

Reflections on Value 15

by David Joel Hamilton

(With input from Loren and Darlene Cunningham and in consultation with the Founders' Circle)

In September, 2018, at *YWAM Together* in Thailand, the Founders' Circle embraced clarified wording for our Foundational Value 15. It now reads, "YWAM affirms the importance of families serving God together in missions, not just the father and/or mother. We also embrace the inclusion of single-parent families. We encourage the development of strong and healthy family units, with each member sharing the call to missions and contributing their gifts in unique and complementary ways. We uphold and celebrate the Biblical view that God's intent for holy matrimony is between one man and one woman. (Gen 2:21-24; Gen 18:17-19; Deu 6:6-7; Pro 5:15-23; Pro 31:10-31; Mal 2:14-16; Mat 19:3-9; 1Co 7:1-16; 1Ti 3:2-5; Heb 13:4).

This wording aims to clarify the heart of this Foundational Value. It was adopted after consulting with and receiving input from many of our eldership circles around the mission. In the process some questions arose about how this new language aligns with the other Foundational Values we hold dear. In light of this I was asked to write this paper to help bring understanding from the Word and from our history as a mission. In order to do this I received vital input from Loren and Darlene Cunningham and consulted with all those who serve on the Founders' Circle. May this document serve you as we together seek to hear and obey the Word of the Lord.

It is important at the outset to note that the new wording is not an amendment to our Value 15; it is a clarification. To amend something is to change or alter something. This is not what this new language does. It does not amend (alter, change) Value 15; it clarifies it – it makes explicitly clear what has always been implicit. From the first printing of these Values, we have clearly supported the Biblical understanding of marriage and family. In the 60s, 70s, 80s and even into much of the 90s we all had a common Biblical presupposition of what constitutes a family and what constitutes a marriage. It is only in this last decade or two, that the social/cultural/political trends in some of the earth's nations have amended their view of family and marriage. Because of these social/cultural/political amendments (alterations, changes) we felt it necessary simply to clarify what we have always held to be Biblical – which makes it both true and valuable.

Now, let's consider Value 15 in the light of our other Foundational Values.

First, let me expand on **Value 14**. We not only believe, but we celebrate the fact that every human being is valuable, because they are created by God in his image (Gen 1:25-27; 9:6; 1Co 11:7; Col 1:15-17; Jam 3:9) and are loved by him (2Ch 6:14; Psa 36:7; Jer 32:18; Mic 7:18; Joh 3:16). Every individual has inestimable worth (Psa 72:14; Mat 6:26; 10:31; 12:12; 16:26), created with specific gifts and talents, which are to be discovered and developed for that individual's fullest potential and destiny/purpose to be realized. Every person is responsible for how they live their life, according to their level of ability and knowledge.

That is why Value 14 states, "YWAM is called to value each individual. We believe in equal opportunity and justice for all. Created in the image of God, people of all nationalities, ages and functions have distinctive contributions and callings. We are committed to honoring God-given leadership and ministry gifts in both men and women."

All people are valuable. Whenever our societies divide people into categories and value

one more than another it does not reflect a Biblical Christian worldview. Whether “Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female” (Gal 3:28 NLT) – all people are valuable. This is true, even though all people have sinned and “fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Rom 3:23 NLT). Right belief and right behavior is not a pre-condition for being valued. God valued and loved us all even when “we were still sinners” (Rom 5:8 NLT) – and this is the gracious attitude we must imitate and extend to all people, for it is through God’s kindness that he “takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change” (Rom 2:4 MESSAGE).

The updated language of Value 15 harmonizes with Value 14. They go hand-in-hand. While clarifying and affirming a Biblical definition of marriage we also affirm the intrinsic value, dignity, and worth of each and every individual.

Next let me address **Value 9**. We must hold to the Scriptures as our final authority. This Value begins by stating that “YWAM is called to a Biblical Christian worldview. We believe that the Bible – the textbook for all of life – makes a clear division between good and evil; right and wrong.” When there are shifting positions in our cultures, we must have a steady, constant reference point. For us that is the Word of God.

The Bible informs us that God instituted holy matrimony as a life-long covenant between one man and one woman (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:4-6; 1Co 7:1-16; Tit 1:6). God’s ordained marriage is to be a place of mutual love and respect (Eph 5:21). This Biblical understanding of holy matrimony should “be held in honor by all” (Heb 13:4). God witnesses the marriage vows made between a man and a woman and holds them accountable to those vows (Mal 2:14-16). Even as God enabled the first married couple to conceive and bear a child (Gen 4:1), so he desires that holy matrimony be the sole and exclusive framework in which humans are to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28; Pro 5:15-23).

