



FIRST-PERSON: Not forgotten

By David Sills
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“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--One of the difficulties of serving as a missionary is battling the oppressive feeling that you are laboring alone, buried in obscurity and forgotten. The struggle is harder when you are serving in a country where the general population doesn't even want you to be there. It grows heavier when friends from home forget to write. The devil tempts you to believe that they have also forgotten to pray and that you are making no difference.



David Sills

Internet, e-mail, Skype, and webcams make it much easier to keep in touch today. I remember when you had to schedule international calls in advance. You would then sit in a room like the department of motor vehicles waiting for them to call your name. When you finally heard something that sounded vaguely like your name, that was your cue that your call had finally gone through. You would bound to a numbered phone booth to shout back and forth through static and echoes for as long as you could afford.

Mail was worse. The long walk everyday to an empty mailbox was disheartening to say the least. In fact, it gets depressing from the first day. When notice of a package arrived saying that a package was waiting for you, it was a great day. Typically, you would spend the next day (or two) waiting in lines at the post office to pay duty on your package before you could receive it. Of course, you had to open it in the presence of the postal officials whose job it was to assign value of the contents and charge you. Imagine how depressing it was for some friends who went through the whole process only to get a box of toothbrushes. Another friend received Mexican food. That would have been great except that the postal staff had pilfered what was still edible and only what was spoiled remained.

As noted already, Internet, e-mail, Skype, and webcams make it much easier to keep in touch today. However, the ease of communication makes it that much more painful when so few stay in touch. Imagine how it was for missionaries in the day when mail came every few months, if at all, and there was no telephone, no short-term mission trips from the home church and few furloughs.

These missionaries were very much on my mind while I was in Nigeria recently. I was reading there about one of our Southern Baptist missionaries who had every reason to be discouraged. In a 1917 book called “The Romance of Missions in Nigeria,” S.G.

Pinnock recounts the experience of A.D. Phillips who began his service in 1855. His wife had died soon after they arrived. During one period of persecution, for some reason the enemies of the Gospel left Phillips alone, although they had driven all the other missionaries out of town and destroyed many mission properties. Phillips was a lonely man during this difficult season but received some encouragement from a grateful old man he had led to the Lord.

Listen to what Pinnock says about that occasion when Phillips went to visit the sick old man, “On entering the house the man told him that he was very ill and about to die. In broken English and with many pauses, the old man said, 'I soon die; but I go to heaven! When I reach the gates, angels carry me to the Lord Jesus. When I thank Jesus for His mercy, I come back to the gate and wait there for you. When you come, I not allow the angels to carry you; these arms carry you to the Lord Jesus, and I tell Him, this is the missionary that preached the gospel to this poor sinner.’”

We may sometimes feel our efforts go unrewarded. We may feel discouraged and wonder whether we are making any difference at all. The devil will tell us our friends have moved on in life and do not remember us. We may labor on buried in seeming obscurity. Whatever else happens, we may know for certain that we are not forgotten. The Lord sees our labors and hears our prayers. Look over your shoulder and count the lives He has changed through you. “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” The Lord never forgets you. We remember you, too, and we pray for you. You missionaries are our heroes.

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