

Not In Vain

“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. --Isaiah 55:11 NIV

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There is probably not one missionary who hasn't wondered whether his or her ministry has achieved anything for the glory of God. So much more for those whose ministry was cut short prematurely by death, illness or some other circumstance.

For years, former LAM president Dr. David Howard wondered about the ministry of his close friend, missionary Ernie Fowler, who was murdered by assailants in Colombia in 1966. Ernie had worked among Colombia's indigenous groups for over 30 years, and in particular his work with the Yukpa group ended tragically just after he began a third attempt to reach the tribe.

Dr. Howard compared the seemingly non-existent results of Ernie's death with the outpouring of response to the martyrdom of five missionaries in Ecuador a decade prior. That incident, which was publicized worldwide, continues to challenge missionaries today who give themselves to Christ's service in response to that story.



Both Ernie Fowler and Jim Elliot, one of the five missionaries martyred in Ecuador, were very close friends of Dave Howard. In fact, Jim Elliot was not only his best friend at the time but also his brother-in-law, having married Dr. Howard's sister, Elisabeth.

As recently as 1997, Dr. Howard reflected in an *Evangelist* article that, “While scores of people over the years have told me that the death of Jim Elliot (in Ecuador) was a definitive factor in their commitment to Christ and to His service, I am not aware of one person who has said the same because of Ernie's death.”

But, in December of last year those questions were answered. A young Colombia evangelist, Danny Sequeda, visited LAM's headquarters and later met with Dr. Howard. He had a remarkable story to relate.

At the age of 15, Danny committed himself to serving the Lord among Colombia's indigenous groups. One day he sensed the Lord saying the word “Yukpa,” to him. Having no idea what that meant, he inquired of veteran missionary Carl Lehman what it might mean. Imagine his surprise when he discovered that not only did Carl know the word, but he had worked among the Yukpa Indians 30 years ago. Not only that, it was in Carl's house that Ernie and his family were living when Ernie was murdered by a group of marauding guerrillas.

Seeking guidance, Danny followed Carl's instructions to seek out Jesús Perez, the son of a friend of the Fowlers during their residence near the Indian group. Carl knew that Jesús could provide

Danny with up-to-date information on the Yukpa tribe and their spiritual situation. Jesús now lives in Codazzi, a town of 60,000 people, yet Danny found him within twenty minutes of arriving in his city.

Continually inspired by God's miraculous leading, Danny began the grueling weeklong trip to the Yukpa village, guided for the first few days by Jesús. After hiking by himself through the rugged mountains for three days, Danny spotted the Yukpa village across a valley. In his excitement, he began to run toward the village only to trip and end up sprawling on the ground.

Searching for what had interrupted his dash, he cleared away grass and dirt and found, to his amazement, that he had tripped over a small marker that had been placed on the spot where Ernie had been killed. Dr. Howard's 14 year-old son, David, who was visiting the Fowler family when the tragedy occurred, had helped to bury Ernie in the rocky soil high in the mountains.

So deeply moved by his discovery and God's obvious hand in leading him to this point, Danny wept profusely and cried out "Don Ernesto! Your death has not been in vain. God has called me and led me here to carry on the work that you were unable to finish over 30 years ago."



Now, four years later, Danny has renovated the house that Carl Lehman built and is using it as a school for the Indians. Hundreds of Yukpa Indians are worshiping in a church that God has established through his efforts in the community.

Dr. Howard said that he has been overwhelmed and deeply moved by Danny's story. In relating the events of recent years, Danny told Dr. Howard that he had read the 1997 articles in the *Evangelist*, especially where Dr. Howard related that he was not aware of anyone who had come to the Lord because of Ernie's death. Danny told him, "I didn't come to know the Lord because of that, but I was called of God to serve Him and am now there. So, you can know that what is happening today is the direct fruit of Ernie's death."

Danny confirmed to Dr. Howard that he plans on staying in the indigenous work for the rest of his life. "This is where God has called me and opened the door," Danny explained.

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