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## Portraits of the Unstoppable Church, Part 2

Missions Conference 2005

George Ninan, Pastor Jeff Petersen

Interviews with LBC Missionaries

(Video clip: *One Deed*)

### **Worship Leaders:**

The greatest thing to happen in all of human history happened on a cross and in a tomb, where Jesus died to pay for our sin but then rose again to conquer death and bring eternal life. The fact that we can be forgiven and brought back into a right relationship with God is the greatest news the world has ever heard.

But 2000 years after Jesus gave this great gift, millions upon millions throughout the world, have still never heard. History's greatest tragedy would be for history's greatest news to be history's greatest secret.

Jesus had a plan to get this great news to all people. Just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus met with His followers and said to them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth."

A couple of months ago we began a study of the Book of Acts together here at Lincoln Berean. We began by being reminded of those marching orders—the plan by which history's greatest news would go out—first through those early disciples and still today through you and me.

As we continue to study the Book of Acts, we continue to see how God began to build His Church. And no matter what people did to try and stop it, the Church of Jesus Christ was *and is* simply unstoppable.

Last weekend and this weekend we're sharing with you stories of how the truth in Scripture is being lived out in the world. Together we're seeking to get just a glimpse of the amazing work God is doing, as He builds His church in all the earth. So let's get going with some more portraits of the unstoppable Church.

### **Testimony: Hannah Helmink**

*"My name is Hannah Helmink, and in the past two years I have taken three trips to Lima, Peru with SportReach. In Peru we put on sports clinics for the children and adults.*

*Max came with a group of friends and they sat at the back of the crowd while the gospel was shared. Later we invited the crowd to another clinic, and much to our surprise, Max showed up. And he continued to come. Max was raised by his grandmother. He longed to have a relationship with his father, so he searched for him. He found his father but did not find the love and acceptance he was hoping for. As Max tried to find something that would fulfill him, he joined a violent gang.*

*The last day of camp, our team leader, Mark Geist, shared with Max that he had a heavenly father who loved him and who would never desert him. As Max told his story to Mark, this young man who had shown no emotion broke down, and that day Max accepted*

*Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Max has been involved in the church and working with youth ever since. This is just another portrait of the unstoppable Church.”*

**Testimony: Chris Ebbers:**

*“My name is Chris Ebbers, and for about the past three years I have had the privilege of serving the Lord in Japan. I have seen the reality of the unstoppable Church in the life of Jun, who is a friend and missionary in Japan.*

*Like most Japanese, Jun came from a Buddhist background. When Jun was a freshman in college, he met a missionary on campus that was handing out gospel tracts. Though he was skeptical at first, Jun took the tract and met with the missionary later. Through this friendship of the missionary and regular gatherings, the Bible and testimony of Jesus Christ was shared with Jun for the first time in his life. Jun hungered for something to take away the pain and loneliness in his life, yet he found nothing. However, it was through God using the love of this missionary and his family and friends that God changed Jun's heart. Through the cross of Christ, Jun found what he longed for: acceptance and love!*

*Now through Jun's changed life and years growing in who he is in Christ Jesus, he is serving and sacrificing his life to love the Japanese as a full-time missionary in Fukuoka, Japan. This is just another portrait of the unstoppable Church.*

**Testimony: Sarah Butler:**

*“My name is Sarah Butler, and for the past 15 months, like Chris, I have had the privilege of serving the Lord in Shizouka, Japan. I have seen the reality of the unstoppable Church in the life of my Japanese roommate Nozomi. She was an incredible roommate and we were good friends, but she sent signals that she was closed off to Jesus and the Bible.*

*However, one night a breakthrough took place and God allowed me to see deeper into the window of her soul. After sharing with her what I felt God was telling me to do in the future, she got really quiet. Then she asked, with tears falling down her cheeks, “What do you mean when you say that God talks to you? Until I met Christians a few years ago, I had never met anyone that thought so differently than me. And it's hard for me because you are my friend, and I want to be able to understand my friend.”*

*I replied by sharing how God talks to me in many different ways. She was then able to say, “Oh, that's not so weird. I think I can kind of understand that now.” I realized that inwardly she had been observing Christians closely and thinking deeply about Christ for a long time. As her heart began to soften, we began to talk more openly about life, Jesus, and the Bible. That is just another portrait of the unstoppable Church.”*

**Testimony: Craig and Jamey Cihak**

*“Our names are Craig and Jamey Cihak, and for the past five years we have had the privilege of serving the Lord with the Navigators International Student Ministry. We have seen the reality of the unstoppable Church in the life of Joe and his family at the University of Alabama.*