In the Scriptures, God clearly instructs us that all good and healthy sexual activity should occur only within the context of holy matrimony. Sexual activity of any kind outside of the Biblical framework of holy matrimony is prohibited (Exo 22:16-17,19; Lev 18:6-20,22-19:2; 19:20-22; 20:10-21; 21:7-9,13-15; Deu 22:13-30; 23:16-17; 27:20-23). The Bible acknowledges that all human beings grapple with sexual desire and lust. God’s Word points all humans towards self-control and righteousness; cautioning against sexual behavior outside of holy matrimony and proffering the hope of forgiveness and redemption when moral failure is followed by confession and repentance.

It is important to underline that the Biblical definition of marriage (Gen 2:24) is one of the few pre-fall instructions for life. It is not an accidental institution. It is not given in response to the entrance of sin into the world. It is part of God’s original design for us as human beings. This is what life in the garden was to look like. This was the ideal plan that God had. That is why we can clearly state in the clarified language of Value 15, “We uphold and celebrate the Biblical view that God’s intent for holy matrimony is between one man and one woman.”

Note that the author of Genesis gives this inspired, marriage-defining summary after Adam breaks into poetry for the first time and celebrates God’s creation of Eve (Gen 2:23). This first love song celebrates their oneness (they are both human) and their distinctiveness (he is a man and she is a woman). The author says that it is “for this reason” (Gen 2:24a NASB) or “this explains why” (Gen 2:24a NLT) – that marriage exists as it does. Jesus underscores this when he quotes the Biblical definition of marriage as between one man and one woman (in Mat 19:5 he quotes Gen 2:24). However, instead of going back to Adam’s poetic outburst (Gen 2:23) as the rationale for marriage, Jesus goes back to “the beginning” to explain the why of marriage. He

says it is because “God made them male and female” (Mat 19:4 quoting Gen 1:27). There is no ambiguity. Marriage exists because there are two genders created as such, so that together they can be “fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28).

As we finish considering Value 9, it is important to note that Gen 2:24 is the only definition of marriage in the Scriptures. No other definition is ever given. Many stories are told of individuals who did not live according to this standard, but this paradigm is never replaced with another. Those many stories are descriptive of what was. This pre-fall statement is prescriptive of what should be. For this reason, we must hold fast to this unique, Biblical definition of holy matrimony. God’s word defines it and whatever our societies embrace, or our friends advocate, or our politicians approve, or our judges enforce, or some theological positions propose, we must have the Word of God as our standard.

Value 8 – Be International and Interdenominational. As a movement we have been perhaps the most international and the most interdenominational in history. On the international front, we have staff from more than 200 nations. We come from the nations and we serve among the nations. This gives us a unique vantage point. And from this global perspective, we observe that the re-writing of traditional definitions of marriage is occurring almost exclusively in nations of the humanistic West or those cultures which have been strongly influenced by Western humanism. We understand that this effort to redefine marriage is not a global issue. It is a Western issue. The advocates of a redefinition of marriage would like it to be a truly international issue, but it is not. This is where we can be strengthened by the Biblical perspective of our brothers and sisters from the Global South.

As to the interdenominational aspect of this issue. It is important to note that current trends to reinterpret the definition of marriage do not reflect truly global realities, and they do not reflect historical realities. When we speak of denominations, the vast majority today and throughout all of history hold fast to the Biblical definition of marriage as expressed in Gen 2:24. The place where there is shift occurring within the church is primarily in some segments of Western Protestantism. This is significant, but it is not the whole church – far from it. Should we shift because a minority has shifted? If so, will we alienate the majority that hasn’t shifted? If we don’t will we alienate the minority that has?

When do we build bridges and when do we challenge paradigms? Let me share from my experience of writing *Why Not Women?* with Loren Cunningham and Janice Rogers. When Loren and I embarked on this project we knew it would put us at odds with some in the Body of Christ. Why would we risk this? Because we felt it was necessary for the Great Commission to be accomplished. How should we do this? With a deliberate blend of grace and truth. I spent years researching and crafting language that enabled me to share what I believe is a Biblical perspective in a loving way (see Eph 4:13). In the writings we attacked no one, we shamed no one, we criticized no one, we called out no one. We simply put forth a positive exposition of the Biblical text as best we understand it. We did not argue; we explained. And to our amazement it was well-received across the Body of Christ, becoming a Christian non-fiction best-seller, which is now translated in several languages.

