

On mission

TOWARDS BETTER DEVELOPMENT



VOL.8

Edited by
Ronald Brown & Mark Jones

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Endorsements

On Mission: Towards Better Development offers a thoughtful and example-filled selection of chapters from field veterans experienced in development work. Offering a theological framework, best practices, and examples of successful and less-than-successful endeavours, this book is essential reading. The Good News of Jesus is animating, and the world needs to experience the abundant life that Jesus offers—a life (abundant and eternal) that dances in God’s justice, truth, and endless love. These stories from international workers offer an honest history and a bold vision for effective development work that is critical to the mission Jesus has commissioned us to.

Bryce Ashlin-Mayo

President, Ambrose University

ON MISSION: Towards Better Development is full of stories . . . stories of remarkable, gifted, committed, compassionate, persevering, innovative, fallible, men and women who are giving their lives to relief and development in some of the darkest and most difficult places on the planet. Their stories are eye-opening, gut-wrenching, faith-building, and hope-giving. They are instructive and inspiring. They are honest and humble. They admit failure, and they celebrate success. They will encourage and instruct anyone involved in relief and development in any context in the world. Chapters 9 and 10 are, as they say, “worth the price of the book” because they highlight key principles that have application to all involved in relief and development, and other areas of business and ministry too. My daughter has been involved in relief and development in the West Bank, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen. I can hardly wait to share this volume with her.

Leigh Robinson

Johannesburg, South Africa

Reading these stories of courage and commitment in this eighth *On Mission* volume, we can acknowledge that so much has been achieved by God’s workers in the countries they are called to live in ... every small step, including backwards (!), is important and necessary to move forward. But we are also reminded how

much more work is still needed in the tapestries of the lives touched by God and His workers across the globe. Important concepts weave their way through the stories ... of resilience, innovation, community, building relationships, listening with open hearts and minds, and acting with purpose. This collection serves as a poignant reminder that there is a duty of care that we—as God’s workers—are called to heed in our work, whether in church ministries, workers in creative access countries, development workers, humanitarians, or peacekeepers. A great read indeed for those engaged in international work.

Kristen Downey

Senior Planner, United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, Baghdad

I arrived on the field a couple of years ago, armed with a master’s in international development and a lot of theory. Feeling very green, I have often wondered, “Where do I even start?” I felt the need for more direction in the practicalities of ‘how.’ *On Mission: Towards Better Development* was an encouragement, providing practical and diverse examples of how to do development work while proclaiming the Kingdom. I appreciate the advice and insights. I know I’m in good company!

Rebecca

North Africa

While the situational contexts of relief, rehabilitation, and development work range profoundly across regions and people groups, there are always opportunities for learning outside of our immediate sphere. This book provides a myriad of collective experiences spanning decades of work across cultures and is an invaluable resource for both those beginning their ministry in this vein and those who are well-established.

Ben

Middle East

Instructional, inspirational, and motivational, Volume 8 hits the target again. The instruction and counsel of seasoned veterans serving in the relief and development ministry of Jesus Christ tune the reader into heartbreaking narratives, yes. But they provide reasoned and practiced solutions to reach least-reached people groups. Herein lies practical counsel which feeds deeper understanding to this demanding care and compassion ministry.

Tim Moore

Envision Site Director, Phuket, Thailand

This volume of *ON MISSION* is a timely and welcomed addition to the series. The reader will appreciate the humility and learning posture of the contributors. The stories of development “failures” challenge the reader to reflect before acting. The stories of development impact will inspire readers to take risks, learn and adapt to the various opportunities that combine wholistic development with Christian witness.

Dave Blundell

Executive Director, Hungry For Life International

Imagine that you could sit around the table with a group of skilled practitioners in international ministry and just listen to their stories. You hear answers to questions like “Why are girls so vulnerable? What are some lessons you’ve learned from your mistakes?” and “Exactly HOW did you set up that resource that is now so deeply valued and integrated into the community?” This book combines the humble, personal stories of workers on mission around the world with concrete data surrounding some of the biggest human disasters of our time. Reading these chapters is an opportunity to join a table of skilled experts in mission and become part of a life-changing conversation.

Ron and Lisa Ramsey

Directors of CAMA Services USA, The Christian and Missionary Alliance

This volume is full of stories, both the struggling and the successful, of various development projects on the mission field. They provide valuable lessons in reaching out to people of different backgrounds and cultural settings. Together with other volumes of the series, it enriches our understanding of missions in the contemporary context. I am proud to be part of this mission movement.

Aaron Tang

General Secretary, Chinese Alliance World Fellowship

In my journey from an international development student to practitioner, and service in a Canadian denominational context, I have been privileged to rub shoulders with a few of these authors through service in Samaritan’s Purse, on boards of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, or hearing their stories. I am grateful to see these stories, and the authors efforts to honour Jesus by seeking the common good of the communities around them. Thank you to the editors and authors who shared practically from their experience, demonstrating humility in addressing where things have not gone well, and encouraging those that read to stay an ever-present learner. This volume would have been an encouragement to me in

the start of my journey and pointed me to important lessons on how best to love and honour context, staying ever-adaptable and assist others in addressing their needs as defined by them.

Nicole Jones-Qandah

Director of World Partners, Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada

We are living in a day and age where models of missions can be polarizing. There is often much opinion without practical knowledge of what is actually being done. This volume tells the stories of workers who have understood their environments, the peoples they are serving, and the season of history we are in. They have built models of relief and development that bring both Jesus and change to hard places and situations.

Ryan Graham

National Vice President, The Alliance Canada

The stories in this book are valuable examples of the many creative ways we have shared Christ's love. It's so important that we realize what development work looks like in different contexts, not just the successes but also the missteps and complexities. What a great resource for the next generation to learn from as they prepare to serve God wherever He calls them.

Sherri Ens

Director of Personnel, SEND International

This book weaves a tapestry of God's heart for the least-reached and most vulnerable, seen through the lens of compelling case studies of current Christian workers seeking to build bridges (and businesses) in hard places. A poignant thread flowing through each case study is searching for God's specific leading for the appropriate business in the context where God leads. The opening 'Oops' case studies caught my attention, as good intentions and initial success don't count for eternity. The successful development initiatives illustrate that smart business practices must be embarked upon prayerfully, grown prayerfully and released to nationals prayerfully. As part of the 'home team' of a denomination's sending arm, I highly recommend this 'On Mission' look at development as a must-read for every Christian seriously concerned for the least reached and most vulnerable. Let's not dare to ignore the paths worn by those who have (recently) gone before.

Valerie Penney

GlobalEd Programs Manager

Mission Global of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

If you are an international worker or someone who is preparing, advising, mentoring or sending international workers engaged in people-helping ministries, this volume of *ON MISSION* is one that you will want to keep within arm's reach. The case studies are wide-ranging and realistic. The authors draw out insightful principles from their experiences. Both models of good practice and bad practice are provided for the reader to learn from. I wish I had this book earlier in my four-and-a-half-decade career that started off in relief and development work and moved to equipping others for ministry. With my current role with its focus on mentoring, I was pleased to see mentoring as a recurring theme. People development, whether it is passing on a means to make a living or nurturing a journey of following Jesus as a way of life, is best facilitated when a Barnabas-like person invests in another person's life.

Tim Jacobson

Executive Director, MentorLink Canada

Making disciples of Jesus while engaging in international relief, development, and Business as Mission (BAM) is not for the faint of heart. Through captivating, first-hand stories from international workers, this book uniquely highlights opportunities to address the desperate plight of those in the developing world, particularly among unreached people groups. Without glossing over the challenges, the authors emphasize creative strategies, guiding principles and practical steps toward effective relief and development work while prioritizing fruitful disciple-making. I highly recommend this reading for anyone giving direction to or pursuing effective gospel work through international relief, development, and business as mission.

