equipment took special handling in such rough surroundings. However, in this case, it appeared that Satan was trying to stop us from reaching the Mursi people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual warfare is expected on the front lines of ministry. Satan will do everything he can to stop someone from hearing the Good News. The ministry in the Horn of Africa was saturated with prayers from all over the world. Unless God was involved, we knew that we would accomplish nothing. And in this case, it was not just a person or even a small group of people—but a whole tribe—that was, for all practical purposes, completely unreached. It was obvious that Satan was doing everything he could to stop the JESUS Film showing that night.

Yohannes and I laid our hands on the equipment and cried out to the Lord. We let Him know that we recognized the Mursi were His creation and that He died for them. We pleaded with Jesus to chase the enemy out of the village and to cause our equipment to function properly.

After saying “Amen,” we started the generator once again and the equipment jumped to life. What a relief! What the villagers would have done if we had not delivered on our promise to show them a “television” that night only God knew. More importantly we had told them that they would

hear about the God who created them. These people were going to meet Jesus that very night.

As darkness grew closer, we could not help but notice ominous clouds forming over the village. Rain was rare in this arid location of Ethiopia, but the dark clouds threatened to unleash their fury upon us as we struggled with the malfunction of the equipment. However, when that equipment came to life after our prayer, we knew that nothing was going to stop us from proclaiming Jesus to these wonderful people. The clouds threatened, but Jesus had this night under control. The rain never came.

By the time the equipment began working, the whole village had gathered before the large screen. It was a small village, but every one of its 150 inhabitants came. They sat on the ground patiently waiting for the “television” to do its thing. They did not know what to expect; but whatever it was, they were ready.

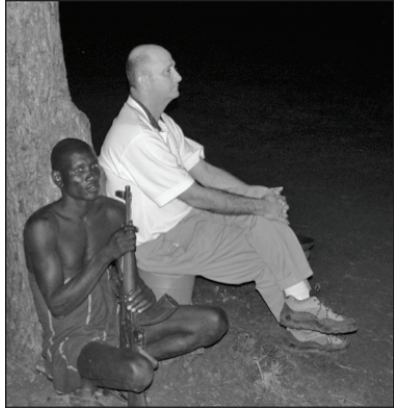
The women had by now removed their jewelry. With their lip plates stored away back in their houses, their lower lips hung down beneath their chins. That seemed to make them uncomfortable since there were still guests in their village, but they wanted to relax and enjoy whatever was coming their way that night.

Both men and women were scantily dressed; most were still carrying AK-47s. I wondered whether they thought they might need their weapons to protect themselves from us, from wild animals, or from a neighboring tribe.

I chuckled to myself when I glanced over to where Glen had positioned himself for the night’s showing. He had

attracted a friend who was determined to provide protection for him that night. He told Glen through his translator that he would protect him from (in his words) “the lions, hyenas and the Hamar¹ tribe.”

All was finally ready. Yohannes was about to start the showing, when the Lord clearly spoke to me. The message was clear, “Don’t show the JESUS Film yet! Show the Old Testament Introduction Video first!” I always carried a short video that we used with people of certain faiths that was a



Glen's bodyguard sitting next to him under the tree with his AK-47 ready for use.

dramatic presentation of the highlights of the Old Testament story. As I mentioned earlier, I was concerned that the Mursi would not understand the message of the JESUS Film because of their complete ignorance of the one true God and his story. I knew immediately why God prompted me to show the Old Testament video first. I quickly retrieved the video from my truck and instructed Yohannes to show it first. Yohannes made the change, and the large screen before the Mursi of Hilao came to life.

¹ The Hamar people were a neighboring people group that would on occasion raid the Mursi's cattle. Those kind of raids often resulted in the deaths of warriors from both the Mursi and the Hamar.

Act On It

- What roadblocks has Satan constructed in your way as you have looked for opportunities to lead a loved one to Christ? How important is effective, fervent prayer in gaining victory over the enemy in these matters? What are you praying for as you reach out to those not experiencing God's grace?
- As we moved forward with the showing of the JESUS Film, God spoke to me about an alternate approach of presenting the gospel. The Old Testament Introduction video became a significant tool in communicating God's truth to the Mursi. How do you react when you sense God is telling you to do something other than what you planned? What were the results of your obedience or disobedience?