In a similar way the updated, clarifying text of Value 15 criticizes no one. It is not anti anyone. It does not discredit any other position. It simply, clearly states the global and historic understanding of the Body of Christ as to what constitutes marriage. Period. That’s all it does.

As we consider our interdenominational value, it is important to note that as YWAMers we can never align ourselves exclusively with any one denomination. We have planted thousands

of churches over the past nearly six decades of ministry. This is appropriate for us to do as a missionary expression of (the sodality anointing within) the Body of Christ. But once the local church has been established we must recognize the spiritual shift of domains from the mobile/sodality stream to the local/modality stream. The new local church now becomes part of a denomination or an association of local churches. Those committed to lead the church must be committed to that local anointing and the associated ecclesial network. They are no longer interdenominational. It is for this reason that full-time YWAM staff are not to be pastors of a local church. As we stay true to our missionary sodality anointing, we must hold to a larger perspective of the Body of Christ universal (both in its geographic expanse and in its historical duration). This enables us to stay the course, to be “stable and steadfast, not shifting” (Col 1:23 ESV) with “every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14 NRSV).

Finally regarding Value 8, the purpose of this Value is to motivate us to major on the majors and not to focus on the minors. As such we embrace the need for baptism, but we do not as a movement tell people at what age they should be baptized nor how much water is needed for the baptism to be authentic. The “what” is agreed upon by all. The “hows” differ among different traditions. In clarifying Value 15 we are strengthening our commitment to Value 8 and helping the Body of Christ major on the majors. For us these majors are best outlined in our YWAM Statement of Purposeⁱ and the Core Beliefs which serve as the introduction to our Foundational Values.ⁱⁱ

Our commitment to these historic “majors” of the faith enable us to have clear Biblical presuppositions. We embrace the historic presuppositions implicit in a Biblical Christian Worldview (see Value 9 once more). We believe that the Scripture everywhere reveals (whether implicitly or explicitly) that:

1. God is Infinite and Personal;
2. Humans are Finite and Personal;
3. Truth is Constant and Knowable;
4. Choices are Significant and Have Consequences; and
5. We are Called to be Change-Makers with God.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is this last point that is at the heart of our missional calling. Our Biblical theology must always make room for God to act transformatively in history, changing individuals and societies, reforming spheres of influence, molding “us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image” (2Co 3:18 NLT). The conviction that motivates us as YWAMers is the perspective that we can co-create with God and see transformation happen in both individual and corporate expressions of humanity. We who were created in God’s image, but have been marred by sin, can be transformed and restored to that original design. We do not accept things as they are, but we walk with God into a transformational process, resulting in a “new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:10 ESV). If we do not believe that the lives of individuals and the status quo of our societies can be transformed we really have no missional purpose. So let us be God-led change-agents in our world, restoring it back to God’s original design – one aspect of which is clearly stated in Gen 2:24.

Value 10 – Function in Teams. As YWAMers we love doing things together. For this reason, the clarification of Value 15 involved much teamwork and a deliberate consultative process. The Founders’ Circle, various other eldership circles and several hundred of those involved in our Area Circle Teams (ACTs) around the world were drawn into the discussion, obviously with different degrees of engagement. We certainly did not hear every voice in the mission, but we

intentionally and deliberately heard many. Was it enough? Well, if we had changed the essence of the Value, perhaps not. But since the new wording only clarifies what has always been our long-held understanding, it seems like it was sufficient. Once again, this is simply a clarification, not a redefinition.

In order for a large movement like ours to be able to hear and obey God, it is imperative that we be led by teams of recognized spiritual elders, which are rightly related to one another. It is for this reason that Loren's Spiritual Eldership/"Tripod" message (first given in Nanning, China in 2002) emphasized the need to 1) encourage freedom in the Spirit to hear and obey God, 2) honor the role of eldership teams, and 3) strengthen healthy relationships under the Lordship of Jesus in order to continue as a fruitful, apostolic movement. And it is for this reason that over the last decade and a half we have intentionally pursued a process of realignment in which we have moved from an hierarchical, organizational model of leadership at the trans-local level to a flattened movement model. This enables us to have a family-style leadership within the movement which is similar to what can be observed in the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. When there were strongly differing views on an essential matter of the faith the spiritual elders came together "to resolve this issue" (Act 15:6). They gave reports, had a "long discussion," and listened carefully to one another (Act 15:4,7,12) before coming to a conclusion. At that point they wrote a letter, stating their decision for – as they said – "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Act 15:28). They did this as a team. They did this together. And the result was that "there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read this encouraging message" (Act 15:31).

This is the example we have sought to follow. It is the Biblical paradigm and it honors our Value 10, to function in team. And we trust it will produce "great joy throughout" our beloved missionary tribe.

