



As a boy I loved to go exploring. I lived in north London, bordering on the edge of Epping Forest and my joy was to ride my bike or take my dog for a walk in the woods. Along with my friends I made all kinds of forts and played hide and seek and thoroughly enjoyed being in 'the wild.'

Perhaps we all have a little of that 'explorer' inside of us, especially if we're working with YWAM. The draw is that sense of adventure, doing new things in new ways, seeing the world and desiring to make a difference.

At the age of fifteen, I remember responding to a missions call, along with perhaps a hundred others and feeling this draw to being a missionary and heading off to who knows where. I was willing to go. Perhaps the most important things at the heart of a pioneer is that willingness to do anything and go anywhere in obedience to God. Whether that meant to speak on the streets of my local town, where we had an open air every Saturday (how scary that was!), or head off to another country to share the gospel. While at university I came into contact with YWAM and again had that sense of being drawn. I wrote off for the DTS application and within all the documentation was a 'death on the field' form that had to be signed. This wasn't a little holiday to see some of the world. It struck me that this meant commitment to perhaps not come back! The next few years after DTS initiated me into being a pioneer and the joy of starting all kinds of ministries.

Lesson 1: Be willing to go anywhere and do anything when God calls, no matter what the cost.

First stop was Canada, where I got married and moved into a little rented apartment and looked for a job. After 3 months as a couple, we began to feel that the normal 9-5 wasn't for us. We were visiting Rite's parents when we found out about a property that was empty just down the road. It was an old people's home with beautiful grounds, industrial kitchen, big lounges and 17 bedrooms. Our pioneer hearts came alive. We had been thinking about our YWAM experience and wondered, 'wouldn't it be great to establish a discipleship community here in Canada.' We were youth leaders in the local church at the time and had all these kids who really needed a lot of discipleship and help. So with an excitement in our hearts we went off to the owners and offered a ridiculously cheap monthly rental to start a community. To our surprise, the owner agreed and said we could move in straight away. We couldn't believe it! We had prayed and got excited but here we were on the verge of a whole new adventure. 'Is pioneering always this easy,' we asked? So we moved in. We shared the vision with the youth group and expected them to be totally in support and excited about the whole project but to our surprise none were interested. Whoops!

Lesson 2: Check out the felt needs and do some research before jumping in the deep end.

However God did start sending people our way. It just wasn't the kind of people we had in mind. The unemployed, alcoholics, single parents with nowhere to go, couples with marriage problems and more. We were on a steep learning curve and quickly emerging from our sheltered life-styles. We called the ministry the 'house of Judah' meaning the house of praise. The only thing I really felt somewhat confident to do was to lead worship, so that's what I did. I was no counsellor, pastor or evangelist, but I had a love to worship. We had little wisdom but we trusted God to bring change in the lives of those he brought to us and he surely did. We worshipped together and opened up evenings to the community and God's presence came down.

Lesson 3: God uses the weak and foolish things and if we bring what we have he'll use it for his glory and touch people's lives.

We were getting worn out. I was working a full time job and Rite my new wife was cooking and looking after everyone and everything in the house during the day. I'd come home from a hard day's work to hear the daily news. It wasn't perhaps like the ordinary newly wed's homecoming - "I've had lunch with mum, been to the shopping mall, picked out paint for the guest room..." No it was more like, "I rescued Charlie (8 year old boy living with us) who was playing with a bear cub on the lawn, the local ranger said if the bear isn't harming anyone then leave him be, our single mum tried to commit suicide but is doing ok now and the foster agency asked if a girl could stay with us as its her last chance before being sent to the young offenders jail." Welcome home dear. (all true)

God was gracious though and sent some helpers to join us who were more 'together' and brought some stability to the community. Despite the dysfunction in so many lives and our naivety and lack of experience, we saw a community of around 25 very different people emerge over the next couple of months and amazingly begin to love one another.

Lesson 4: Persevere through the crazy days and you will grow in character and learn important lessons.

Things were beginning to take shape. We'd learned some lesson of praying over our guests, encouraging them to participate in the work around the house, creating a welcoming spirit and developed in the general running of the house. Just as we were beginning to get comfortable, the enemy tried to trip us up.