Jerry Schuetz

Global Harvest Mission Director, Apostolic Church of Pentecost

The ministry of Jesus demonstrates that God cares about transformation of people's spiritual, emotional, cognitive and socio-economic conditions. A similar emphasis needs to remain central and comprehensive in the mission of the Church today. This calls for international workers to be more than pedlars of faith but become courageously creative, culturally contextual, and compassionately engaged in the nurture and development of communities of HOPE! This volume provides a sample of what is working and what did not work. It persuasively compels further Spirit-directed exploits by many more to vigorously expand God's Kingdom.

T.V. Thomas

Chairman, Lausanne Global Diaspora Network

As Ron Brown accurately notes in his preface, there has been a notable need for new mission biographies and histories that examine and explain more recent mission endeavours globally. The *ON MISSION* series, and this eighth volume “*Towards Better Development*,” respond beautifully to that need and provides a broad and inspiring mosaic of how Christ’s call to missions has been lived out internationally in the Alliance and beyond. From the ministry among the girls of Niger, to the Christ-like support of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, to the juice factory seeking to provide employment for ostracized immigrants, this volume prompts the reader to thank God and to pray for these expressions of His Kingdom to continue to make Christ known.

Clyde Glass, PhD

Former Pastor, Southview Alliance Church, Calgary

This volume is a refreshing look at the world of development and business as mission. From the start of Chapter 1, there is no fear of admitting to ideas that did not go well. We can learn so much from mistakes and even better if we do not have to each individually commit them. The second part of the book moves into more testimonials of ministries that again show both the highs and the lows with transparency. The last section will allow the reader to leave with principles of development that are transferable and ready to be contextualized into a new situation.

Mike Schmidt, PhD

Director of Intercultural Studies Programs, Prairie College

Congratulations to the *ON Mission* team for another volume in their series! This new book is a wonderful addition to the conversation about international relief and development work. It was incredibly moving to read about transformed lives from West Africa, to SE Asia. Thank you for providing a space for development practitioners to share their stories from the trenches around the world of helping people in Jesus’ name.

Dave Ingram

Senior Director of Evangelism and Discipleship
Billy Graham Evangelistic Association of Canada

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Contributors

BECKY MCCABE (MA, Crown College) and her family have served with the Alliance through CAMA Services for 20 years. In 2013, she established Hands of Honor, a preventative ministry providing services to adolescent teen girls to keep them out of sexual exploitation and trafficking. In 2017, Becky and her family moved to Senegal, where she began Seeds of Hope, an education-focused ministry serving youth in slum communities. She currently serves in a leadership role with CAMA, where she is passionate about influencing and equipping the next generation of Jesus-loving humanitarians to take the gospel to vulnerable communities and people. She is actively involved in Hands of Honor and Seeds of Hope as they continue under local leadership.

BRUCE PIERCEY (BA in Poli Sci, University of Calgary, LLB Osgoode Hall at York University). In 1992, Bruce left a career in law to follow God's calling to bi-vocational missions in China. He, his wife Fran, and their daughter Amanda worked there with the International Fellowship of Alliance Professionals (IFAP) and, in 1997, moved into a business-for-transformation context with CAMA Services in Laos for five years. While in Laos, Bruce was also the lay pastor of a small international church. He began working full-time for Samaritan's Purse Canada in 2005, managing emergency response and community development projects across Asia. Since 2019, he has served as the international projects director for Samaritan's Purse Canada.

BUZZ MAXEY (MA, Fuller Seminary) and Myrna have worked with CAMA Services in Indonesia for many years. His involvement has been in leadership development, education, disaster response, and many other ministries. He has championed initiatives that uplift local communities and ensure their long-term well-being. His approach to development has not been to gain immediate results but to work for enduring solutions that empower individuals and communities for generations to come. One of his favourite quotes comes from his son Ben, who also serves with CAMA: "Let's not want to help so badly that we help badly."

CARA KENNEDY (B.Eng, University of Waterloo) and her husband Wade own and operate a business for transformation company that employs nearly 150 people from unreached people groups. This business and the relationships they have built in the country form the main context of their ministry. As part of a Bible-focused team, they meet regularly with men's and ladies' seeker and discipleship groups and embark in one-on-ones with key nationals for discipleship times. They host events and training days with the goal of building a humble and loving Christ-following community. They seek to do this in a contextual and natural way.

CHANTELLE (MA, Tulane University) and her husband Paul have been overseas working in development contexts for 16 years, along with their three children—first in Niger, Africa for 10 years and now in Malaysia for six years. Chantelle is passionate about advocacy and supporting the marginalized and sits on the advisory team for Relief and Development for The Alliance Canada.

CYNDY INGRAM (MALM, Ambrose University) and her husband Dave were international workers in Cote d'Ivoire for two terms, working in both villages and the capital city of Abidjan, where she taught French literacy classes, and helped establish a community centre for literacy and public health. She worked at Ambrose University directing onSite, a cross-cultural internship program, as well as working with the Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives. She also served as associate pastor of Intercultural Ministries at Foothills Alliance Church. She lives in Calgary, AB, and is loving life as a spiritual director, a piano teacher and a grandma.

DAMIEN LEE (DMin, Alliance Theological Seminary) grew up in Malaysia, studied in Canada, and pastored a church in Alberta before taking a global assignment in the Middle East for a decade. Currently, Damien is vice president international for The Alliance Canada. He lives with Darlene in Toronto, ON.

DANIEL (MDiv, Ambrose University) has been serving in and connected to Kingdom work in Southeast Asia for the past 17 years. Whether in the classroom, on the stage, behind a maze of IT equipment, or guiding a hospitality business, he is always thrilled to participate in the redemptive work God is doing in the world for His name's sake. Daniel and his wife Carla are serving in a creative access country with their young daughter in tow, working with a strong team committed to bringing freedom and restoration to persons victimized by or at high risk of exploitation and trafficking.

DEDEN (M. Intercultural Ministries, Canadian Theological Seminary) and his wife Joan have served in a disaster-prone creative access country for 26 years and have had many opportunities to be involved in various relief efforts during that time. After more than 20 years in one location, they recently moved to a new area of the country to help re-establish a work among a different least-reached people group, creating paths for both international and local workers to have a context-fitted, impactful Kingdom presence in the area.

DREW (M.Div, Canadian Theological Seminary) and Destiny have been serving as international workers in Asia since 2004. For over 10 years, they co-owned and managed a small business for transformation (B4T) in a creative access country, seeking to be witnesses for Christ and to bring meaningful and sustainable employment to women in rural villages.

JOANNE BEACH (MTS, Wycliffe College, University of Toronto) served The Alliance Canada for over 20 years and in various roles: Women's Ministries national president (2000-2006), missions consultant in the Eastern Canadian District (2004-2007), and the director of Justice and Compassion (2007-2023). She has travelled to over 55 countries, allowing her to experience what God is doing in many different cultures and contexts of ministry.

As director of Justice and Compassion, she oversaw The Alliance Canada's disaster relief responses, the refugee sponsorship program, and a national network of Alliance chaplains. Joanne served 16 years on the Canadian Foodgrains Bank board of directors, which is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. Over those years, she oversaw Alliance and Canadian government-funded programming with international partners to implement food and agricultural programming.

She also served on the Tearfund Canada (formerly World Relief Canada) board of directors for 20 years. Joanne also participated on the Commission of Justice and Peace for the Canadian Council of Churches for 10 years. She is currently serving in an advisory role at the Alliance World Fellowship.

Married to Dr. Lee Beach, a professor at McMaster Divinity College, they live in Ancaster, ON.

LAURENT TRABADELLO has worked for 20 years with Samaritan's Purse, managing various relief and development projects around the world. Since 2021, he has been the West Coast Africa international regional director for Operation Christmas Child, a child evangelism and discipleship program in Senegal, Cape

Verde, The Gambia, and Guinea Bissau.

MICHAEL HARDER is the co-founder and general director of Joma Bakery Café, which operates 15 cafés, four bakeries, and eight commercial food service contracts. Joma provides a taste of home while employing nearly 400 full-time staff, with over 40 being disabled. During 25 years with Joma, Michael has extended his knowledge well beyond his business administration studies. He has developed a broad skill set, enabling him to be relevant and effective in leading multi-national teams in the Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodian markets. He brings visionary gifting and creativity to develop new systems and solutions for improving business operations and productivity, contributing to Joma’s substantial success in becoming a multi-national company. Michael is committed to setting the standard that models business success while impacting his community in a significant Kingdom-focused way.