CHAPTER 9

Victory—The Same Day

They sat there with their eyes riveted on the screen. No one moved. Not a sound uttered. They had never seen anything like this before. I couldn't tell whether they were glued to the screen because of the story or because it was their first encounter with media technology.

The Old Testament story was unfolding before them. They witnessed God's creation of the earth, Adam being formed out of dust, and Eve created from Adam's rib. They were especially fascinated as they watched Adam and Eve standing in the garden. They marveled at the plush greenery and low-hanging fruit, dangling from the trees within easy reach. They paid close attention to the portrayal of our first parents' rebellion against God. The Mursi groaned as Adam was cast out of the garden and found himself separated from God. Seeming to understand his despair, they witnessed the pain on Adam's face as he crouched in agony on the hot desert floor, far from the presence of God.

As they witnessed Cain killing Abel, I wondered if they identified with the killing of their brothers, as often took place in tribal wars in the isolated region in which they lived. As God's story progressed from creation to the rebellion of man and then to God calling out a people of his own, I had my doubts that these people fully comprehended what they were watching. I only hoped that some of it would be understood.

As this Old Testament Introduction came to a close, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed the coming of a Messiah who would deliver humanity from their sin. The film ended with this pronouncement—*A savior would come. His name would be Jesus.*

Yohannes was prepared to make an immediate and quick change out of DVDs, replacing the Old Testament Introduction with the full-length version of the JESUS Film. He did so with such expediency that there was almost



no lull in the production dancing across the screen before these people. That was important. We did not want to lose them. It was critical at this point that they see the whole story. They sat motionless before the large screen “television” as the story in the Gospel of Luke played out. Zenabu was translating the film from Amharic to Mursi with such emotion and fervency. It appeared as if these Mursi villagers had placed themselves right there amid the action taking place on the large screen.

Suddenly without warning, the chief jumped to his feet. He pushed himself forward in an excited and agitated way to where Zenabu held the microphone. I saw the chief reach out and grab the microphone away from Zenabu. I was amazed that he understood that he could project his voice through this technology that he had never seen before. More than that, I was deeply concerned that it appeared as if this village leader was angry at something that we had done. He almost jumped up and down as he belted his message through the loudspeaker with great emotion. He had something to say, but I had no idea what that was. All I knew was that I needed to be prepared for us to escape if things went wrong. It looked like we might need to flee another disastrous situation in Hilao.

It took a few minutes for the translation of the chief’s words to reach me. As Zenabu translated from Mursi to Amharic and Yohannes interpreted into English, I was stunned. The chief was not angry at all. He shouted out his message to us with the microphone clutched firmly in his hand:

We now know that there is a God. We now see that He created us. We never knew these things before. We see that there was much fruit in the garden [speaking of the Garden of Eden]. We plant much seed, but gather little fruit. We are like Adam, who was thrown out of the garden. We live like animals. We walk naked before one another. We live in sin; we have been separated from God. But now it's late. Our cows are in the field. We must go out to them and bring them into the protection of our homes. We do not need to see anymore of the film. Just tell us: What do we need to do?

“What do we need to do?” Were they really asking how to be saved? Had God penetrated the minds and hearts of these unreached people? A glimmer of hope flickered. However, these people had not seen much of the JESUS Film at all. The film had only been running a short time. They had not yet heard Jesus teach the crowds. They had not witnessed the miraculous power of Jesus' ministry. The healings had not yet been shown. Most importantly they had not even heard that Jesus had died on the cross to provide forgiveness for their sins. They still didn't know about His resurrection from the dead. Whatever was meant by their plea of what *do we need to do*, it was obvious that they had not fully understood the gospel.

Yohannes understood this too. He got the microphone back into Zenabu's hands and pleaded with the chief and his people, “Please do not leave. Your cows are safe. Just give us

a few more minutes.” As he asked for more time, he cranked the film equipment back into action. As he did, he fast-forwarded the film to the crucifixion scene, stopping with Jesus hanging on the cross. With the film paused, he began to preach:

Yes. You are just like Adam. You have sinned; and because of your sin, you have been separated from God. That separation from God is the penalty for your sin. You are dead spiritually, but God sent His Son Jesus into the world to die for you. He died to take away your sin. If you believe that Jesus died in your place, you will be forgiven of all of your sin. You will be His child and will live with Him forever.