Value 1 – Know God. We absolutely celebrate this Value. Without this as an undergirding passion in our life, all else is lost. The updated wording of Value 15 only affirms our desire to know, love and obey God. We take him at his word; we take his word seriously. We align ourselves with the God of the word and say, "let us know, let us press on to know the Lord" (Hos 6:3).

Value 2 – Make God Known. This is why we are a mission movement! Knowing him has been such a transformative joy in each of our lives we want every person and all peoples to have the same opportunity to know God that we have had. For this reason, we embrace Jesus' words, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Joh 20:21). He puts himself forward as the model, which we are to imitate. Much can be said (and much has been said) about how Jesus was sent by the Father. But two things are clearly obvious.

1. Jesus came incarnationally. He became one of us. He identified with us. He walked into our world and embraced us with all the brokenness and pain that we experience.

2. Jesus came prophetically. While identifying with us, he challenged us. He's like us in every way, but he did not sin. He pointed to a different way of living while stepping into our reality. He brought heaven to earth and invited us to journey with him on a new path.

Whatever we do to make God known, it is necessary to be sent as Jesus was sent. We must go incarnationally (affirming and identifying) and we must go prophetically (challenging and inviting people into a new way). We must learn to contextualize the gospel presentation wherever we go; but the gospel message itself should always have a counter-cultural ring to it. It

must be both comforting and disquieting. It must sound both familiar and foreign in the ears of the lost. This blend takes extraordinary grace, which is ours only when we allow ourselves to be empowered with the Holy Spirit of God. In Jesus – like no other – “Unfailing love and truth have met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed!” (Psa 85:10). Let us ever seek to do likewise. May love and truth never be at odds in our lives. May they be blended together in a Christ-like, Spirit-filled demonstration of the Father.

Value 18 – Communicate with Integrity. This was the very purpose that motivated the new wording of Value 15. It became clear to us that given the social/cultural/political shifts in some of our nations, the definition of holy matrimony was no longer equally clear to all. That is why what was always implicit was made explicit; so that our communication would be “truthful, accurate, timely and relevant.” If our previous communication could be interpreted in various ways which led to confusion, then this helps restore communication with integrity. The Biblical definition of holy matrimony may not be popular with everyone; but it truthfully is what we Value. It is what aligns accurately with the word of God. It certainly is timely in this age when so much confusion surrounds this theme. And it is relevant, because those hungry for God in this generation want to know what is God’s original design for life.

Value 13 – Be Relationship-oriented. When Paul writes to Titus and lays out the qualifications for spiritual leadership in the Body of Christ, he begins by talking about relationships (Tit 1:5-6). He tells Titus to look at the most intimate of relationships – those of family. He speaks of marriage and of parenting. His first point on his list for eldership is that one man be married to one woman. This was not popular in his day. The culture permitted polygamy; but Paul pointed back to the beginning. The voices of culture should not drown out the word of the Lord. So he underscored that which was first stated in Gen 2:24 – even though it was counter-cultural.

Then Paul went on to describe the necessary character of the elder (Tit 1:7-8) and finally he addresses the necessary skills required of the potential church leader: “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Tit 1:9 NIV). Able to encourage and refute. What a challenging blend! Some of us love to do the one; others love to do the other. Paul says we must learn to do both. It is possible to do this only as we “hold firmly to the trustworthy message.” Holding to God’s word and building strong, loving relationships are not antithetical one to the other. Both can be done. Both must be done.

Finally, **Value 7** – Be Broad-structured and Decentralized. Here great clarity is needed. Our decentralization has to do with our structure. Our financial and legal structures are to be “broad-structured and decentralized.” Not so with our Foundational Values. Although our Values can find diverse expressions in varying contexts, as YWAMers these 18 Values are foundational to our identity, to who we are, to our DNA. We have not decentralized our identity or our DNA. These are not up for grabs. It is not enough to embrace 16 or 17 of these Values. As members of this tribe we are called to embrace all 18. They are a whole. They are an indivisible unit. We are not asked to pick and chose which Values we like and which we don’t. Values are not external standards that we try to live up to; they are internal convictions which we celebrate because we see them as desirable. They are not just the right thing to do; they are the good thing to do. Holding to this set is what defines a YWAMer as a YWAMer.