*Joe and his sister, PhD students from China, started attending our weekly Bible discussions a year ago. This summer Joe's sister trusted Christ and was baptized. We*

*helped them move to a new apartment and also helped their family when the mom needed some minor surgery on her throat. A Christian surgeon in town did the work for free!*

*We have never seen such a huge, glowing, smile as the one on Joe's face as he told us last month that he had decided to trust Christ, too!*

*We had Joe and his mom over for dinner at our house and Jamey discovered that John's mom had recently prayed to receive Christ, much to the surprise of her own son! She said she wanted to get baptized right away. The next morning both Joe and his mom were baptized in our church. Now the mom has gone back to her country and is eager to get involved with Christians there. That is just another portrait of the unstoppable Church."*

(Video clip: *Treasures Among The Trash—Kenya*)

### **Testimony: Matt Lovelace**

*"My name is Matt Lovelace, and for the past two years I have had the privilege of serving the Lord in Kenya. I have seen the reality of the unstoppable Church in the life of my Kenyan friends Stanley and Sylvia.*

*Stanley is a pastor at a local church in Nairobi, and his wife Sylvia does clerical work to help support their life and the ministries. I witnessed many incidents where their faith could have been stretched and exhausted, were they not so dependent upon the Lord for provision. I witnessed each lose family members and friends to accidents, disease and violence. They daily survive on little income, endure threats and crime, have experienced major health complications, and are always under a cloud of medical debt. But never have I heard them questioning the goodness of our Lord.*

*Whether I was many miles away from them while teaching in western Kenya, or living under their roof, God's love was always abundant within their household. God demonstrated to me how His servants still enjoy true happiness in the Lord, despite a lack of material goods and health. Stanley and Sylvia use their platform of faith to declare the message of the gospel to every community they travel to and every family they touch with their lives. That is just another portrait of the unstoppable Church."*

### **Worship Leaders:**

Africa today is a place where there is much tragedy—with poverty, tribal war, AIDS, and even religious persecution. And yet, God breaks through the ugliness of this world to show the beauty of His love. John and Gala are LBC missionaries to Cameroon. They share how tragedy has presented opportunity. A war in Nigeria a couple of years ago led to thousands of Fulani Muslim refugees pouring across the border into Cameroon. Displaced families, including thousands of children, were left with nothing.

John and Gala knew they had to do something. They began giving out food, blankets, sleeping mats, and the gospel. And through the love of Christians, several of these families turned from Islam to the living Lord Jesus Christ.

For several years they stayed in Cameroon and they grew in their faith. Now, today, they are back in Nigeria, following Christ and sharing His great news with the Muslims of that land.

This Fall in Ecuador, one of our newest Berean missionaries, Patty had the opportunity to share Christ with the lady who was teaching her Spanish. Lorena trusted Christ and began to attend church with Rick and Patty.

In Venezuela, the government is trying to stop missions. But God is still at work. Berean missionaries Doug and Sharon Hefft recently wrote to tell us that 100 of the previously unreached Maco people had recently been baptized. Not only are Maco people coming to Christ and growing in their faith, they're sharing the Good News. A group of them recently went down river to another village where they shared the gospel, and over 20 people in that village put their trust in Christ.

One of the reasons people are coming to Christ in South America today is because followers of Christ from the U.S. were willing to pay any price to see the gospel go forward among those tribes. Fifty years ago a group of American missionaries paid the ultimate price as they were murdered by the very ones they were trying to reach. But instead of giving up and going home, the wives, sons, and daughters of those martyred missionaries stayed in South America and kept trying to share God's love—even with those who robbed them of the ones they loved. And today a story of the unstoppable Church and the amazing love of God has been written in the jungle down there and it is impacting hearts all the way back here.

(Video clip: *Beyond the Gates of Splendor*)

Tonight at 6:00 we invite you to come back to hear the rest of the story, as we have a LifeGroup/ All-church Night Out to view and discuss the film, *Beyond the Gates of Splendor*. (Parents, please note: The movie *Beyond the Gates* is rated PG-13, and each family should decide for themselves whether or not the film would be appropriate for their children.)

Another place where God is today doing amazing things to build His unstoppable Church is in India. This is a place where we as a church have been called of God to really focus our efforts, as He has opened a historic opportunity to reach the world's most spiritually needy land.

This morning as we view portraits of the unstoppable Church, we want to take some extended time to update the picture regarding what God is doing in India.

