

"Look to the fields. . ."

SHAD WILLIAMS EVANGELISTIC ASSOCIATION

"We Go To Them"

June 2025

1975 - 2025: A FIFTY-YEAR JOURNEY A BRIEF STORY OF HOW IT ALL BEGAN



Shad and Sheila - June 1975

This fifty-year journey of faith and international ministry began in June 1975 in the remote city of Mbeya, Tanzania in East Africa. Sheila and I were there as part of a mission team from our church. When we flew out of Memphis, we had no idea that our lives were about to change forever. While standing out on a hillside one afternoon on the Mbeya Baptist Hospital compound, I heard God speak clearly in my heart, "Go home, resign your church position, and go into international evangelism". Needless to say, I did not expect that encounter that day, or that message. But I knew God had spoken, and I knew I had to obey. I had no idea at that time what His instructions would involve or where they would lead. But, after fifty years of following them, I can say it has been quite a journey - one that has taken Sheila and me farther, in every way, than we could have ever imagined in our wildest dreams. We celebrated Sheila's birthday during that trip, at the Shepherd Hotel in Cairo, Egypt on our way home. She was turning 27, and I was turning 29 in September. We had been married nine years.

First, let me back up a little. When Sheila and I met in October 1966, the thought of living for God or serving Him had never occurred to either of us. She was a freshman at Rhodes University (Memphis) and was at a fraternity dance, for which my band was playing. We had our first date a month later and were married on April 2, 1967. By then, Sheila had already dropped out of school to join me in my pursuit of a career in the music business. She was raised going to church, and I was not, but neither of us had a relationship with God. Through the influence of her mom, and the faithful witness of her Pastor, Don J. Milam (Park Ave Baptist Church, Memphis), we were both saved in July 1968. To put it simply - Jesus changed EVERYTHING. I quit the music business immediately and surrendered to the call of God to serve him by spending my life telling people about Jesus.

In the beginning, I did not know how to preach the Gospel. But I began writing new songs to sing about Jesus, and I did know how to share my testimony of what He had done for me. For the next five years, while attending Bible college in Memphis and Union University (Jackson, TN), Sheila and I traveled around the country sharing Jesus in a multitude of various venues. We saw thousands of people experience the same transformation that had taken place in us. Following graduation in May 1973, I joined the staff of East Park Baptist Church in Memphis as Minister to Youth. Our "youth program" was just to train them in evangelism and then take them to the streets to do it. It was an aggressive outreach program which caught the attention of the International Mission Board and resulted in an invitation to our church to conduct an evangelistic mission trip to Tanzania and Kenya, working with Baptist missionaries in both countries.

Now back to that hillside in Mbeya. After hearing that unexpected command from God, I kept it in my heart for a day or so. Then I finally asked Sheila, "Honey, do you by any chance think that God might be telling us something?" She said, "Yes, I do. I believe we are to resign the church and go into international ministry." If there was a shred of doubt before, it was certainly gone now! But, the big question was - HOW?

We returned home to a church that loved us and to a dynamic ministry that was seeing people come to Jesus every week. For two years we could not have been any happier or felt any more fulfilled and gratified. However, in the midst of this very fruitful ministry, a strange "discontentment" began to settle in upon us. Yes, we were seeing great things happen, but that did not change the fact that God had spoken and was leading us in a different direction. But, just HOW does a person go into international ministry? We did not know anyone outside the US. We had no organization, no experience, and certainly no money! For a year we prayed, continued to serve at the church, continued to see people saved, and continued to seek the mind of God.

