

PAUL CUNNINGHAM: RADICAL OBEDIENCE

by FRANK MOORE

Paul Cunningham has marked his life and career with a mindset of radical obedience to the call of God.



THE CUNNINGHAMS
HAVE CIRCLED THE
GLOBE NUMEROUS
TIMES, MINISTERING TO
INDIVIDUALS THROUGH
THEIR WARM HEARTS,
LISTENING EARS,
HELPING HANDS, AND
STRONG MESSAGE OF
HOLINESS AND HOPE
IN CHRIST.

SPECIAL TIMES in a person's life cause us to pause and offer a snapshot of that person in a phrase. Perhaps the most appropriate phrase to describe the life of Paul Cunningham is *radical obedience*. These words best characterize the way he has responded to God throughout his life journey.

Born to Paul and Naomi Cunningham, Paul grew up in Chicago. His childhood spiritual development took place at Chicago First Church of the Nazarene. At age 12, he gave his heart to Christ. Upon graduating from Fenger High School, he moved on to higher education at Olivet Nazarene University, majoring in history. Paul involved himself in numerous campus activities and served as class president during his senior year.

The year 1960 marked both his graduation from Olivet and his marriage to Connie Seaman, his childhood sweetheart.

The Cunninghams quickly moved to Kansas City for Paul to attend Nazarene Theological Seminary. During his seminary training, Paul found himself at a critical juncture in his spiritual journey. Personal soul searching resulted in a decision of radical obedience to God and His unconditional call for a complete consecration of Paul's life, future, career—everything. Paul marked this place in his journey as God's gift of entire sanctification. That mindset of radical obedience to God prepared the way for his upcoming ministry.

Seminary training drew to a close as Paul and Connie sought direction for a pastoral assignment. God's call led them just a few miles south to pastor a small congregation in Olathe, Kansas. A month after taking the Olathe assignment, while attending the 1964 General Assembly in Portland, Oregon, God challenged the young pastor.

The assembly voted to start two new liberal arts colleges. God seemed to say to Paul, "One of those colleges could be in Olathe."

With God's challenge in his heart, he returned home to watch God miraculously raise a college in a cornfield with a new Olathe College Church of the Nazarene at its side.

Paul Cunningham learned an important lesson about giving to God in the early years of his pastoral ministry. God challenged him to enlarge his people's vision for missions, and he set a rather large goal of \$1,000* for the upcoming missions offering. Paul urged the people to give \$100 per family while God urged him to give \$200. Only a response of radical obedience would allow the couple to meet God's challenge. Not knowing how they could make such a sacrifice, Paul visited a local bank president and asked for a loan to give in the missions offering. Pastor and people accepted God's larger vision for them by giving \$1,300 for missions that year.

This set the stage for greater things to come in the life of College Church.

Radical obedience to God opened the way for the Lord to lead Paul and Connie through a church relocation and three major building campaigns necessitated by the rapid growth of the Olathe congregation. During the final construction phase on the 4,000-seat sanctuary, the economy took a downturn as interest rates spiraled upward. Steady leadership by the seasoned pastor led the entire congregation to a time of radical


response in what became known as "120 Days of Special Obedience." God honored their obedience. The building's completion stood as a reminder of God's leadership and faithfulness.

Paul and Connie gave 29 years of faithful service to College Church. During that time they raised their three children: Lori, Paul Mark, and Connie Jo. Connie personally baked thousands of cookies for church socials across the years, taught a Sunday School class, led a women's Bible study, and pastored alongside her husband. Paul, an effective storyteller, prepared God-inspired sermons Sunday after Sunday. He built a strong staff of leaders and shepherded his growing congregation well.

At the 1993 General Assembly in Indianapolis, Indiana, God placed a new challenge to radical obedience in Paul and Connie's path as He led them to leave their beloved congregation and assume the role of general superintendent. They faithfully accepted the challenge and enlarged their ministry to include the entire world.

For the past 16 years, the Cunninghams have circled the globe numerous times, ministering to individuals through their warm hearts, listening ears, helping hands, and strong message of holiness and hope in Christ.

Paul Cunningham has served God's kingdom well and led the Church of the Nazarene decisively as a member of the Board of General Superintendents. His passion for the Great Commission and lost souls, fueled by the expanded vision of that first missions offering, has challenged the global church to action.

This time of transition in the lives of two of God's special servants gives Nazarenes an opportunity to stop and thank God for His faithfulness and to recommit ourselves to God's challenge for radical obedience. 

FRANK MOORE is director of the Center for Faith and Culture at Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois.

*All amounts are expressed in U.S. dollars.

PAUL CUNNINGHAM

Paul Cunningham with Raja Nwaiser in Lebanon

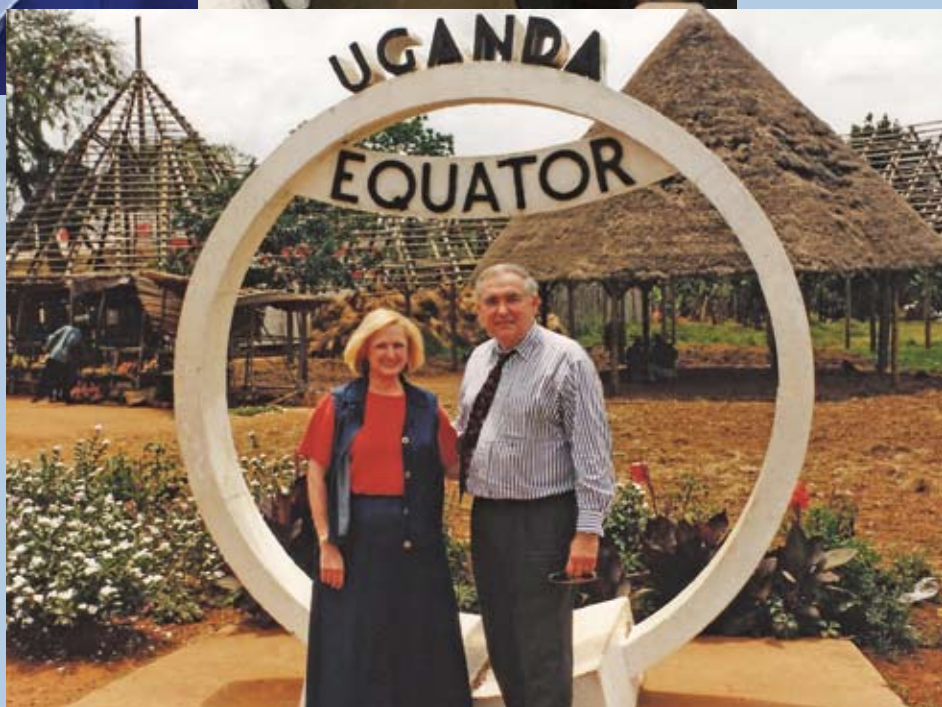


Paul Cunningham being received warmly in Volgograd, Russia.

Ordaining pastors in Africa



Paul and Connie Cunningham



Connie and Paul in Uganda