(Video clip: *India: The Spiritual Contrast*)

**Pastor Jeff Petersen:**

Fifteen years ago my wife Cynci and I began to hear about the vast needs in India. We also began to hear about God going forth in India to share the gospel in pretty amazing ways. We wanted to become involved. Way back, we thought about trying to go to India, but God didn't open a door. So we began to pray, we began to give, and we just began to wait upon the Lord as we continued to serve Him faithfully where we were.

Some years after that, we found out that our Berean Fellowship had been supporting a small work in India, and that opened up a door for me to actually go to India on my first trip. We were also working in partnership with the *Jesus* Film Ministry, which is a division of Campus Crusade for Christ, to help take the gospel to places in India where they have never heard.

Through all those things, our heart for what God is doing in that place just continued to grow. At the same time, other pastors in the Berean Fellowship began to have a deep sense of burden for India. So when God closed the door of an opportunity for us, there were several of us who felt like

we needed to continue to seek Him to give us a way to be used by God in that country. For about two years we waited on the Lord and we prayed and we looked for opportunities to support a ministry in India. We felt like probably the best thing we could do was to simply rally the churches in America to be involved in supporting a work. Yet God just seemed to continue to close the door and close the door and close the door.

In March of 2001, I went to India with great hope, as we were taking one last shot at meeting with an organization which we might be able to support. Very quickly on that trip it became clear that that situation was not going to work either and I wondered, *God, what in the world are You doing?* It was a couple of days later that I had gone to the city of Bangalore and I stood at the headquarters of India Campus Crusade. I stood out on the grass under a tree with a man by the name of George Ninan, who is the director of Campus Crusade's Ministry for all of South Asia. There he began to share with me what God had been doing to take the gospel to village after village after village. But he had a deep burden that there was this need for follow-up church planting to work in the hearts of those people who were responding. I shared with him how we had this burden on the other side of the earth to be involved in church planting in India, but we lacked the ability and infrastructure from the other side of the globe to do so. Right there under that tree, God birthed a partnership.

Several months later that summer, George Cheek, George Ninan and I met in Colorado to write up together a formal partnership agreement between the Berean Fellowship of Churches and India Campus Crusade. It was a couple years after that, that God launched the 300in3 Initiative, where we are seeking to bring 300 church planters into our program in a period of just three years.

You have known that God has been at work in this, but let me tell you the latest. There are now 13 Berean Fellowship districts in India. There are 220 men involved, 107 pastors who are serving on the field in those 13 districts, which are located across the country. There are an additional 113 men who are in six training academies in five states all across India. Eighty-three new churches have been formally organized with over 1,600 people involved. An additional 385 small cell group home fellowships have also been started with an additional over 2,700 people involved.

What started just as a dream and a burden, God has taken and launched into a movement. When I found out in June that George Ninan was going to be in the United States in November, I knew we just had to have him come here and share with us a little bit more about what God is doing. So this morning it is my privilege to invite my friend George to share with us a little bit more about what's happening, as he has served for over 30 years watching God build His unstoppable Church in India.

### **George Ninan:**

Thank you for allowing me to be in your church this morning. I understand from Pastor Petersen that you are going through a study of the Book of Acts. I remember several years back when I came to Christ from a Hinduistic background, the person who was discipling me decided to take me through the basics of Christianity. And I was particularly thrilled when I went through the Acts of the Apostles. I still remember the second chapter of Acts, verse 47, the words said: "... and the Lord was adding daily to the church."

I went back and asked this person, "This is wonderful! Will we be able to see it again?" And his answer was "Sure, maybe you are going to see greater things." And he said "The Lord is the same, the Spirit is willing to work; but what we need to make sure is..." Then he led me from verse 42 to 47, where it talked about a church that was devoted to the Word of God, a church that was devoted to prayer, a church that was unified in life and its focus, and so on. He told me that if you and I are willing to build up churches like that, we will see *greater* things.

I cannot say that we are building churches exactly like that, but even as we have this great desire to see God's kingdom growing, God gave us several opportunities. Today I am working in India and almost every month I get to hear great stories about how God is building His Church.

A few months back I was told about the story of a young Hindu man. He came to Christ from a Hindu family. His father had left the home for another woman and he started growing up in a lot of anger and frustration. When he went to the University he came to know the Lord personally and he felt that God was calling him into ministry, so he committed his life to serve in missions. When he went back to his home they could not accept it; they rejected it. All the hope was on this young man to get a job and take care of the family and take them out of their financial struggles. They were angry because they were going to be social outcasts. They cursed him, particularly his mother. She said, "You let me down after all the sacrifice I made for you."

Then as he was telling his story, he said the next morning the mother woke him up and said, "My son, forgive me for all that I said. You should live in peace to do what Jesus has called you to do." He asked his mother, "Mother, what happened?" She said, "A miracle happened last night when I was sleeping. I don't know whether it was reality or whether it was a vision, but a person appeared to me and introduced Himself as Jesus—the God that you are worshipping—and just told me, 'I have called your son to serve Me; you must release him.' So today you are free to go."

He went to a village that had never heard about Jesus Christ. He had problems; several times he wanted to run away from there because he did not even know how to preach properly. But God kept strengthening him in a unique way.

One day there was a demon-possessed woman and she threw a stone at him and started beating him. In his fear and frustration he just raised his hands and told that woman in front of the whole village, "In the name of Jesus I am casting the demon out from you." Immediately the woman fell down there and she was healed. There were people who started gathering around him—people who were willing to listen to him for the first time. But this boy was confused. The next day he decided to run away from there. His thinking was, *I don't know what happened; I am not a specialist in casting demons out.*

Somebody asked him, "Why are you running away?" He said, "Tomorrow more sick people are going to come. Demon-possessed people are going to come and they are going to ask me to do that, and I don't know what will happen." And he literally ran away from there....almost. But he went to the village bus stop and was waiting for the bus when another miracle happened. On the same bus that he was going to catch, his mother and brother stepped down. They told him his brother said, "I was touched by God last week. Your God appeared to me and told me that I need to come to this village and work with you. So I have come here." Both of them decided to work together.

Here was a boy that was scared, weak, and not trained properly. But in all his fear, he was still obedient and God used him. Today he is pastoring a church where more than 1,500 people are worshipping. The church cannot be stopped—it is *His Church*.

A few months back I was in Kashmir, not to enjoy the beauty of the place, but when we landed in Sri Lanka the organizers of the meeting drove me about four to five hours into a mountain site and they said that is the safest place for Christians to do anything away from all the tourists there. It was a privilege for me to minister to about 80 people who had gathered there. Some of the women were still in the burka—you know, the black cover they wear from the Muslim background.

One man, let's call him "Mohammed," came and shared his story with me. He started his life a devout Muslim. He became an informant for the Indian Army about the Al Qaeda and other terrorists that are operating at the Indian-Afghan border. One day the Al Qaeda caught him and took him to a remote place—their camp. They tried questioning him, and he kept denying that he had anything to do with the army. He showed me his hands. All the fingernails they pulled out trying to make him tell the truth. But he kept on denying that he had anything to do with the army. He started saying that if they were doing it in the name of Allah, he didn't know whether he wanted to serve that god. He started praying that God, if there is a real God, would release him from there. Then a miracle happened: that whole communication fell apart. They were waiting to hear from their leaders as to whether they could execute him or not. Because they were not able to contact him, they let him free.

He told me that three days later, with all the anger of what they did to him, he came back with a group of commandos and he personally killed the guy who pulled his fingernails from his hands. He said, "There was a moment of exultation, but when I climbed down the hill I felt empty and drained. Why did I kill him? I had my revenge; I should have been happy." But then he said, "I had my questions."

He started his search. He went from one person and then to another. Then he went to the Imam, and while he was waiting for the Imam, on the wall on the room he saw a picture of a man he had never met before. He asked the Imam, "Who is he?" The Imam told him, "That is the prophet Jesus." So he asked this man, "Why are they keeping his picture there? Who is he?" And he said, "The prophet Jesus says He is the way to God." Then he asked him, "If He is the way to God, why are you not following Him?" He said, "I don't know, okay; I don't know." But he said, "He is the way." And he had more questions. He was more confused.

Then he went to Delhi and he went to a Hindu friend and asked the same question, "How can I get peace and fulfillment in my life?" He said, "Go to that church." He went and met with the Roman Catholic priest there. The priest said, "I am too busy; I won't be able to explain everything right now. You go back to Kashmir; I'll give you an address." He gave him the address of one of the priests who was working very closely with some of my friends. Finally, he became a Christian.

I see Hindus and Muslims coming to Christ. Some of them have never heard the gospel, but I often wonder, *How much did the Imam know?* He knew something about the man he called prophet Jesus, without knowing that He is God. But he did not know enough. What about that Hindu man—was he a secret believer? I don't know, but I believe that maybe he knew a little as to the power of Jesus. But maybe he never knew enough to accept Him as his personal Savior and Lord.