In July 1976, I was asked to attend a conference in Ridgecrest NC. While there, I went out early one morning to pray. As I was praying, I was turning pages in my little New Testament, and it opened, seemingly at random, to Romans 9. As I looked down, my eyes were drawn to verse 17, in which God was speaking to Pharaoh. But, when I read it, it was not to Pharaoh, it was to ME. The Holy Spirit took the words and drove them into my heart, and once again, I knew beyond a doubt that God had

spoken. It said, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." At that moment I turned and looked behind me at a pavilion just up a little hill. There was an elderly couple sitting there together, praying. The Holy Spirit prompted me, "Go tell them what I just told you." So, I went and sat down across from them. I waited until they finished praying and then I said, "Excuse me, but I believe God wants me to share with you what He just told me." So, I did, and when they heard it, they began to weep, and so did I, and the pavilion was suddenly filled with the overwhelming presence of God. I knew that what I had heard from Him a few minutes ago was sealed with His presence, and I left that pavilion with an unmistakable reconfirmation of His will for our life.

Ater returning home, I began to wake up at 4:30 every morning and would go to a park close to our house to pray. I knew what God had called us to do, but I still had no clue as to how to go about it. I was concerned about how we would survive financially with no salary, no support, and no one committed to help us. Day after day I walked through that park asking God the same questions - how do we survive, how do we get started, how, how, how? Then one morning the answer came, and God had it written in stone. As I walked through the park, the heel of my shoe caught on something on the ground. It was a large piece of concrete. I looked down at it and saw the word FAITH written in it! It was settled - the HOW was to trust GOD by faith in Him alone. He told me that morning to never ask anyone for help but to live by trusting in His unseen resources, for our personal needs and the needs of the ministry. We committed ourselves to His plan and have lived by it for 50 years, watching Him meet every need in His own miraculous way. After that encounter, it still took us another year to completely make the transition, but on September 4, 1977, it was complete. That was our last Sunday at the church, and on Monday morning we began a new life - a life of looking to God alone for EVERYTHING!

Our first international trip was to Hong Kong in December 1977. It was in conjunction with the International Mission Board. During our flight home, I was looking at a map in the flight magazine, and my attention was drawn to Brazil. As I looked at it, the Holy Spirit told me, "Your next trip will be to Brazil" On January 8th, I received a call from the Evangelism Director of the IMB. He was in Memphis and asked if we could meet him at his hotel. While there he asked, "Shad and Sheila, could you guys go to Brazil and do a project with the First Baptist Church of Niteroi? We said yes. Then he informed us we would have to pay our own way and would depart in 60 days. At that moment, we had no money and barely enough gas in the car to get back home. But we knew it was God's will to go. The short story is that God provided, and as a result of that trip, there were many other trips to Brazil in which thousands of people received Jesus. So, in the first six months, God had arranged for us to go on two international projects and had provided everything needed for both.

At first we did several projects with the IMB, but in time we began to make contacts of our own in various countries. Through those contacts over the years that followed, we began to develop and train indigenous teams in Brazil, the Philippines, India, and several countries in East and Central Africa. Over the years, Sheila and I have conducted over 190 international campaigns in which millions of people have received the Gospel. But, the real story, the **BIG** story, is what God has done through the national teams that we have had the joy to train, the dedicated evangelists who live there, and are sharing the Gospel day in and day out.

OVER 100 MILLION REACHED THUS FAR

As of May 31st of this year, the total number of people reached with the Gospel message through the ministry of SWEA/ WE GO TO THEM has now passed 100,000,000. There are currently 65 teams (over 250 people) working every day in eleven countries. They conduct an average of 2,500 evangelistic events per month. The number of people reached with the Gospel per day ranges from 75,000 to 80,000.

THE JOURNEY IS NOT OVER

Even after 50 years of international ministry, Sheila and I feel that the journey is far from over. There are still hundreds of millions of people who have not yet heard the Gospel. Our goal personally, and as a ministry team, is to see 1000 evangelists in the field reaching hundreds of thousands of people daily. We believe that God can do it, and that He WILL do it in our lifetime as we continue to trust HIM by faith, and as WE GO TO THEM. Yes, it has been, and continues to be, quite a journey. It began in Mbeya, Tanzania, and to the glory of God, I'm thrilled to share with you that there is today a WGTT team actively sharing the Gospel in that remote town where it all started 50 years ago. What a wonderful God we serve!!