

BECOMING A SELFLESS SERVANT

**The Odyssey Journey of Sojourner Dan Savou
Prison Fellowship Fiji
By Donna Varnam**

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, any fellowship with the Spirit, any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2: 1-5

Dan Savou knows what it is like to grow up in a Christian home surrounded by the familiar practices of the Christian faith. Dan, the eldest of five children, was born in the Solomon Islands to professional parents, his father, a doctor and mother, a nurse. His childhood was more privileged than many he knew. Maybe it was taken for granted the advantages he had, or perhaps it was looking for something more complex than the simplicity of God's love, but Dan knew his heart did not have the freedom that comes with having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He was withdrawn, living in his own world and removing himself from those who were not of his status. He was more critical than complimentary and often viewed his associates as competitors.

God often takes us out of our comfort zone and places us in areas to experience personal growth in amazing ways. While Dan often tried to control the direction God had mapped out for him, he soon found that his life would be bound by individuals and circumstances that would impact the outlook he had on his own personal life, as well as how he viewed the lives of others. Dan had worked with street kids as a social worker and was a missionary, working and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with prisoners, but did not realize he was a prisoner in his own world. He could relate to the words of Paul in Romans 7:15, "For that, which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I." Even though he was not a prisoner in the physical sense, he had shackles around his heart. It wasn't until he was visiting those behind bars that he became free himself, allowing Christ to break the chains around his hardened heart.

Dan began working for Prison Fellowship Fiji in 2001 and in 2010 became their director. As a PF Fiji leader, he was soon asked to participate in the Odyssey in Singapore. He considered it a privilege to attend, but did not anticipate the impact the experience would have. Dan says, "In the common walk of life, there is many a man patiently treading the round of daily toil, unconscious that he possesses powers which, if called into action, would raise him to equality with the world's most honoured men. The touch of a skillful hand is needed to arouse those dormant faculties. To have the advantage of association with leaders from diverse cultures and backgrounds and to be under the tutelage of skillful tutors with the help of the Holy Spirit has helped to arouse those dormant faculties in me."

After living in his own world for so long, the Odyssey enabled Dan to identify his selfishness and to realize that he was living in a larger world which belonged to God. This has helped him grow from serving himself to joyfully serving others in his Heavenly Father's world. He is more confident now in sharing and speaking publicly and his interpersonal relationship with others has improved because of the Odyssey experience.

As a result of the Odyssey, Dan has acknowledged the forty volunteers that PF Fiji has and he makes every effort to meet with them all and help them build bridges between the various service providers. At one time, Dan said he once saw the service providers as competitors in prison ministry. He now views them as valuable partners and due to the change he has made in himself, PF Fiji's service delivery has improved to the extent that the relationship and partnership with the Prison Correctional Services has enhanced as well.

The Odyssey assignments helped Dan to monitor and evaluate his personal, spiritual, physical and mental health and to also monitor and evaluate the national organization. Dan said he could not wait for the second phase of the Odyssey so he could share in class how much he had learned and how he had grown since the first phase; and how the organization as a whole had grown as a result of his personal growth. He says the personal growth quadrant of the Odyssey curriculum was definitely the most helpful to him personally because that is where he experienced the most development.

Since his completion of the Odyssey, the Alpha Course and Angel Tree® project have been programmes that are now currently recognized by the Fiji Prison Correctional Services. Recently four new programmes have been introduced – Purpose for Life, Character First, Substance Abuse and the Sycamore Tree Project. Positive feedback has been received already regarding these new programmes.

A first ever event, a Gospel Charity concert featuring performances by local gospel artists and local churches was organised by PF Fiji and the media (television, radio and newspapers) were involved which helped create public awareness for Prison Fellowship's service to "the least of these." This is a strong example of everyone working selflessly together for the greater cause.

Where does Dan Savou see himself and the future of PF Fiji? His desire is to see the ministry reach a stage where all full-time volunteers throughout Fiji, who give of their time so tirelessly, receive an allowance or salary to complement their unselfish efforts in prison ministry. As for Dan, he will continue to value himself as he was made in God's image and value the same gift in others. There is a lot of work to be done and Dan does not intend for selfish pride to get in the way of accomplishing all that God has planned for him or PF Fiji.