MIKE SOHM (M.Div., Canadian Theological Seminary) and his wife Nancy have served with the Alliance in different roles, beginning in Thailand. They transitioned back to the U.S., where Mike served as the regional director for the East Asia/Pacific Islands Region. Mike also served in the administration at Crown College for seven years before leading CAMA Services for a decade. Currently, he is an advisor to the president of the Alliance World Fellowship for relief and development, member care, and fundraising. Mike is passionate about fostering collaboration that can evolve into partnerships.

TREVOR (B.Comm., M.Ed., University of Calgary) and his family feel blessed to steward a small juice factory that has been in the Alliance family for almost 20 years. Located in a refugee settlement, one local friend described the factory as “the tree that Zacchaeus climbed to be able to see Jesus.” Desperate for good peanut butter, they expanded operations to include this staple food and became their best customers. When not squeezing fruit or crushing peanuts, they are usually worshipping with their local church, working on a people-with-disabilities ministry, or hiking and riding in the mountains.

EDITORS

RONALD BROWN (D.Min., Trinity International University), after pastoring a church in Alberta for two years, worked in Africa for 26 years with The Alliance Canada, first in theological education, then as Africa regional director, and then

for 13 years as a mission mobilizer in the Western Canadian District Alberta office. He and his wife Myra live in Calgary, AB.

MARK JONES (MA, Trinity Western University) has lived in Asia for 30 years, 15 of those years in Lao and 15 in Thailand. Mark's roles have included being a language student, managing social enterprises, and community development and relief work. Currently, he is the leader of the relief and development track of The Alliance Canada. In his free time, he loves mountain biking. He lives with his wife Paula in Vancouver, BC.

Note: The names of workers in creative access countries have been changed for security purposes.

Preface

by Ronald Brown

An intercultural professor once asked me if there were some newer mission biographies which could be used for reading assignments, books written more recently than those about past greats such as Hudson Taylor, William Carey, and David Livingstone. The question planted a seed in my mind.

The field of missiology (the science of missions) includes four streams of study: theology, history, culture, and strategy. The 780-page reader, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* and the *Kairos Course* are divided into these four sections.

The ON MISSION series began when Gladys Thompson, Alexis Tjart, Dan Nel, Shelby Keith, and I started working together to produce some quality, readable books about mission for today's faith communities. My job was to quarterback each book and bring together writers to achieve this goal.

Volumes 1, 2, 3, 6 - *ON MISSION: Stories of Those Who Went.* We began by asking forty-seven former global workers to write their life stories to show how God had used them to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth and give accountability to donors and prayer partners. Thus, the history of the missions stream came into being.

Volume 4 - *ON MISSION: Caring for Those Who Go.* This book looks at the member care side of global work. For international workers to continue two to three decades on the front lines of ministry, there are sending churches and agencies with policies, structures, people, and systems to guide and care for them.

Volume 5 - *ON MISSION: Why We Go.* With my Congolese colleague, Mabilia Kenzo, 24 pastor-scholars were invited to explain why we go into missions. Those essays are the theology of the mission stream.

Volume 7 - *ON MISSION: Road to Going Global.* Based on our combined 58 years of living in seven different countries, my daughter and I put together a cultural missions primer for those in the process of going global and needing cultural intelligence. This primer is in the cultural stream of missions.

Volume 8 - *ON MISSION: Toward Better Development.* In our increasingly complicated world and with an effort to bring the good news to unreached people in places where regular international workers cannot go, and visas are not

available, Mark Jones (International Strategy Director, The Alliance Canada) and I decided to focus on the strategy of international community development. As we all know, there are good and bad ways to do development. This book intends to feature some case studies of development projects with at least a decade of history. These workers have figured things out and are making a positive difference around the world today, so this is in the strategic stream of the ON MISSION series of books.

The ON MISSION books are available as a free download [here](#). Print versions are available [here](#).

Introduction

by Mark Jones

Let's start with a question: What strategies would you employ to assist individuals in overcoming poverty, both in economic and spiritual terms? Numerous estimates put the percentage of the world living in financial poverty at approximately 47 percent. If the job of helping people out of poverty were easy, you would think that number would be a lot smaller. Where to start? How do we impact without bringing our own cultural baggage to bear on our responses?

What if you didn't have to process possible responses on your own? What if you could gather with some friends who had spent a fair bit of time trying to make a difference? What if you could sit and listen to their successes and failures and learn things to help you as you engage a needy world that needs to hear the whole gospel and see it in action? This book allows long-time practitioners in relief, development, and missional business to share their stories with you. You will hear stories of triumphs and setbacks; each will serve as a valuable lesson for you on your journey to impacting a world in need.

As a practitioner of 30 years in Asia, with my fair share of success and failure stories, I commend this book and its authors to you for your consideration and enjoyment. Diving into a chapter that resonates with your passions could offer you a more engaging reading experience. Learn from those who work with refugees or food insecurity issues, anti-human trafficking, or how to set up and run a business that not only turns a financial profit but makes a huge difference in the community within which it exists.

Jesus said in John 10:10 that He came 'to give a rich and satisfying life' (NLT). If you want to know how to come alongside Him as He does that with people living in poverty, read on.

Mark Jones
International Strategy Director
The Alliance Canada

Foreword

by Damien Lee

I feel somewhat ill-equipped to write the Foreword on this volume of *On Mission*. I have “dabbled” in the world of development among the world’s unreached poor through the occasional writing of a project proposal or hands-on delivery of food baskets and medical assistance. However, very little of my vocational ministry history falls within the realm of the gritty expertise exemplified by the various contributors in the following pages. This fact would render me, and perhaps you, as the ideal audience for this volume, men and women on the journey to learn about the world of development through a biblical lens.

I have the profound privilege of knowing and working with some of the practitioners who have penned the chapters herein. While most readers would label them as experts in the world of development, these men and women would humbly view themselves as those who have made countless mistakes, with the God-given grace of learning from such pitfalls and the ongoing opportunities to keep trying. All told, this volume’s practitioners have over two centuries of development experience. Their lessons have been forged in the furnace of front-line community development among some of the world’s poorest physically and spiritually, in some of the harshest climates of countries typically closed or hostile to the proclamation of the gospel. These stories have been sowed with the blood, sweat, and tears of the authors and those they love and serve.

As with all books, different readers will find specific sections impacting them to a greater degree than others. I found Mark Jones’ chapter, “Two Decades in the Trenches,” quite helpful for where I’m at as I approach two decades in vocational ministry. According to Mark, effective development practitioners are Searchers, men and women who learn to listen, keep growing, choose humility, build a tolerance for ambiguity and become more self-aware. Upon reflection, such traits are critical not just for development practitioners but for all of God’s people seeking to live out the transforming power of God’s unifying grace and love in an increasingly polarized and fractured world.

With my limited experience, I wholeheartedly agree with Buzz Maxey that “although we are often involved in these kinds of projects as we deal with peoples’ physical needs, the most important and sustainable development occurs inside the

mind and heart.” As you read through the following pages, certainly glean all you can from the practical wisdom offered. History does not need to repeat itself in the development *faux pas* described. Yet, my hope for each reader is what Maxey describes, for ongoing “sustainable development inside the mind and heart” of those offering and receiving development, stemming from the gracious hand of God desiring to heal all brokenness.

On Mission with you,
Rev. Dr. Damien Lee
Vice President, International
The Alliance Canada

PART A

Caution! Mistakes Are Easily Made

Chapter 1

Oops, That Didn't Go So Well!

by Various Authors

Before we begin considering what better development looks like, we first looked at some examples of things that weren't done well. These underline how often people arrive from their home country and swiftly look at something in another country, decide what the problem is, and then quickly provide a solution and solve it from their cultural perspective.

This chapter is a testament to the humility of our contributors, who are currently on or have worked on the frontlines and have made some mistakes. They show how easy it is for us to make bad judgment calls. These stories are intended to caution us about quickly arriving at our solutions for their problems. Caution will save us from making bad development decisions.

Waiting for Big, Fat, Healthy Cattle by Mark Jones

In one area of the country we served, subsistence-level living was the norm. We looked at their resources and observed most farmers had a cow or maybe even a few. While this area was far from the capital and the good markets, we saw the potential for these farmers to increase the amount and quality of their cattle, and we could help find solutions on the market end of things.

So, we devised a plan. We brought in a cattle expert from Canada. He researched everything related to making small, scrawny cattle big, fat, and marketable. He did trial plots on grasses from different areas to find out what grew well and balanced it out with grasses the cattle seemed to like better than others. He did silage trials and looked at ways of bailing. He looked at what diseases they were dying of and got access to the right kind of vaccinations. And with all this learning in hand, we started training sessions for farmers to teach them all he had learned. Then, with high expectations, we waited to see big, fat, healthy cattle.

We waited, and we waited, and it never happened. What could have gone wrong? So, we started doing what we should have done in the first place: We talked to the farmers about what was going on. It seems like it should have been evident to us all along that we needed to take this step. Yet somehow, when we think we see what the problem is, we tend to jump to conclusions about the

solutions and devise a plan on our own instead.

It turns out the farmers have their one cow or a few cows for really only one purpose...manure production. As farmers, they wanted access to good fertilizer, and as long as their cattle stayed alive and made cow pies, they had what they wanted. They wanted their crops healthy to feed their families and maybe enough to sell for cash. The vaccinations went well as they helped keep their cattle alive. However, nothing we did to help find ways of turning them into beef cattle found root as the farmers had no desire to sell their cattle; they needed the manure.

Honouring and Protecting? by Chantelle

From 2010 to 2017, we ran a school for teen girls in Niger, Africa. This school was meant to combat child marriage and train these girls in income-generating skills, teach them life skills, and build relationships with them and their families. To help us do this, we hired national staff as our cooks, translators, and sewing teachers.

One lady named Amina was our head teacher. She had run sewing programs in the city for many years and was a real asset to us. I valued her knowledge and trusted her to manage the girls and their learning of the national curriculum for the sewing skills program. Amina was a larger woman, not in the best of health and not very mobile.

One day, we had a grant to buy a bunch of new sewing machines for our school and to give some to another community sewing centre in a neighbouring area. I did not want to burden Amina with the hassle and physically demanding work of going out into the heat and markets to track down suppliers and buy and transport about 15 sewing machines. So, in my mind, I was honouring and protecting her by saving her the work and assigning it to someone else. I asked the head teacher of the other school to do it since she was receiving the benefit of some of the machines.

The machines were bought and delivered. Only then did I find out Amina was hurt and crying; she felt ashamed I had skipped over her to ask this other teacher (with whom she had a bit of a long history of relationship or rivalry) to trust to find the machines and make the purchases. She wondered why I did not trust her and had not asked her to do it.

I thought I had been honouring and helping her by not asking her to do extra work. We talked, I asked for forgiveness, and we explained the motivations of each of us. We worked it out. But I learned a valuable lesson that week.

Long-term Generosity by Becky McCabe

After 13 years of service in one country, our family recently re-launched to a new country and was back in language and cultural studies. I enjoyed meeting

with a wonderful new language and cultural teacher, Khady. During one of our classes, we got to chat about our kids. Khady shared with me how, at one point, another expat family had offered to send her daughter to the local American international school our kids attended. She decided to turn down the generous offer.

I was surprised; I knew what a significant educational opportunity it would have been for her only child. Khady explained she had asked the family how long they'd help her with her daughter's education. You see, Khady knew she could never afford the cost alone and recognized how devastating it would be for her daughter to be pulled out and forced to enter the local school system. When the family was not sure they'd be able to commit to the entirety of her daughter's education, Khady decided to turn down their generous offer.

After our conversation, I began reflecting on the past 13 years and how often I had not considered the long-term implications of excessive generosity.

How often had I set up expectations or living standards which were not met long-term? I can't deny how remorseful I felt when I thought about the students whose education we no longer sponsored. I learned a lot from my conversation with Khady, and before I err on the side of generosity, I measure how able I am to maintain my generosity long-term.

How often had I set up expectations or living standards which were not met long-term?

Rats in the Rice Huller by Buzz Maxey

Many years ago, before we had much experience, we were involved in helping install a rice hulling machine in a poor community. The people in the community formed a farmer's cooperative and agreed to pay for half of the price of the rice huller. We promised to pay for the other half of the costs. We installed the machine, and everyone was thrilled. The cooperative members grew great rice and processed it together. They sold the rice and the rich bran from it, made money, and even bought a couple of second-hand vehicles with their profits. In terms of development, it looked like a very effective endeavour. Visitors came to see the "successful agricultural development project." Even the British Broadcasting Corporation made a documentary on this "development success" story.

However, after a short time, we began to see things deteriorate in the project. We observed what looked like a successful development project was actually beginning to hurt the people involved. Villagers started to gossip and fight. The community was split, and it even weakened the local church. Co-op members became greedy and corrupt. We were saddened as we watched how destructive

the rice hulling project had become. Eventually, this well-intentioned agricultural project died a slow death. Today, the rice huller is a broken-down piece of junk that hasn't run for many years and is home to a colony of rats!

The villagers were ready. Our motivation was honourable. So, how could this have concluded so poorly?

It all went wrong because of us. We learned that even when we want to help, we must go slowly and carefully to prevent a development disaster. Now, whenever we are involved in helping people, there are four principles we adhere to:

1. Go slowly and prayerfully.
2. Require sacrifice on the part of participants.
3. Mentor villagers in the use of their increased income.
4. Walk with them when they fail and give them hope to try again.

After learning some hard lessons, the project head now pastors his church, runs his own rice hulling business, and is respected in the community.

Doing "Reverse Development" by Buzz Maxey

The people group we are involved with is located in a remote area of Indonesia. There are no roads into the region; the only way to get in and out is by airplane. For many years, we were only serviced by a small aircraft. Mission Aviation Fellowship would bring supplies, mail, and a few passengers when they landed.

The local people saw that the airstrips in other tribes were longer and broader and that airplanes could actually bring in more passengers and goods; they asked if we could help them with an airstrip project of their own. We hesitated because there was a hill in the way where an extension would be needed. It was explained to the community that the project would take years of hard work and lots of earth moving by shovel to make the extension. The only way to move such a large amount of earth would be by bulldozer.

Because of their enthusiasm and persistence, I was slowly drawn into the airstrip project, and my mind began to dream of how to get a bulldozer into the village. We convinced a construction company in the capital city to donate the use of their bulldozer. The Australian military had two large helicopters they were using for a few months in our area, and amazingly, they were happy to sling-load the bulldozer in by parts. The operator assembled the bulldozer, we flew in loads of oil and fuel, and they went to work.

After several months, the airstrip was completed. It had cost us a lot of time, energy, and money, but we were pleased when large airplanes began to land and discharge nine passengers at a time and an abundance of goods. A big feast was held, and we were pleased at how happy the villagers were and satisfied we had contributed to their welfare.

Twenty-four years later, many airplanes land on the airstrip each week, and

pastors and church leaders are often gone from their ministries. It's easy to go to the town and the source of government money now, and people often stay away for months at a time.

HIV is spreading as men travel more, and the education of children is almost nonexistent. Both men and women spend less time tending their pigs and preparing their gardens. It's rare to see the government health worker and the medical facility, which has remained locked for four years. When an airplane now lands, it's usually loaded with rice, cooking oil, sugar, ramen noodles, and salt, which lead to heart disease and diabetes.

Of course, there are some benefits of a longer airstrip and larger airplanes, but sometimes I wonder if the villagers wouldn't be better off if they still relied on the little runway. Would church leaders be in their posts instead of flying off to the city? Would the lifeless literacy program have continued? Did we really contribute? Did our efforts hurt rather than help? Maybe it was actually "reverse development" to which we contributed?

Did our efforts hurt
rather than help?

Broken Wells by Laurent Trabadello

What always comes to mind is the endless quantity of broken wells and pumps abandoned because they were "handed down" without ownership by the community or any means to maintain them. Sustainable practices would include a significant contribution from the community, including a group responsible for the maintenance and security of the well.

Feeling Slighted by Cyndy Ingram

During our second term in West Africa, we partnered with a national pastor with a heart for outreach in a poor neighbourhood. Most of the residents were Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries. Property had been obtained for church use, and a few bricks had been used to start the walls of a church known as home to a significant tribal group (the "B people") in the country.

At our pastor's suggestion, we canvassed the entire neighbourhood (about 10,000 homes) to determine their felt needs. A local Christian woman trained in public health wanted to assess the possibility of establishing a health clinic or vaccination centre. So, with her help, along with several university students, we went from home to home with a survey. We were particularly interested in assessing openness to offering French literacy classes. The results were encouraging, and we began to move forward with steps toward making these dreams a reality.

Our national colleagues felt strongly that the first building on the property should be a facility for literacy classes and a health/vaccination centre. They

explained how if the church building was built first, it could be a stumbling block to the neighbourhood people we wanted to reach, making them more reluctant to attend classes or bring their children for vaccinations. So, we built our classrooms and health office, received government approval to run a vaccination centre, installed a fridge for the vaccines, and started classes and appointments. For the first while, everything seemed to be great.

But with a lot of civil unrest and instability in the country, things started to fall apart. We were out of the country for months at a time, and the maintenance of our programs fell to some of the local believers (part of the “B people”). This group had initially said they supported this outreach venture, but as time went on and their church building was not moving forward, they began to resent the priority being given to the immigrant population. In short, they stopped paying the electricity bill, the power was shut off, all the vaccines in the fridge were ruined, and we lost our designation as a vaccination centre. In time, the literacy classes dwindled down to just a few students.

What happened? We needed much more support and “buy-in” from the local believers. They felt slighted because their church building was pushed to the side in favour of a facility that serviced “outsiders.”

Care Before Cure by Bruce Piercey

Always put care before cure. This aphorism is not always easy to implement. Our Western obsession with fixing problems can cause us to put the fix (cure) before actually caring for people. We often have trouble distinguishing how fixing someone’s problems is not the same as caring for them. This is especially true in medical care projects.

Our office in one country received the “preliminary” approval for a team of visiting doctors and nurses to conduct mobile clinics in a remote mountainous region. I came with a Canadian doctor to meet with local Ministry of Health officials and doctors from the hospital planning to support our visiting medical team. Our goal was to receive the final approval for the clinics, travel visas, and permission for these doctors to practice under the supervision of national doctors.

Our discussions were going smoothly until my Canadian doctor inquired about the frequency of childhood respiratory illnesses. The Ministry of Health official quickly informed us that only two cases of pneumonia had been reported throughout the whole district in the previous year.

Knowing statistically that more children die each year from respiratory illness than any other cause, I asked, “What percentage of families in each village cook over indoor open fire pits?” Without hesitation, a local doctor said, “100%.”

Now, I let my little bit of expertise get the better of me. “How is it possible that the clinics have only seen two cases of respiratory illness in the whole year?”

"That's what our reports say," said the Ministry of Health official.

"Shall we move on," said the local doctor.

"But it is impossible that there are only two cases reported," I continued. The local doctor gave me a stern look and silently said, "Drop it!"

It was too late. The local Ministry of Health official had reported only two cases to the central government, so there were only two cases. We had agreed to provide a final report to the central government Ministry of Health as a condition for our visas. Clearly, our visiting medical team would be reporting many cases of respiratory illness.

In my zeal for our medical team to diagnose and potentially treat childhood respiratory illness, I was conflating cure with care. My zeal for an effective cure resulted in denying our team's visas and the clinics cancelled. No child received any medical care.

I was fully aware that the local medical administrators were in the habit of sending false reports to prove that they had achieved the health outcomes mandated by the central government. In fairness, the local officials were required to eliminate childhood illness without any resources. Filling this gap was the reason for setting up the mobile clinics in the first place. My insistence on getting the numbers correct to document the "success" of our "fix" eliminated any chance of any medical treatment for the children we were supposed to care for.

My insistence on getting the numbers correct...eliminated any chance of any medical treatment for the children...

Striking the Right Balance by Bruce Piercey

We were one of about six international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with another local NGO implementing projects in the inner-city ad hoc communities (aka "slums") of internally dispossessed migrants seeking a better life. Youth gangs, drugs – notably glue sniffing, lack of education, literacy, and access to medical care were some of the issues we sought to address.

The projects were innovative and saw some remarkable success. The ministry was growing rapidly, as was our funding year after year. The founder of this ministry was a well-respected leader in his local church, and the organization received support from at least five other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Their projects received positive acclaim from local governments. Legal agreements were in place for four different projects, which included detailed quarterly reporting of project outcomes and finances with copies of receipts. We had no reason to suspect any misuse of funds.

Only one requirement for ensuring accountability was missed. We had no idea what requirements the other INGO had in place. We did not have a clear picture of the total number of projects and funding received by the local NGO. Although our funds were initially deposited into a separate bank account, funds were being transferred into an operational account where funds from other donors were mixed in. Some donors were from jurisdictions with very lax requirements; others simply granted funds. It turned out that their largest donor gave all of their project funding in one payment each year.

While the NGO required the director to have two signatures on all withdrawals for him and the financial manager, the large cash balance at the beginning of the year created pressure and temptation for both. In an honour-based culture, both had reached the senior levels in the NGO by extending favours to family, friends and patrons. As the organization grew in size and reputation, the pressure mounted to use its access to funds to “help” patrons in need. Excess funds were loaned to themselves “with every intention of paying these loans back.” Small at first, the loans grew until they had purchased land, a house, and finally, a Lexus vehicle, all “for the ministry.” The end came when a “whistleblower” informed the donors of the misuse of funds.

Six INGOs, all supporting the same local organization. All seeing good results from the projects. Some have strong controls, and others have weak or no controls on funds. There was no collective understanding of the big picture. All expressed a high level of trust and shock when the misuse of funds was revealed.

Were we collectively guilty of putting temptation in the way of our brothers? Had we collectively got the balance of trust and accountability wrong? The local leaders had rationalized their own actions as loans but were nevertheless culpable for those same actions.

In perfect hindsight, we might have prevented this with a few simple questions. For example, I never asked them, “Who bought the Lexus?” I trusted them too much to think it was bought with misused funds.

My Worst Cultural Blunder by Cara Kennedy

When we first arrived in our host country, we lived with a family consisting of a father, a mother, and four teenagers. While we were living there, one of the daughters got engaged and then married; we were able to attend the wedding celebrations and were immersed in many wonderful family connections.

Eighteen months later, I received an urgent phone call telling me this young bride’s husband had committed suicide. Culture dictated that I needed to drop

whatever I was doing and come to the funeral gathering immediately. I did my best to dress in local attire, complete with a large mourning headscarf.

As I made the trek to the groom's family home, I felt nervous about how to connect with all the grieving family members in a new-to-me environment. Beyond the nervousness, I was desperate to connect with my local sister to comfort her.

At the apartment door, I was greeted by strangers and could hear loud crying and wailing echoing through the hallway of several rooms. I was brought down the hallway to a doorway opening into a spacious room. There were many people gathered all around the edges of the room, but across the far side, I spotted my friend, the wife of the deceased, slumped over and sobbing audibly but quietly. Not paying attention to my surroundings, I stepped into the room and beelined straight to my sister, wrapping her in my arms. In the short journey from doorway to sister, I had to sort of step over something in the middle of the room.

Now, we squatted in embrace and tears, just holding each other without words. It was enough to communicate care amidst the heart-wrenching pain of the situation.

Time passed, and eventually, we sat down properly, calmed ourselves and were offered a little tea. It was about this time when I actually looked around the room. I observed new guests arriving, quietly, thoughtfully and methodically greeting others around the room, making their way toward the deceased's spouse and mother.

Oops – I'd missed out on that cultural cue/formality! Then I noticed the emptiness in the middle of the room, but it was not completely empty. Could it indeed be? In the centre of the room, on the floor, was what I'd stepped over on my way to my friend, the groom's body?

Then I noticed the emptiness in the middle of the room...

In the decade and a half that we've lived amongst these people, that is the worst of my cultural blunders! Thankfully, everyone in the room was so gracious, and nobody threw me out of the gathering. Years later, the host sister is now once again married. This memory serves as a poignant reminder of the learning curve in adapting to new customs and cultures.

Gut Feelings and Napkin Answers by Michael Harder

We own and operate over a dozen fast-casual dining cafés and other food service and central kitchen facilities. We provide premium products to Starbucks, hotels, and many other clients. Recently, we operated in a new market. It isn't small, with over 10 million people in it, and so many of our customers from other

cities said we would do well there if we opened cafés. There is a lack of our style of café.

We had limited funds and were looking for a quick opportunity to have a business unit that generated cash and provided our great products and services to the residents of this city. In haste, we found a location and rushed to open it within a month. Though our chief financial officer strongly cautioned against this and asked key questions, we (myself the biggest culprit) used gut feeling and napkin answers to feel confident with our decision.

Six months after opening, we were forced to close and accumulate horrendous losses. I have been involved in renovating and opening over 20 new locations, and never has one failed to make a profit. This was not only a financial disaster, but it also came with a headache of issues week after week. Much travel and time was spent trying to bail out and save a sinking ship.

Listening to a few dozen customers doesn't mean market research and proper due diligence can be avoided. Being overconfident doesn't mean you won't fail eventually. Now, 20 staff members are without a job they enjoyed, and in the consuming headache and mess, damaged relationships occurred, of which this might be the biggest regret.

Try to Explain This to Your Donors! by Drew

You bought what with that money!?

Our artisan knitting business was growing. We had built a team of 10 women skilled at knitting hats, mitts, and scarves. We were seeing the fruit of bringing sustainable employment to a village of subsistence farmers.

The ladies who knit for us lived in a rural village high in the mountains, two hours away by car. Once a month, we loaded our 4x4 with bags of yarn, gathered the new patterns, contracts, and cash to pay the ladies for their hard work and made our way to the village.

They raised their children, worked the fields, and tended the cows and pigs while many of their husbands went to the city to find work. The men spent most of the money they earned before they came home after weeks or months of being away. Little cash was available for medications or to pay the travel costs to get their children to school. But with the money they earned knitting for us, the ladies could purchase those much-needed medications and pay for those extra costs when sending their children to school. Their self-worth grew as they told their husbands how much money they had earned throughout the year.

But on one trip to the village, we learned about another way hard-earned

money was being spent. The son of one of the knitters was getting married, and the family wanted to show the bride's family that they weren't poor. What better way to impress the bride's family than to have a new 55-inch flat-screen TV in the living room when they arrive! The TV was purchased, and we were asked to bring it with us on our next village trip. How do we explain this to our supporters back in Canada?

The ladies were subsistence farmers. They had no cash for common medications and extra school expenses. But with the purchase of that huge TV, we learned two things. First, while we could employ these ladies, we couldn't decide for them how they spent their money. Second, we had much to learn about this village's felt needs.

PART B

DEVELOPING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Chapter 2

Building Bridges: The Power of Faith-Based Disaster Relief

by Deden

On the 5th of August, 2018, yet another peaceful Indonesian island was rocked by a cataclysmic earthquake, leaving widespread devastation and desperate residents in its wake. The tremors shattered buildings, displaced communities, and claimed lives, plunging the population into a state of emergency and prompting an urgent national response. Amidst the chaos and rubble, tales of resilience and solidarity emerged as testimonies to the unwavering spirit of communities in the face of adversity. This seismic event left a profound impact on the island's physical landscape and etched itself into the collective memory of those who experienced it, serving as a poignant reminder of the unpredictable forces of nature and the resilience of the human spirit.

In the aftermath of any earthquake, a profound sense of trauma often envelops the affected communities, leaving indelible scars on the collective psyche. The sudden and violent upheaval of the earth shatters not just buildings and infrastructure but also the sense of security and stability individuals once held dear. Survivors

grapple with a myriad of emotions, ranging from fear and anxiety to grief and despair, as they confront the stark reality of loss – of loved ones, homes, and familiar surroundings. The relentless aftershocks served as cruel reminders of the initial terror, triggering a persistent state of hyperarousal and vigilance. Even the most mundane activities are tinged with apprehension as survivors navigate their shattered landscape. Yet amidst the darkness, glimmers of hope emerged. Support networks, counselling services, and acts of solidarity offered a lifeline to those grappling with the profound psychological toll of the earthquake's aftermath.

The sudden and violent upheaval of the earth shatters not just buildings and infrastructure but also the sense of security and stability individuals once held dear.

The infamous Aceh tsunami of December 2004 was not Indonesia’s first natural disaster to demand a massive relief effort, but it was certainly the largest and most publicized. It put disaster relief on the radar of every Kingdom worker throughout the country. By the time the 2018 earthquake hit, Alliance workers throughout Indonesia had become adept at responding quickly and effectively in crises.

Beginning Stages of Relief

Effective disaster response begins with thorough surveys of the affected areas. Many areas of the island, such as the capital city, were certainly severely impacted. Thousands of people throughout the island were living in makeshift shelters and trying to scrape together daily needs, all while deeply traumatized and without much help from the outside. However, we have learned over the years that impacted areas in cities and areas close to major roads tend to receive the attention and help they need fairly quickly because NGOs, government agencies, and – perhaps most importantly – the media have ready access.

Those poor souls away from the spotlight often languish for weeks before anyone notices them and attends to their needs. For this reason, Alliance workers in Indonesia have usually focused relief efforts on areas off the beaten path. In this case, it was a small, overlooked village in the north, far from the gaze of most agencies offering aid. In the eyes of most, the village was unimportant, unstrategic, and unlikely to receive many “likes” on social media.

The second stage of effective relief consists of countless hours speaking gently and strategically with those affected, determining their needs, and then working out, in cooperation with local leaders, how to meet those needs. In Asian cultures, nothing happens outside of a relationship, so building relationships was key.

A beautiful first we witnessed in the earthquake’s aftermath was that both of these vital beginning stages were spearheaded by the leader of the national church’s brand new relief and development arm, Nathan. Together with a local pastor, Nathan determined the area in which we would work, established rapport with a receptive local leader, and got things moving quickly in a culturally appropriate way. Nathan then returned to Jakarta to “mobilize the troops,” encouraging the national church to give towards, pray for, and send people to help those who were decidedly not their spiritual brothers and sisters.

Effective disaster response begins with thorough surveys of the affected areas.

Meeting Needs

With the groundwork established, a hodge-podge team of workers gathered from across the country and arrived one by one in that little village. Alliance international workers, national colleagues, local believers from unaffected parts of the island, and a few random volunteers set up their “base camp” right in the heart of the village. Some slept in tents across the dirt road, some slept on the front porch of the local leader, and some drove almost daily back and forth from the capital. Local women cooked all our meals. A wonderful sense of camaraderie quickly emerged as everyone worked hard to help those who could not yet help themselves.

Each type of natural disaster has its own unique relief needs. After floods and tsunamis, wells need to be cleaned, and the omnipresent mud needs to be cleared from houses and roads. After volcanic eruptions, roofs need to be cleared of fallen ash, and everyone needs face masks to guard their lungs from the fine dust hanging in the air. In the aftermath of all natural disasters, however, the basic needs of water, food, shelter, and health care (including mental health care) are top priorities.

A widespread and essential need was access to clean water because many wells or springs had collapsed, and the earthquake and aftershocks had severed pipes. And people *always* need water. Recruiting local volunteers, local trucks and drivers, purchasing tanks and containers, and distributing clean water to neighbouring villages became a high priority at first. Eventually, it tapered off as



Sleeping quarters for volunteers at “base camp”



Clean water distribution was vital in early stages

water sources were made functional again.

Indonesians eat fresh food, so that was the second priority. Canned or dried food is not part of the local diet, so providing rice, vegetables, fish, tofu, tempe, and the all-important spices needed for daily cooking was a major undertaking. Buying local is always preferable but not always possible. One local volunteer had a brand new vehicle, which he had purchased just before the earthquake, and he selflessly made almost daily trips from the capital, delivering much-needed fresh food and other essentials that couldn't be found nearby.



Bags and bags of food, ready to be packed and distributed

Even though Indonesia straddles the equator and there's no danger of hypothermia, shelter from the tropical sun and rain is still essential in the first days and weeks after a disaster. Tarps, ropes, mats, and blankets provide physical comfort as well as mental and emotional relief at a time when it is hard to come by. Even the simple things we might never think of under normal circumstances become a high priority in times of disaster—such as diapers, soap, a change of clothing, hair brushes, tampons, and baby formula. The list is long, but providing for these real needs cannot be overlooked. They were brought in from the island's capital or larger centres on other islands.

A major complicating factor, intertwined with all the practical needs mentioned above, is the deep trauma, fear, and grief that people need to work through in the days and weeks following a natural disaster. The main earthquake of August 5th was devastating, but compounding the trauma of that event were the strong, multiple daily aftershocks in the following weeks. Grief and fear traumatized everyone while emotionally and mentally paralyzing many.

It was quickly recognized that trauma counselling was a real need. Enter Eni, a national colleague with a wealth of experience in disaster relief and trauma counselling. For many weeks, Eni and her team spent hours every day helping people process their grief and fear, praying for them, and helping dozens (maybe even hundreds) of children work through their feelings through play, singing, clubs, and games. Those kids probably never even knew they were receiving some of the best trauma counselling available because they were having so much fun with Aunti Eni and her friends.

There were several soccer fans among the group of volunteers, and soccer is the number one sport in Indonesia, so another helpful contribution to the community's mental, emotional, and social health were sporting events allowing the young and energetic to play together and burn off steam. Regular friendly matches were played throughout the relief period, and one of the Alliance workers even organized a tournament several months after the earthquake, reuniting local young people, volunteers who returned home when the relief stage was over, and even teams invited from other islands. This was an effective, enjoyable way to rekindle the friendships forged in the aftermath of the earthquake and provide yet another opportunity for young people to talk together and continue to process the ongoing journey of life post-disaster.

The earthquake made hundreds of homes "flat with the earth," as Indonesians would say, but many hundreds more were left in a perilous struggle with gravity, always on the verge of collapse with even the slightest nudge from an aftershock. The effect on peoples' psyche was significant. Beloved photos, essential documents, blankets, pots, and a lifetime of memories needed to be rescued, but fear of re-entering their precarious homes kept them from doing so. We



A child stands among the rubble of her home

quickly realized this was a very real area in which we could be of service. Relief volunteers, unfettered by the paralyzing trauma that gripped local residents, zipped in and out of homes, rescuing precious family possessions and important documents from their precarious locations and returning them to their grateful owners.

We also took on demolition duties. Houses throughout many areas of Indonesia are often built close to one another, and dangerously leaning homes needed to come down for public safety. With thick ropes, crowbars, and bamboo poles, the youngest and strongest among us brought many more houses to the ground. On the one hand, the demolition of peoples' homes triggered a new stage of grief for them, but it also served as a transition point from relief to rebuilding.

Earthquakes create rubble like you wouldn't believe, so what do you do with it all? In the early stages, no heavy machinery is available, so rubble gets cleared, reduced to smaller rubble, and either relocated to somewhere out of the way or becomes the base for new foundations, ready to be built upon when the time is right.

After Relief Workers Leave

It's well understood that disaster relief is a short-term effort and can't continue indefinitely; that's not the nature of it. Agencies run out of money, media outlets move on to the next world event, volunteers return home, and the impacted people must learn to live again and rebuild their community.

Usually, the departure of relief agencies happens in stages. Those without deep pockets and volunteers without an organization behind them are the first to leave. Government relief agencies and larger NGOs have much more staying power, and their logistical and financial contributions to the relief effort are vital to reestablishing infrastructure. Our team's timing was somewhere in the



Rescuing essential documents from a school

middle. The large team, which quickly emerged and stayed for about a month, was reduced to a much smaller team, mainly consisting of national workers who remained active in sports ministry, trauma counselling, and meeting various pragmatic ongoing needs in the community. Eventually, however, everyone left, and the local community continued rebuilding their lives without the intervention of outsiders. This is both inevitable and necessary.

Very recently, I returned to the community where we worked and sat with several community leaders to talk about how life has been for the community in the years after the 2018 earthquakes. We sat on the porch of the very same home that served as base camp five years ago and reminisced about the earthquake itself, the relief efforts afterwards, and, most importantly, the people who came to help in their time of need.

Disaster relief settings are fascinating microcosms of human interaction. For the worst of reasons and under the most difficult of circumstances, bonds of love and friendship form quickly and deeply. The inevitable departure of those who bring love and help is sad for everyone, and multiple expressions of friendship, appreciation, and love salted our conversation on that porch. To this day, many residents keep in touch with volunteers. Some volunteers have been able to return to the community. Some never will. We who live on the island make regular visits and never return home without a bag or a box full of more bananas, avocados, or homemade snacks than can be responsibly eaten in a week.

Near the end of that meeting on the porch, one of the men gave an open invitation for everyone who served with the team to return for a reunion someday. A reunion is highly unlikely, but I have no doubt that the invitation is 100 percent genuine and speaks to the intangible something which flavours Kingdom-based relief efforts.

As stated earlier, relationships are vital in Asian culture. They are also vital in the Kingdom of God. Yes, tarps, food, counselling, and rebuilding are all needed in disaster relief situations, as are relationships. Not only does relationship guide and assist in our relief efforts, but it endures in the hearts and minds of people far longer and more significantly than any tangible aid we could ever offer. As a rule, people don't remember what we said or did, but they will always remember how we made them feel. As the bridge of love and trust is built in the context of relationship, the truth of Jesus is introduced in a way that continues to impact lives.

For all those victims of the earthquake who quickly became

As the bridge of love and trust is built...the truth of Jesus is introduced...

our partners and then our friends, life will never fully return to what it was pre-disaster. Our desire is that it never will. We certainly hope and pray people will heal, communities will be restored, and economies will recover, but may the residents of that tiny, overlooked, eternally important community never recover from the earth-shattering Truth introduced through the faithful efforts of Jesus-followers in those weeks following the infamous earthquakes of 2018.

Chapter 3

Girls Matter

by Chantelle

A Young Lady Named Miriama

A young girl entered a vocational school at the age of 15. She had been out of school for several years, and her parents trusted this safe space for girls only and allowed her to stay there for three years. She learned to be a tailor, manage money, health and wellness, how to be a mother, nutrition, and pregnancy care. After three years at the school, she graduated with a state-recognized certificate, married a husband of her choosing, and soon after was pregnant. She also quickly found tailoring clients and started building her business from home. Her skills were so high quality she would do special projects to make marketable items for the school. Jumping ahead four more years, she continues to make clothing and



Girls' sewing class, Niger

has steady clients. She has two healthy, happy children, and her sewing income gave them the money to build their entire hut and buy all the wooden furniture within. She is a respected mother and member of society and a strong example of what education and safe spaces for girls can do.

Case Study: Impacting Girls in the World's Most Challenging Place to Be a Girl

Niger, Africa, is considered to be one of the world's worst places to be a girl. When we landed there in 2008, it was immediately apparent there were significant struggles facing the entire population of this land-locked, poverty-stricken country.

One of our first steps in this new field was to create, translate, and roll out an in-depth baseline study of four different communities we wanted to work in. This was an essential first step in recognizing each community's unique situations, hardships, influences, and realities. It also helped us to see where there were potential needs and gaps we could partner with them to address. In the urban community of Tuaregs, one of the obvious gaps was how very few of their daughters were enrolled in school, even though the city had many schools nearby they could choose to attend. The quality and consistency of the education system in Niger are poor, but it is still better than no schooling. Further conversations to flesh out the reason behind this brought to our attention several important factors.

1. There was a history of Tuareg young girls being abused (either beaten, verbally abused, or sexually) by either their schoolmates or the teachers. The Tuaregs are often the target of racism in the capital city, and they did not feel the public school system was safe for their daughters.
2. While the public system was almost free, the children still had to buy two school uniforms, many school supplies, and pay for special event days. The impoverished urban Tuareg community could rarely afford this.
3. The cultural values of this people group were such that they did not value formal education, especially for girls. They were some of the worst



Niger girls in blue

offenders when it came to child marriage, with the majority of their daughters being married off to an older man before the age of 16. They did not see a purpose in educating girls.

After continued conversations with a group of fathers, we realized they wanted safe spaces for their daughters. We also heard several times one of the reasons they married off their daughters so young was so they could not disgrace the family by being promiscuous or causing gossip in the community. As their daughters became teens, they wanted more freedom, and thus, their parents felt they could not trust their girls and married them off to avoid shame.

The idea was born in 2010 to create a school for these young girls, targeting unmarried girls between 12 and 18, where they would have a women-only safe space, free education, and vocational and health training all in their community. The parents wanted their daughters to know these things, and by putting in place pieces for security and guarding the family's honour, they were happy to sign on. After the first year, we also added a hot lunch program and a weekly medical clinic to meet the needs of the girls' health concerns. Our program ran for 3-year cycles, during which the girls committed to attend faithfully and work hard; the parents committed to not marrying off their daughters. We committed to keeping them safe in our walls and providing excellent quality teaching on vocational topics as



Niger girls eating

well as health, hygiene, and mothering topics that would be indispensable to their lives.

After 12 years of running this school, 200 girls have passed through its doors, and it has an excellent reputation in the community. It has also opened up relationships within the Tuareg community with a level of trust, allowing us to continue working with this people group in multiple capacities and different types of work, both developmental and discipling in nature.

Why are Girls so Vulnerable?

All around the world, research shows adolescent girls are among the most vulnerable in the population. This includes indicators which illustrate economic vulnerabilities, increased gender-based violence, heightened health risks, and significant educational gaps. They are also subject to inhumane practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced to marry too young with high rates of child marriage in many economically disadvantaged countries, and women represent the largest number of victims in human trafficking.

According to non-government organizations (NGOs) focused on women's development, poverty and gender inequality go hand in hand. According to their



Niger woman cooking

research, those born into developing countries as a female have a significantly harder life than those born into more developed countries. While this may not be surprising – because men in poor countries are also disadvantaged, they found the gender gap between males and females is more prominent in the poorest countries.

Child Marriage

Child marriage rates have been soaring across the world. It occurs across many different religions, regions, and cultures. The highest rates in the world are in Africa in countries such as Niger, Central African Republic, and Chad, but the largest population in terms of numbers of child brides is in South East Asia. As of 2023, 45 percent of girls here are married before the age of 18.¹ According to new data from UNICEF, the total number of girls married in childhood is now estimated at 12 million a year.²

Child marriage can have catastrophic impacts on the lives of the girls and the community in general.

In my experiences in Niger, where child marriage is the worst in the world, with 76 percent of girls being married before the age of 18³, an early marriage was very rarely the choice of the girl. It signalled the end of her schooling and the beginning of roles she was ill-equipped to handle, such as being a wife and mother and running a household. These girls are at greater risk of dangerous complications in pregnancy and birth and suffer greatly from increased risk of violence and abuse in their new homes at the hands of their husbands and new in-law family members. Rates of infant death, maternal death, and fistula are higher in young girls than in older women.

The reasons young girls are married off are very diverse. Many families living in poverty see child marriage as a way to transfer economic responsibility for their daughter to someone else and thus give some relief to their own stretched household budgets. Others fear once their daughters become teenagers, they will likely disgrace their household through inappropriate actions, especially with the opposite sex. Rather than run the risk of shame to the family, they will get married off. Other families marry them off to families with better economic

...the total number of girls married in childhood is now estimated at 12 million a year.

¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/20/south-asia-has-worlds-highest-number-of-child-brides-says-un>

² UNICEF. 2018. *25 million child marriages prevented...* <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/25-million-child-marriages-prevented>

³ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/atlas/>

status or standings in the community in hopes of improving their daughters' lives.

Victims of Trafficking

The vast majority of victims of trafficking come from backgrounds of poverty, abuse, or dysfunctional homes. When their lives lack stability, care, or economic advantage, they are more susceptible to schemes of deception where traffickers offer fraudulent jobs, fake marriages, and other schemes promising a better life outside of their home community. The number of women trafficked across international borders is on the rise. In 2020, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported the percentage of child victims had risen in three years to 35 percent of all trafficked cases. The gender and age profile of victims detected globally in 2020 statistics were 42 percent women, 23 percent men, 18 percent girls and 17 percent boys.⁴

In 2020, the different forms of detected trafficking showed roughly 38.8 percent were trafficked for forced labour, 38.7 percent were trafficked for sexual exploitation, and 10.3 percent fell into the other or unknown category, which includes forced begging, forced marriage, organ trafficking, and child soldiers⁵. Trafficking is not just about sex, and the increased numbers of men and forced labour camps with horrific working conditions are on the rise as well. However, for young women, sexual exploitation is still the most significant risk.

Prevention and Push/Pull Factors

Policy, programs, and community interventions are the most important first steps in communities where instability and crisis are push factors leading to trafficked victims. Addressing the social and financial needs of girls in these communities in this critical stage can stem the tide, prevent conditions of vulnerability, and keep many from being trafficked. While this will not stop all cases, it can make a significant dent in the number of girls affected. When communities and family units are stronger and more secure, and the community ceases to accept sending or selling their daughters abroad as a viable cultural choice, incidences of trafficking will be lower in the area. This is to address the push factor, or what is pushing them to leave home and put themselves into risky situations or be led astray by false promises.

⁴ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTiP_2022_web.pdf

⁵ Ibid

Pull factors are factors creating the demand and economic opportunity for the perpetrators to capitalize on trafficking in persons. Demand for cheap labour and prostituted women, girls, and boys are the primary “pull” factor. However, other pull factors are unemployment, perceived job opportunities overseas, relatives or friends in destination countries, and the chance to send remittances to their home countries.

FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE GIRL-ORIENTED PROGRAMMING AND MENTORSHIP

The framework for an effective girl-oriented program has to think wholistically. This means looking at the girls and your program in emotional, spiritual, physical, and community-oriented ways right from the start. Helping adolescent girls by combining social, health, and economic assets in order to make a healthy transition into adulthood will, in turn, reduce poverty. For example, one kind of asset with a health and knowledge aspect could be an increased awareness of HIV and pregnancy. This knowledge alone might not be sufficient to change risky behaviour because their underpinning economic situation trumps their knowledge and is the push factor behind their risky behaviour. A better targeted investment with a combination focus will dismantle multiple barriers preventing many young women from living successful lives.

Looking For the Hidden Hurt

Reviewing your situation and target area using a wider lens is important. In many conflict and emergency situations, there are pockets of people being left behind or whose needs are unmet by traditional aid. When assessing and gathering your data, you can reach these people using more comprehensive, more inclusive viewpoints. Specifically look for children, adolescents, the elderly, and people with disabilities. When looking at adolescent girls, it is not just a lack of skills, knowledge, or assets but also the social, cultural, political, and economic systems preventing them from participating in their communities.

Focus on Education

One of the basic early interventions for girls is helping them attain their education. Many studies show how investing in girls’ early education significantly impacts their futures. Every year a girl spends in school can boost her future



Niger class with teacher

income by 20 percent⁶. In other words, if all students in least-developed countries could leave school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, equivalent to a 12 percent cut in world poverty!⁷

So, if there is such a proven response to basic education, what prevents girls from having access to an equitable, quality education? For some families, the cost of educating their children is too much. They might choose to educate their sons over their daughters when forced to choose. Many are also afraid that their daughters face a hostile, dangerous environment in the local schools, such as was the case in Niger. