

Remembering a Leader

By Marti Wade

Celebrating Mission, January 2024

[Note from Leslie Urie: This [article](#) originally appeared in *Missions Catalyst* on October 11, 2023, under the title “Practical Mobilization: Remembering Those Who Came Before Us”. Reprinted with permission.]

A Morbid Confession

It may be strange to admit it. But I enjoy a good funeral. What about you? It’s not the music, flowers, or stained glass that gets me. And the death of a child or someone who died prematurely can be brutal.

But I love to see people gather to celebrate a long life well lived, especially when it’s the life of someone who stayed focused on honoring God and loving people their whole life long, not giving up or hindered long by the setbacks and struggles they faced or their own hang-ups and handicaps.

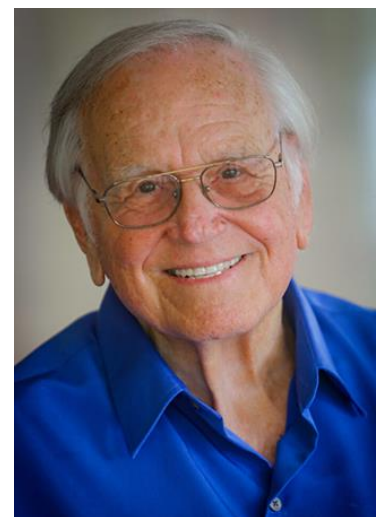
Maybe they made a big splash in the world. Maybe not. But they lived for what matters, and when they’re gone—and probably before that, too—people saw it and said, “Yes, that’s right.”

The death of such a saint, now at rest, calls me to question my habits and refocus on things that count more than killing time or meeting deadlines.

Losses and Legacies

The mission community and the Church have lost many senior leaders in the last few years. Some of those deaths have brought an outpouring of articles celebrating that person’s legacy in the lives of others. Think [Billy Graham](#), [George Verwer](#), and [Tim Keller](#).

On October 6, 2023, the mission community lost another: Youth with a Mission (YWAM) founder [Loren Cunningham](#). He died October 6 at the age of 88.



Loren Cunningham, Founder of Youth With A Mission

Into All the World and Now Beyond

A YWAM press release reports, “Loren was the first person in history to travel to every sovereign nation on earth, all dependent countries, and more than 100 territories and islands for the sake of Christ and the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). Now he has added one more “stamp” to his well-worn passport: HEAVEN!”

That Mark 16 verse (“*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*”) was part of the bedrock of Loren’s life and had been since 1948 when he was 13, and it rang in his ears at an altar call. Then, at age 20, Loren heard the call confirmed. In prayer, he saw a picture of a world map with waves crashing on every coast, waves of young people from all over who would go share the Gospel all across the globe. In the early 1960s, Loren’s vision led to the launch of Youth With A Mission.

YWAM and the Short-Term Mission Movement

Loren had a gift to mobilize young people to respond to the gospel and offer themselves up in service. Yet, he saw the years of schooling they’d have to complete to become missionaries as an unnecessary barrier to unleashing them on the world. Loren was ready to disrupt traditions and remove obstacles. So he looked for new pathways. Created them, really.



Youth With a Mission founder Loren Cunningham saw waves of young people sharing the Gospel in every nation (Mark 15:16)

His early experiments with sending short-term missionaries (like some of his later efforts) had mixed results. There were controversies and failures. But Loren and those who joined him learned as they went. By 1985, YWAM was discipling and sending out more than 15,000 young people every year. The impact of these trips on their lives and the lives of those who received them and served alongside them was significant.

YWAM went on to become one of the world's largest mission organizations. Loren always brushed off that claim lest it take away from God's glory, the urgency of the task remaining, or the great work done by others. Yet, through YWAM, millions have been discipled and shared the love of Jesus with people everywhere.

That's no small thing.

And it started with a man who listened to
and was led by God and who wouldn't give up.

**“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.
Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”
— Hebrews 13:7**

Practical Mobilization Takeaways

1. Think about leaders who have impacted you, directly or indirectly. Is there a parent, grandparent, pastor, mentor, or ministry leader whose influence helped set the trajectory of your life? If you can, thank them for their faithfulness. Ask God to help you recognize opportunities to pour into someone else's life like that.
2. Life verses have fallen from fashion, but maybe you have a favorite passage (or a few) that you hang your hat on in the way Loren Cunningham held onto Mark 15:16. If not, ask God to show you a Bible verse, story, or principle that might help you set your course or make sense of how he's led you so far.

How would God have you encourage the next generation and walk with them through the challenges and obstacles they face in following God's plans for them, close to home or across the world? What would help you persevere as a sender, mentor, or mobilizer?

Links for Learning More

- See a press release with a link to Loren's full [obituary](#) (YWAM).
- Browse Loren Cunningham's [website](#), now posting tributes. You can also find information there about plans to celebrate his life.
- Watch a brief YWAM [video](#) about Loren's life and legacy.



About the Author

Marti Wade is a researcher, writer, editor, and curator with almost 30 years experience in mission mobilization and communication. Since 2004, Marti is the managing editor and publisher of *Missions Catalyst*. She is a member of *Pioneers* and also serves on the board of directors for *MissionWorks*. She lives in Hillsboro, Oregon.

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Links:

Original article: <https://missionscatalyst.net/?cat=9>

Missions Catalyst: <https://missionscatalyst.net/>

Billy Graham: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Billy-Graham>

George Verwer: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Verwer

Tim Keller: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Keller_\(pastor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Keller_(pastor))

Loren Cunningham: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loren_Cunningham

YWAM: <https://ywam.org/>

Obituary: <https://ywam.org/loreniswithjesus>

Loren Cunningham website: <https://lorencunningham.com/>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwQtSXJcQP0>

Pioneers: <https://pioneers.org/>

MissionWorks: <https://missionworks.global/>