

YOUR LABORS ARE NOT IN VAIN: THE LIFE OF WILBROAD CHANDA

DOUG HAYES

One of the many endearing qualities of my Sovereign Grace ministry partner and dearly departed friend, Wilbroad Chanda, was his regular, conversational quotation of the word of God. He prayed the word, counseled the word, encouraged the word. In the mundane moments of life as well as in the pulpit, our brother Will thought and spoke in the language of the Bible.

As a result, I think I will always hear certain Scriptures in his voice. Certainly, that's true of the beautiful biblical encouragement (widely quoted by other Zambian Christians as well), "Your labors in the Lord are not in vain." I will likely never read that phrase again without hearing an echo of Wilbroad's big, booming baritone in my mind.

How fitting, then, to hear that passage (1 Cor. 15:50-58) read aloud at Wilbroad's funeral. His own labors—which the Lord deemed complete on January 18, 2021—were eternally valuable precisely because Christ was at the center of them. In the words of 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ has not been raised, Wilbroad Chanda was a man most to be pitied; he toiled in futility. But because Christ in fact has been raised, the labors this man devoted his life to will resonate for all eternity. His labors indeed were not in vain. And they were many.

Connection to Sovereign Grace

I first met Wilbrod when he was nearing completion of his MDiv studies at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. After reading and benefiting from *Why Small Groups?*, he reached out to Sovereign Grace and ended up attending the Small Group Leaders Conference in November 2002. I was preparing for my first trip to Africa the next month, so I invited Wilbrod to my home after the conference. Thus began one of the most treasured friendships and gospel partnerships of my life.

After graduating from seminary and returning to Zambia with his wife and four sons, Wilbrod resumed leadership of Ndola Baptist Church, in the center of his nation's third most populous city. Though he was a faithful preacher at a large church with a full calendar, the Lord had additional labors in mind for him.

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Abounding in the Work of the Lord

When the HIV/AIDS epidemic devastated families in his community and left countless orphans and street children in its wake, Will and his wife Zicky responded by founding [Lighthouse Christian School](#)

in 2005, with an initial class of six kindergarten students and a vision to serve many more in the years to come. In 2006, [Covenant Mercies](#) began sponsoring fatherless children in Ndola to attend Lighthouse. Through the years, we have partnered together to grow the school and develop its campus. Nearly 500 students have received the gift of quality Christian education through Lighthouse to date, including approximately 300 enrolled at present. If not for this intervention, most would have discontinued their education in elementary school. Instead, many are giving glory to God and graduating from university today.

As the years went by, Wilbrod's desire to be part of the Sovereign Grace family grew. In 2009, this led him to leave a secure position in a well-established church, plant a new work called Christ Community Church, and ultimately lead that church into Sovereign Grace. In time, he completed the ordination protocols in our Book of Church Order, becoming the first

African pastor ordained by Sovereign Grace Churches.

Cutting it Straight

Many pastors would have been content with this resumé, but Wilbroad's godly ambition was not yet satisfied. He knew he'd been blessed to receive the theological education he'd received. And as those who sat under his teaching can attest, he was "in his element" in the classroom. Will was uniquely gifted by God to impart his learning to others who hadn't had similar opportunities for formal training. He knew the vulnerability of the untrained pastor to prosperity theology and other false teachings, and he knew their flocks would be vulnerable by extension.

So he established the Copperbelt Pastors College, named after his province in Zambia but modeled after the Sovereign Grace Pastors College. Their motto, "Study to Show Yourself Approved," comes from 2 Timothy 2:15a. But Wilbroad also loved (and unabashedly lifted) H.B. Charles' modern paraphrase of verse 15b, "cutting it straight." This became the unofficial motto of the Copperbelt PC, as he regularly reminded his students of their responsibility to divide the word of truth rightly.

A Man of Truth

I will never forget when I and two of my co-pastors from Covenant Fellowship joined Wilbroad for an evangelistic event he had organized in Ndola. A popular Christian singer was booked to perform, and let's just say this singer wasn't "cutting it straight" in his theology. While introducing a song, the singer assured the crowd that coming to Jesus would solve all their problems for them, and they would no longer suffer. Just then, that big, booming baritone rang out from the front row: "You *will* suffer." At least three times as the singer continued, Wilbroad persisted: "You *will* suffer." He desperately wanted people to know the real Jesus, not a distorted caricature sketched by false teachings that sound enticing but lack biblical truth.

And this, it occurs to me, is an apt portrait of our dearly departed brother. He was a man of truth. He was passionate about proclaiming truth in every way he could. But he didn't care about truth for truth's sake. He cared about truth for Christ's sake. And precisely for that reason, his labors were not in vain. The work of his hands will endure. It will endure through the well-equipped saints at Christ Community Church who now take the ba-

ton their pastor handed to them. It will endure in the ongoing partnership Wilbroad pioneered between his labors in Zambia and Sovereign Grace Churches—a partnership we are humbled by and grateful for. And it will endure through the reality of Christ’s resurrection. Though the seed sown in Wilbroad’s earthly life was perishable, the fruit it gave rise to is imperishable and glorious.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

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