



Ride for the reason

They are committed to the number zero.

Willem Lategan leans forward in his chair, one hand casually resting on his knee.

“Someday, people must search far and wide – and they must find zero unengaged, unreached people groups.”

Behind him, photos of outreaches to Lesotho and North Africa jump off the screen. Statistics of the number of unengaged people groups in the world without a portion of Scripture – approximately 1 671 – highlight the conviction in his voice.

“The Gospel must be proclaimed to every tribe and every tongue. Jesus’ last instruction, last words should be our greatest responsibility and our greatest priority. Our greatest task.”

Willem and his wife, Carin, pledged to make the great commission their biggest priority by adopting a language group in North Africa*. This group*, with a population of approximately 300 000, is spread between two countries in North Africa, of which one of the five subgroups has only half a percent of Christians – the other four subgroups have none. No one has yet attempted to translate the Bible or the Jesus film into their native tongue.

“These people have no living testimony of the Gospel. They have no idea what Jesus has done for them.”

The story before the story begins much earlier– at the Amsterdam 2000 congress for World evangelization where altogether 600 Christian leaders came together around 75 tables to discuss the issue of unreached, unengaged people groups.

Bruce Wilkinson, the founder of Walk Thru the Bible and Paul Eshelman for the Jesus film project, went out on a limb and challenged those present to adopt certain people groups as their responsibility.

This challenge resonated in their hearts as, one after another, these men of God raised their hands and their voices for the lost. The heavens rejoiced as tribe after tribe was adopted.

Soon, however, the exuberance gave way to silence as people stopped taking ownership. A deafening, discouraging silence. About half of the people groups were still unclaimed.

But at one table, table number 71, it started buzzing as God laid a daunting idea on their hearts. They, the leaders around this table, would take the rest.

Leaders of organisations such as Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru), Youth with a Mission, International Mission Board, Transworld Radio, Walk Thru the Bible, Wycliffe Bible Translators and The Seed Company committed to make Jesus' last words their greatest priority. Every year this table reunites to ensure that the goal is being reached.

Taking a sip of coffee, Willem settles back into his chair.

In October 2010, he and Carin attended a working group of Table 71 in Franschhoek, on behalf of Walk Thru the Bible South Africa. This took place prior to the Lausanne congress in Cape Town. Excitement colours his expression. "We sat around the table with these great leaders, and all we could do was watch and appreciate their passion."

At that moment, the leaders, including Samuel Chiang (currently CEO of The Seed Company) asked them the question that would change their lives forever.

"They asked us whether we would consider adopting a people group." With a shake of his head, he remembers all the emotions that confronted him at the time. Fear, uncertainty. Excitement.

"I went straight to the Lord to make sense of what just had happened and He gave me a scripture – Luke 12:21. Do not store up earthly wealth, but be rich in God."

How the two of them would have the capacity to do it, he did not know. But when God speaks, you obey.

In 2012, Willem and Carin had the opportunity to join a group in taking Bibles into North Africa.

Their daughter, Carissa (12 at the time), hated the idea of letting them go. Thinking back to that time, she smiles.

“I remember waking up one morning feeling completely at peace. I knew they had to go, but I also had the certainty that the Lord would keep them safe.”

Leaning over to pat her daughter on the knee, Carin smiles. “Well, then we no longer had an excuse not to go!”

So, loaded with Bibles wrapped up like presents, they flew to North Africa with ten others.

The group got through customs without much difficulty – except for Willem and another young man.

“Our bags just didn’t appear,” he remembers. “When they eventually came, security demanded to go through them.”

Knowing that the bags were filled with Bibles, the two men did the only thing they could. They prayed.

“The head of the security grabbed a children’s Bible with torn wrapping paper, on the cover exposing an illustrated picture of Jesus.”

After barking orders in his mother tongue to the other security men, he tossed the Bible back into the bag and told them they must leave.

“We instinctively knew that they could follow us to see what we were going to do with the Bibles.”

The group as a whole decided to diverge from their original plans and to avoid the city where they would have made their delivery.

They maintained a low profile for a couple of days to make sure “the coast was clear”, before travelling 400 km per train to another town where they delivered the Bibles to an underground church.

