

Language Lessons

There's a children's Bible that presents the Acts chapter two story pretty well. It specifies Jesus' name baptism, and even follows up, saying that people after that were baptized in Jesus' name. The only problem is that when the Holy Ghost falls on the Day of Pentecost, the book's authors get it wrong. They present tongues as the means of spreading the gospel to everyone.

Ever wish that were true? No, really, don't you wish it were that easy to prepare for missionary service?

Some early Pentecostal missionaries left Azusa Street speaking in tongues and just assumed that the purpose of tongues was to speed up their missions efforts. Oh, imagine if that had worked! Unfortunately for them, it didn't. It's this real-life practical stuff like language lessons that many people don't realize has to happen behind the scenes. By popular estimates, it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in a new language. Whether or not we ever become experts, learning to communicate in another language takes a lot of hard work.

But there is just something about hearing your own language. When a missionary communicates in the local language, it has the powerful effect of eliminating a layer of distance. This is true especially when he or she ministers.

Thank God for interpreters! We've all relied on them at some time or another. But what freedom, when you can speak directly with the people God has sent you to!

I remember when I was first on the field in El Salvador, learning to preach in Spanish. I taught 14 hours of Bible school and we had services on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and two on Sunday. To do it all, I had to get up at 2 and 3 AM to translate my notes from English into Spanish. It took time and effort. But it was worth it! Over time, it came more easily. Today, I love preaching in Spanish! In fact, I would just as soon preach in Spanish as English.

So many of you have overcome the language barrier by having to read your first sermons. I've spoken with many of you about the challenges and rewards of language study. Some of the languages you have learned are so very different from the Spanish I'm used to, but you have persevered. My hat is off to you! You may not hear this often, but thank you for making the effort to learn another language! I honor you for it. Keep learning, keep growing, keep reaching!

To those of you who are facing the challenging task of learning the language of your field right now, I want to encourage you not to grow weary in well doing. Don't give up and don't stop. If you get overwhelmed, take a breath and take it to Jesus. It can be exhausting and frustrating at times, but you will reap the benefit if you faint not! Pay the price, and watch how God opens more doors for your ministry.