There are thousands and thousands of people all around the world, especially in the region I come from, who are waiting for someone to go and tell them. I stand here with a grateful heart to you—to the church here—who are obedient to listen to the call of Christ to reach out and help thousands of people come to Christ. There are difficulties; there are dangers ahead. But His Church can never be stopped! Thank you, may God bless you.

(Drama: "William Carey")

### **Worship Leaders:**

One of the hard things about looking at portraits of the unstoppable Church is that the picture is often filled with hardship, even suffering, for Christ and His good news. Suffering and sacrifice are pretty foreign concepts to most of us, and yet they have always been a part of the fabric used to

weave the unstoppable Church. Remember, the Church began with suffering—not yours or mine—but Jesus’ suffering. He sacrificed *all* that we might be forgiven.

Throughout the foyers of our church are pictures of people whose lives have been transformed because others have been faithful to be witnesses. They are all a part of the story of the unstoppable Church. But...so are *we*. Perhaps you have noticed there are not only pictures placed around the church, but also mirrors. Those mirrors are there to remind each of us that *we* are a part of the unstoppable Church. Our salvation is another beautiful picture of His love.

But as we look in the mirror, let us not forget that our story isn’t finished. God not only wants to love and save us, He wants to use us—to share with others.

But maybe you sit there today and you think, *No, not me; I could never do what William Carey did. I couldn’t even go overseas short term.* Maybe so. But is the point of our time together that we should all become missionaries? No, the point is that God loved *you* so much that He gave His very life that you might be adopted as His child. And that He also wants the person across the street to know His love and forgiveness. He wants the millions who have never even heard His name to have a chance to hear. And He has called us to be His witnesses—right here in Lincoln and all the way to the ends of the earth.

How will that look in your life? How should you personally go about being His witness? I have no idea—but He does! Remember, He made you for His good pleasure and His great purposes.

(Video clip: *Sanctity of Life*)

Friends, God is not out to make your life miserable. He made you. He loves you. And He knows exactly how His design of you fits with His plan to build His unstoppable Church. You don’t have to be William Carey or even the people from Lincoln Berean that you’ve heard from today. But you do need to be available. You and I need to say yes to God. We need to tell Him that we love Him and that we trust Him. For we cannot be used by God until we are willing to submit ourselves to His loving hands, recognizing that not only did He form us in our mother’s womb, but He wants to use the events of life to shape us into a beautiful vessel He can use in amazing ways.

(Video clip: *The Potter’s Wheel*)

You see, it’s when we choose to really give ourselves fully to God that He can mold us and shape us in accordance with His plan for us. And that simply starts with us saying, “Here am I, Lord. I know You love me, so I choose to trust You. Take my life and shape it... mold it... and use it... however You desire.”

And whether He wants to use you to love and be His witness to moms in your neighborhood, to business people in our community, to the needy in our city, or to the lost in a far corner of the world—that’s up to Him. But whatever He wants, we know it will not only be for His glory, it will also ultimately be for our good.

As the quote from Jim Elliot on the video at the beginning of the hour said, “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” Again, it starts with us saying yes to God.

(Video clip: *Lordship*)

Jesus gave everything: He let people beat Him, mock Him and crucify Him. And He did it because He loves you, and me, and people all over Lincoln, and all around the world. In Acts, just before He went back to heaven, Jesus gave us our marching orders. He told us to be His witnesses in the power of His Spirit.

Today, and every day, we have a choice. Will we live for ourselves? Or will we live for the One who loved us and gave Himself for us?

Will we *spend* our lives on our own desires, or will we *invest* our lives into something that really matters—something that will truly last: *people*—people hearing the Good News and sharing with us in the love and grace of God.

In the Book of Acts, through church history, and across the world today, God is building His unstoppable Church. He is painting millions of beautiful pictures as He transforms millions of needy people. You and I are a part of the story.

Will our chapter be only about what God did for us? Or will stories be told of what He also did through us? As we offer ourselves to Him, He takes us—even us—and He does the amazing. What a privilege! What a God!

As we prepare to worship Him together one more time, let's take a minute just to talk to Him. In the silence of your own heart, tell Him about your fears, your doubts. Ask Him to strengthen your faith. Ask Him to direct your steps. Offer yourself to Him to be used by Him as a part of His unstoppable Church. Take just a moment and silently share your heart with the One who created you and loves you more than any other.

(Video clip: *We Speak To The Nations*)

Thank you for joining us on a journey around the world and toward the heart of God. He is so good and so worthy of our lives! We hope that in these weeks you have been reminded of how amazing are His works and how great is His love. And we hope we will all leave knowing that even you and I can be used by God to help reach the world.

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