Yohannes instructed them to hold on, giving him one more opportunity to speak. Again, he zipped forward on the DVD, pausing the film with the resurrection scene displayed. They stared into the empty tomb, and Yohannes preached on, “Jesus died for you; but after three days He rose from the dead, demonstrating His power over death. Death cannot keep Him in the grave.” Yohannes continued, quoting Romans 10:9 (BSB), “...If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The Ethiopian preacher stopped. Silence reigned for a moment, then he asked his listeners what they were going to do with Jesus. Did they believe He died to take away their sin? Did they believe that He had risen from the dead? In a

very sober tone, Yohannes urged them to come forward to where he was standing if they really believed these things and wanted to give their lives to Jesus.

One by one, they came. First, the village chief moved toward Yohannes. The village elders followed. These proud leaders, who feared neither lion nor attacking tribesmen, humbly presented themselves before the villagers, in surrender to God. The chief and 18 elders gave their hearts to Jesus Christ. Yohannes urged them to give everything to God as he led them in the sinner's prayer. Many lifted their AK-47s to God as a symbol of giving all to Him. One elder without a weapon, raised the wooden stool he had been sitting on during the showing. It was this man's way to announce his surrender to God.



It was May 2, 2005, when 19 Mursi village leaders gave their hearts to Christ—6 years since our first visit. On that day, an unreached people group was removed from the long list of groups around the world who had never heard the name of Jesus Christ.

Act On It

- I confess that I was surprised when the Mursi received the gospel with such joy. Why is it that we react that way when God reaches difficult people? How does this story affect your prayers and plans to reach out to someone you may have given up on?
- If we think the gospel is powerful enough to save those for whom we pray, what effect does that have on how we present the gospel? What methods of presentation or terminology would they understand best?



CHAPTER 10

The Aftermath—The Days to Follow

We left Hilao late that night. Two weeks on the road were catching up to us. We were exhausted from day after day of travel, night after night of sleeping in different beds, and kilometer after kilometer of traversing extremely difficult roads. Emotionally, we were totally spent!

However, to see those 19 men move forward and surrender their lives to the one true God was an unbelievable experience. We arrived in their village knowing that God was able and, at the same time, never expecting to see an unreached people group come to Jesus in one night.

As we motored through the wild territory toward Jinka, the darkness of the night reminded us of the spiritual darkness from which the Mursi people had come (from which each of us comes, for that matter). The Mursi had been a people without hope, living in ignorance of their Creator. They had feared the spirits of their ancestors. They had no expectation of life beyond the grave.

Now Light had pierced the darkness of their grim existence. Joy for today and hope for tomorrow flooded their lives. Everything had changed for the Mursi; and God had given us the wonderful privilege of speaking for Him in a far-off place to a people that He loved with an unending fervor.

Yes, we were physically exhausted and emotionally spent. However, we couldn't help but rejoice, as the thump of the tires against the bumpy roads counted off the kilometers to our hotel in Jinka that night. Glen and I had been praying for the Mursi for five years. Now God had used us to make a difference in the lives of these people.

Glen was beside himself with excitement. He later wrote:

I must admit that, during these years of prayer and anticipation, I was totally intimidated by the challenge of taking the film to the Mursi and often wondered how they would understand. We knew that God was able to overcome the challenges. [And] we knew that He would need to be the One to make all this happen.

As for his bodyguard who sat next to him by the tree that night, Glen wrote, "It was a very special joy to walk with this man as he gave his life to Jesus. All glory to the Lord Jesus!"

It was a great accomplishment for the Kingdom, yet we knew the work had only begun. The 19 men who went forward that evening were babes in Christ. We left Zenabu behind, so he could begin the work of discipleship in Hilao.

The closest Nazarene Church was a half-day's drive *if* they had vehicles, which they did not. Those new believers had started their walk with Jesus, but the journey ahead would require a great deal of spiritual guidance from the Church of the Nazarene in the South Omo Region. Many long and dangerous trips by South Omo Nazarenes would be necessary to follow up on the new converts.

All of the Mursi that had come forward to receive Christ that night were men. *And* these men were all village leaders. This was the way things happened in the Mursi culture. It would have been forbidden for any woman or child to step forward and make a decision of such importance without the village leaders' permission. However, once the leaders had sanctioned the decision to submit to God, children and women would follow later. Some people from other cultures may not understand this practice, but God reaches each person in a way with which that person is familiar.