Earlier I made reference to Loren's Spiritual Eldership/"Tripod" message given in Nanning, China in 2002. It was at this same time that Mercy Ships communicated with the Global Leadership Team that they could no longer embrace all of our YWAM values. Specifically they did not see how they could continue to embrace Value 16 as their financial model. As a result they wanted to proceed into the future with a new identity – not a YWAM one. Though it was a costly moment, we released them to follow the direction in which they felt God was leading them. We blessed them, as we have blessed myriads of others, who have been a part of us for a season and then – because of God's call on their lives – have created other frameworks for ministry. As a result, many ministry expressions have been birthed out of YWAM. We are grateful for this.

Not every follower of Jesus will embrace all our 18 Values as we do. These Values were given to us by God for our tribe. We do not seek to project them onto everyone else, even though they all are consistent with Biblical truth. They are descriptive of our family convictions, so as one member of the family to all my sisters and brothers, I invite you to embrace all these clarified Values and to cherish one another with great love and unity.

Thank you for allowing me to reflect together with you as we clarify Value 15. May God continue to lead us all into the fullness of his ways, so that together we might see his dreams fulfilled and the earth "filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14 ESV).

ENDNOTES:

i. **YWAM Statement of Purpose:** Youth With A Mission (YWAM) is an international movement of Christians from many denominations dedicated to presenting Jesus personally to this generation, to mobilizing as many as possible to help in this task, and to the training and equipping of believers for their part in fulfilling the Great Commission. As citizens of God's kingdom, we are called to love, worship, and obey our Lord, to love and serve His body, the Church, and to present the whole Gospel for the whole person throughout the whole world.

We of Youth With A Mission believe that the Bible is God's inspired and authoritative word, revealing that Jesus Christ is God's son; that people are created in God's image; that He created us to have eternal life through Jesus Christ; that although all people have sinned and come short of God's glory, God has made salvation possible through the death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ; that repentance, faith, love and obedience are fitting responses to God's initiative of grace toward us; that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth; and that the Holy Spirit's power is demonstrated in and through us for the accomplishment of Christ's last commandment, "*Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.*" (Mark 16:15 NLT).

ii. **YWAM's Core Beliefs: Youth With A Mission (YWAM) affirms the Bible as the inspired and authoritative word of God** and, with the Holy Spirit's guidance, the absolute reference point for every aspect of life and ministry. Based upon God's word, who He is, and His initiative of salvation, through the atoning work of Jesus (His death, burial and resurrection), the following responses are strongly emphasized in YWAM:

1. **Worship:** We are called to **praise and worship God alone** (Exo 20:2-3; Deu 6:4-5; 2Ki 17:35-39; 1Ch 16:28-30; Neh 8:2-10; Mar 12:29-30; Rom 15:5-13; Jud 24-25; Rev 5:6-14; Rev 19:5-8).

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2. **Holiness:** We are called to **lead holy and righteous lives** that exemplify the nature and character of God (Lev 19:1-2; Psa 51:7-11; Jer 18:1-11; Eze 20:10-12; Zec 13:9; Luk 1:68-75; Eph 4:21-32; Tit 2:11-14; 1Pe 2:9,21-25; 1Jo 3:1-3).
 3. **Witness:** We are called to **share the Gospel of Jesus Christ** with those who do not know Him (Psa 78:1-7; Isa 40:3-11; Mic 4:1-2; Hab 2:14; Luk 24:44-48; Act 2:32-26; Act 10:39-43; 1Co 9:19-23; 2Co 2:12-17; 1Pe 3:15-18).
 4. **Prayer:** We are called to **engage in intercessory prayer** for the people and causes on God's heart, including standing against evil in every form (Gen 18:20-33; Exo 32:1-16; Jdg 3:9,15; 1Ki 8:22-61; Eze 22:30-31; Eze 33:1-11; Mat 6:5-15; Mat 9:36-38; Eph 3:14-21; 2Th 3:1-5).
 5. **Fellowship:** We are called to **commit to the Church** in both its local nurturing expression and its mobile multiplying expression (2Ch 29:20-30; Psa 22:25-28; Psa 122:1-4; Joe 2:15-17; Mat 18:19-20; Act 2:44-47; Act 4:32-35; 1Co 14:26-40; Eph 2:11-18; Heb 10:23-25).
 6. **Service:** We are called to **contribute toward God's Kingdom purposes** in every sphere of life (Deu 15:7-11; Deu 24:17-22; Psa 112:4-9; Pro 11:10-11; Zec 7:8-10; Mat 5:14-16; 2Th 3:13; Tit 3:4-8; Heb 13:15-16; Jam 2:14-26).

iii. These first four Biblical presuppositions were taught by Francis Schaeffer in our earliest Schools of Evangelism (SOE) in Switzerland. The fifth point was added as we reflected on the Scriptures and the ways of God in our midst.