

It Takes Two To Tango – Stan Hankins

I never thought I would hear my ministry described by the word Playboy! Now, I've heard it all. Lunching with a local pastor over scrumptious sushi as gentle trade winds waft, he described his past personal experience in foreign missions. A youthful stint in the Orient convinced him he was not cut out to be a resident missionary serving an appointed term. Yet, he was intrigued by the possibility of, and I quote, popping in and out, having a short-term impact then off again to the next locale! Sort of a Playboy missions ministry.

At that point I swallowed hard. I realized he had aptly portrayed the nature of itinerant ministry. He had described me!

As I regularly serve, now numbering over twenty foreign lands ranging from Africa to Oceania, and points in between; I grow in appreciation for resident missionaries (both indigenous and non) with whom I minister. They immerse themselves in culture and context. They take the time to discern the situation, build relationships and credibility, and sew lasting seeds for the gospel. They remain to cultivate spiritual fruit.

That however, is not the calling or primary function God has given an itinerant. Throughout Scripture, in both Old Testament and New, God employed traveling preachers and teachers to provide poignant impact through prophetic proclamation of His truth (reference II Chronicles 17 and III John, et. al.). Offering a fresh voice with a different perspective, there is something decisive about an out-of-towner declaring the gospel. (In fact, when I served as a local pastor, my people would hear an invited guest speaker then ask me, Why haven't you said that? (Thereby eliciting the proverbial polite pastoral smile and inaudible sigh.) Folks love a familiar song with a new voice.)

In his fine work, *Church Without Walls* (Navpress, 1992), author Jim Peterson speaks of the New Testament function of Apostolic ministry. Essentially, he argues for mobile sent ones to invigorate and augment local ministry. He states, Tracing the progress of God's people in the New Testament, we see how the apostolic and local efforts were inseparable. Each was dependent upon the other. One contemporary weakness is the belief that a single local fellowship can be self-sufficient. Fellowships that do not have ongoing input from people who minister on a broader-than-local level suffer spiritual myopia. (p. 81-82)

I am acutely aware of the necessity for local colleagues who know fully where lay the social quicksand. When I prepare to visit their country, they must have previously scouted the land. During my stay, my schedule (and safety) is in their hands. Upon departure, follow up and carry through with local people is their responsibility. Without them, my ministry would wither. Then again, without mine, maybe theirs would, too!

So, the next time you hear the word Playboy, picture me. It'll be a better image for us both.