The days of follow-up were filled with challenges. Ethiopian Nazarenes who would never consider the possibility of drinking blood now faced new friends who drank a blood and milk mixture. To reject an offer of this drink was tantamount to rejecting the person offering it. Issues raised during the study of Scripture included the drinking of blood.

Young Mursi women raised the question about cutting their lips and wearing lip plates. The older Mursi, especially the men, were upset that the younger generation was challenging long-established traditions. The village elders questioned the girls about how they could abandon

traditions that the Mursi had observed for generations. In great frustration, they reminded the girls that no one could remember a time when women would not be properly fashioned with their lip plates. Such are the issues that faced the church when training new believers of unreached tribes in remote regions of Africa.

Today we have one church among the Mursi people. A beachhead has been established, but a movement of multiplication through the Mursi has not yet begun, partly due to their extremely remote location and nomadic lifestyle. We have seen this people group reached through the prayers of a businessman in Roanoke, Virginia, a missionary in the Horn of Africa, and a host of partners around the world who became caught up in the vision of reaching the unreached. Prayer brought the Mursi to Christ in the first place, and prayer will allow us to participate with God to multiply believers and churches throughout the Mursi people.

Act On It

- After the chief and the community elders came to Christ, a beginning was established, but there was much work to be done. Jesus' commission is to make disciples, not converts. How are you helping to make disciples?
- What do you think might be the issues involved in training the Mursi to be Jesus-followers? What concerns are important in making disciples in your community?



CHAPTER 11

A Challenge to the Readers

As you have read the Mursi story, I am sure you have seen plainly how Christians around the world can help make a significant impact globally. The Argabrights made contributions in reaching the Mursi, donating finances and time. They prayed for years to see an unreached people group learn of the Father's love, Christ's sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit's power and comfort. They were also involved with reaching other people groups in Ethiopia and in other countries in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

While the focus of this book is reaching the Mursi, other Horn of Africa Partners participated in ministry over the years.¹ Their roles may help you grasp some of the varied needs on a field in the Church of the Nazarene. (The list is not exhaustive and will change from field to field and with time.)

1 Field partners were men and women from local congregations throughout the global church who came alongside the field strategy coordinator and field missionaries to provide support through financial giving and prayer.

- Larry Wiest [WEEST] from Encinitas [en-sin-EE-tahs], California, helped in the expansion of the church to the Nuer people in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia and Southern Sudan. Training centers, constructed throughout Ethiopia, helped in the training of pastors from a number of countries in the Horn of Africa. Larry became one of the approved trainers of teachers in the extension education program, educating pastors in preaching, teaching, theology, and leadership.
- John Rush and Walt Sharp were two Horn of Africa partners, leading a Denver, Colorado, chapter of the partnership. They raised money for leadership development programs and provided extensive prayer support for the Horn mission work.
- Volunteers, serving with Mission Corps, gave months—and sometimes years—of their lives to the Horn of Africa.
- Other volunteers served for shorter periods.
- Steve Sharp was a volunteer missionary who served sacrificially for years in the Horn. He worked with one of the indigenous leaders in developing the JESUS Film ministry. Steve would travel for weeks in the bush, taking the gospel to people and training leaders in evangelism and discipleship methods.
- Bob and Janet Miller from Indiana gave years for the people in the Horn. Bob acted as the field Work & Witness coordinator.

- Local churches entered into partnership with the Horn of Africa Field. It was incredible how many Nazarenes and local churches in America made significant contributions to the work in the very challenging countries in the Horn of Africa.
- Beyond these mentioned are the thousands of Nazarenes who faithfully gave to the World Evangelism Fund that provided the infrastructure for ministry to take place throughout the Horn of Africa, the Africa Region, and, yes, the world.

What I am saying is this: ask God how you can be used to have an impact on the kingdom of God around the world. If you are involved in missions in some way already, you can be involved in reaching the world in even greater ways. If you own your own business, have you considered donating a portion of your profit and using it to reach others? What might God do in your life if you dedicated it to the Lord for Kingdom purposes?

Most importantly, pray. Anyone can pray, no matter the age, income, or ability. I don't mean "lip service" where you end your daily prayer with, "Oh yeah, Lord, bless the missionaries and their work around the world." I am referring to carrying a burden for an unreached people group for years. I am asking you to allow your heart to break over people who do not know Christ to the point that you cry out to God for them. Allow God to use you. Your prayers may make a difference in where some people spend eternity.

In today's context, there are places where it is difficult to send missionaries. In many countries, there are governments and cultures that forbid the proclamation of the gospel. For situations like that, people serve in ways other than what many would consider "traditional" missions. The apostle Paul traveled his world, providing for his own needs by making tents. Maybe God has given you skills that are needed in other world areas and the opportunity to provide for your needs, while helping those areas. Or perhaps you have sensed God's call to missionary service in another culture or ministry in your own community.

God continues to seek people who will pray, give, share their faith with those around them, and sometimes be willing to reach the unreached in a variety of ways. God may be waiting for you to share Jesus with a friend or maybe a neighbor next door. While we need to be aware of the many needs globally, we should not neglect those immediately around us. Millions have yet to embrace the salvation available to them, but God will open their hearts if we continue to pray, give, and share the wonderful news that Jesus saves.

And don't forget the Mursi. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field"² of the South Omo Valley and disciple Mursi believers. Pray that God would expand the established harvest field, causing a multiplication of believers that will reach the entirety of the Mursi people.

2 Luke 10:2

Act On It

- The World Evangelism Fund provides Nazarenes an opportunity to participate in God's mission around the world. This amazing ministry affects all ministries (directly or indirectly) and allows you to have a role in every work around the world.
- What passions, resources, or gifts have you been blessed with that might be used for God's glory on the mission field, either short- or long-term?
- Visit the Joshua Project website (www.joshuaproject.net). Joshua Project is a research initiative seeking to highlight the people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ. On the site are pages devoted to groups all over the world with information about them, prayer resources, and ideas that have been used by individuals and churches to encourage prayer for unreached peoples. Ask God to give you a desire to pray for unreached people groups.
- Put the Mursi people on your prayer list, and intercede for them regularly.
- We are called to be World Christians. What do you think that means, and how might you be a more effective World Christian?

- If you sense God leading you to be involved in missions in a direct way (in addition to praying, giving, learning, and going on short-term trips), visit <http://mobilization.nazarene.org/> to learn of the many opportunities for mission service in the Church of the Nazarene. You might be just the person to fulfill a critical need in God's global harvest field.



APPENDIX

Strategic Principles for the Horn of Africa

As mentioned in the Introduction, each people group required a unique strategy to reach their culture and their various perceptions of God. Following are some basic strategic principles that were applied to the work of the Church of the Nazarene throughout the Horn of Africa and the people groups there.

- Every Nazarene was to make disciples of Jesus, who would make disciples, who would make disciples, etc.
- Every Nazarene church was to plant a church, which would plant a church, which would plant a church. The churches were to reproduce themselves every 6 to 12 months and would be responsible for the ongoing development of the churches they planted.
- Every Nazarene pastor was to train a pastor who would train a pastor. This training involved ongoing mentoring that supplemented the training the pastors received in our extension education program.

- Anyone who received training was responsible to train others.
- No one could graduate from our extension education program or be ordained unless he or she satisfied all academic requirements and also planted a church that planted a church.
- There were at least three levels of training in our extension education program. We trained Trainers of Trainers at the field training centers. Those Trainers of Trainers then trained Teachers of Pastors at the district training centers. The Teachers of Pastors then trained local pastors at zonal training centers. On an informal basis, pastors would then teach laypersons in the local churches throughout the various zones. The courses ranged from 2 to 3 weeks in length, depending upon the level of training being done.
- We utilized an obedience-based discipleship strategy, instead of a knowledge-based strategy. That is, we focused on obedience to the Word of God, rather than just knowing the Word of God.
- Once a month, churches would gather to participate in fellowship, worship, compassionate ministry, training, evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. Anywhere from 5 to 10 local churches, including their pastors and the people, would meet according to their geographical locations. These became missional fellowship teams that would impact villages in their vicinity

as they put the Word of God into practice. The gatherings allowed the people to be together all day and into the evenings, ministering together for an entire weekend.

There were other principles in our strategy, but these were the most important points. We believed that this God-given strategy set the conditions for Him to move among the nearly 150 million people living in the Horn. Thousands upon thousands of highly gospel-resistant people came to Christ in the years the Lord privileged us to join Him in mission in the Horn of Africa.