

## Language Learning

### WHY?

Jesus came from heaven and became one of us...in the incarnation we see what our life and role of missionary should be. He spoke their language, ate their food, got His feet dirty walking with them on dusty roads, etc.

Language is the key into a culture. And we must understand the culture of those we minister to if we are going to be able to share the gospel with them in a way that they can fully understand and respond to faithfully.

One of my mentors in mission told me that missionaries live in between two cultures; home culture and host culture. That is a painful place to be, because it means that we do not completely fit in either place. But it does give us the ability to enter one of the most important roles that we play as missionaries. We are often asked to speak truth into situations from our outsider perspective. There are things that we see in our host culture and in our home culture that other might not see. God asks us to speak truth into those.

Missionaries have often been perceived or ministered from an attitude of superiority. Modernism, technology, colonialism, and much more often puts the missionary in a place of power. Learning a language puts the missionary in a place of weakness and need. Weakness is a key place that Christ works through His people. If we are not willing to look and sound foolish, we will not be viewed as people who want to enter life with people there.

Missionaries who do not learn the language are essentially saying to the people of the respondent culture, "Before you can learn the ways of God from me, you must learn my language—and more, you must learn it well" (Hesselgrave 1991, 354).

Posture of learner – people help someone who is wanting to learn/value their language and culture/builds relationship and trust.

Charles Kraft said, "Indeed, if we do no more than engage in the process of language learning we will have communicated more of the essentials of the Gospel than if we devote ourselves to any other task I can think of" (Brewster 1984, 1).

## HOW?

Language learning is hard for most of us. For some it makes them think that they CANNOT serve as missionaries! That is a lie Satan, the deceiver, likes to throw at us.

If God calls you to serve in another language group, you can trust that He will help you have what you need to master the language to the ability that you need for your part in His work in that place. This does not remove the difficulty, but He gives the grace to persevere. I prayed for the gift of tongues of Kinyarwanda when I came back.

There is an important concept from Dallas Willard called **VIM**. Willard says that for any change to happen there must be three things.

Vision  
Intention  
Means

The problem is that most people come up with an idea for a kind of change they want to see or experience like learning a language and then immediately jump to finding the means for bringing that change. If we have a strong vision and intend to do whatever it takes to reach the vision, then with the right means, we will move towards and reach the vision.

**Vision:** to know Kinyarwanda well enough to disciple people in Rwanda

**Intention:** Set boundaries; first year was only about learning language. People asked me to preach, share my testimony, etc...I said "No, not until I can do it in Kinyarwanda. Others who started "ministry" at the beginning never became fluent.

**Means:** MTI (Mission Training International) – COMPASS program is an amazing and crucial way to learn how to learn a language.

What are some thoughts or feelings you have related to learning another language?

### Books:

*Language Learning IS Communication IS Ministry* by E. Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster.

*Language Acquisition Made Practical (LAMP)* by E. Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster.

*Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* by David J. Hesselgrave.