Willem traces their winding route on a map.

“After the delivery was made, I was relieved. When we got on the train to head back, a Muslim woman sat right across from Carin. The two of them started talking and before long they were exchanging recipes,” Willem says.

“At that time, I was talking to the Lord. And frankly, I felt confused. I asked Him why I had been caught and why we had to take such a long detour to deliver the Bibles.”

His answer? A reminder of Willem’s promise made in October 2010. “He reminded me of the people group we committed to reach and he told me to be attentive.”

At that exact moment Willem paid more careful attention to his wife’s conversation and heard the woman saying the name of a place* – an island just off the coast of North Africa.

“In that instant, I just knew. That was the tribe that we have to take ownership of. It dawned on me that we had taken this whole journey, this detour, to meet this woman.”

Back in their hotel room that night, Willem was on the internet doing research. Did the people group on that island have any believers? A mere half percent. Bibles in the native tongue? None. The Jesus film – not available for them.

With a heart filled with God-given conviction, he resigned his job at a leading Wealth & Investment company and started a new business – *RiG advisory services*. Neels Grobbelaar, a fellow director and shareholder, immediately agreed that the business be called RiG (Rich in God), just as Jesus commands in Luke 12:21.

Now that the business is up and running, they believe that it is time to make good on the rest of their promise.

“We are involved in discipleship and missionary outreaches in our business, in Lesotho and also overseas,” Carin says.

“Just like Acts 1:8 tells us to do,” Willem agrees. “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

“We not only believe in following the Lord, but also making fishers of men. We believe in business as a mission. Mission work cannot be done in the same way it always has been done – we will never finish the task if we do,” he laughs. “Mission work is not simply for missionaries in the church. It is for ordinary believers in the workplace as well.”

Now is the time for them to close the circle, to finish their task.

“During our trip to North Africa in 2012, we bought two woven rugs,” Carin says. “We placed them at the foot of our bed. Every morning when we step onto those rugs, we pray for the people.”

“This tribe is a difficult one,” Willem says. “One of those that no one wanted to take ownership of, one that was left after everyone chose. It’s a place where leaving in one piece is not guaranteed.”

The task ahead of them is big. With no Bible in their own language and no Jesus film, they have to start from scratch.

Firstly they want to make contact with a Christians on the island and partner with him or her to translate the Gospel of Luke. The translation will then serve as the soundtrack for the Jesus film.

“I am so excited to plan this mission strategically and to give that first step into changing that tribe’s destiny,” Willem says.

Although reaching the unreached is an expensive task, they rest in the knowledge that God will provide.

“The Lord takes us by the hand and leads us,” Carin says. “It is such a confirmation that God is in control. All the puzzle pieces are finally falling into place – now it is just up to us to obey.”

To raise money for the mission, they became involved with the 360NE MTB Challenge.

“We are doing this to close the circle of our promise,” Willem says.

The route of this mountain biking race is a full 361 degrees – a circle made up of four stages – that must be completed in 36 hours.

“We are trying to enter as many teams as possible. These teams will be sponsored per kilometre. Anyone riding in this race can also become part of our initiative, even if they are not participating in one of our teams.”

Whether you want to compete on your own, in a team or as part of a relay, you can ride for a reason.

“And not merely any reason – you can ride for *the* reason. Jesus gave His life for everyone – even for the people who do not yet know of His existence.”

“Even everyday activities like mountain biking can be used to expand the Kingdom,” Carin agrees.

Only a limited number of people can participate in the race. But by giving, many can invest in the future of this unreached language group in North Africa.

“This mission is bigger than us,” Carin says. “The Lord has to provide, because we will never be able to do it without Him.

“The vastness of this task actually scares me. But I see the Lord’s blessing resting on it. And this 360NE initiative gives anyone the opportunity to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.”

“No one said this would be easy,” Willem admits. “But is it worth it? Definitely. Jesus’ last words are our greatest priority.”

*The names of certain organisations, countries and towns are withheld due to safety reasons.

*Contact 086-1221-777 and visit www.leavealastinglegacy.org for more information on how to get involved.