One day a church phoned up and asked if we could interview a certain guy to see if we would take him on. They said he was being disciplined but needed further help and they weren't able to provide it for him. So we agreed to meet and the day came. As the door bell rung, we went to greet the visitors only to find the guy standing there alone with his suitcase. 'Where's your pastor,' I asked. 'Oh he's gone,' was the reply, 'he told me I could move in here with you guys.' What do you do in these circumstances? I had a gut feeling this wasn't good but chose to believe the best. The next months were like a nightmare unfolding as it came out that this guy had a history of paedophilia. What was worse was the

knowledge that he had been pursuing kids in our community. We were overwhelmed and shocked that such a thing could happen. Of course he was asked to leave but not without difficulty and the atmosphere was strained for some time to come as people tried to work through the trauma. We recognised how important spiritual discernment is in the life of a community.

Lesson 5: Following every initial step or commitment comes opposition and a test.

We lived in a small apartment within the community, with its own small living room and bedroom. Often times we wanted some privacy and so we would put a sign on the door, 'knock only if it's a matter of life or death.' Of course there was constant knocking, as every issue became one of life or death. So we soon realised that there would be no peace unless we created some space outside of the community. So during the week we would escape to a coffee shop where we could talk and share without interruption. However we also felt the need for some weekends off, so we delegated responsibility to a few of the more together people and one weekend a month we hit the road. We stayed in cheap hotels and saw the sights in British Columbia and were able to catch our breath, and enjoy our marriage together. We still have fond memories of those weekends away. Those were wonderful times that refreshed us and enabled us to be ready for the next adventure.

Lesson 6: Delegate and take a needed break.

Thinking back to our YWAM days, we remembered the short summer outreaches that we'd been on and thought, 'why don't we do a summer outreach and take teams into Vancouver to do evangelism.' Brochures were printed, the programme organised and recruiting started. Six weeks later no one had responded to the literature and the vision we had shared. There wasn't one phone call, not one slight interest – even from our youth group. We were stunned. So with some disappointment we cancelled the summer outreach plan.

It's so easy to assume and presume. As we checked out our process, we realised how little prayer we'd put into it. We copied a model we'd seen but hadn't really received the word of the Lord. What an important lesson early on in our pioneering experience this was, although a little embarrassing.

Lesson 7: The flesh act. Running with a good idea not a God idea is bound to fail.

After a year at the house of Judah, having had many people through our doors, many lessons learned and positive fruit taking place in people's lives, we received a letter from Lynn Green, the leader of YWAM England. He asked us if we would like to come back to England and join staff. We read the letter and knew immediately in our spirits that this was our next step. Amazingly within a month, everyone in the community had plans to move on; some getting married, others to ywam and others to their own homes. It had been an intense leadership-training year for us and our spiritual muscles had been stretched, our trust in God to bring about the miraculous had also been challenged and we had an excitement that the pioneering adventure was just really beginning.

Lesson 8: Know when your season is up but remember, God often gives us just enough information for the next step.

We responded to Lynn's letter and shared that we would love to come back to YWAM. His reply let us know that YWAM England was fully staffed but Scotland needed staff for 4 months and following the time there we could join him in England. We talked and prayed and felt we could do anything for 4 months and off we went to Bonnie Scotland. Having been there for 3 months, God spoke to us about putting our roots down. One day in the staff meeting we shared that we felt God was speaking to us to commit ourselves for the next 3 years. We wondered if we had made the right decision as we saw the shock on people's faces! But yes it was right and having put down our roots, God had the opportunity of doing some more needed work in our lives.

The next years continued to be years of pioneering. First in establishing a café in town, then a mobile team, an urban team, a rehabilitation centre and then on to become the national leader for Scotland. The pioneering hasn't stopped. We stayed in Scotland 26 years and now have been in Spain for the last 4 years. The interesting thing is that those initial lessons from 1979-80 have been such foundations for each pioneering situation we have been in. Why not create your own list of lessons from the pioneering that you have experienced. Your stories and principles will bring such an encouragement into other people's lives.

Til next month.

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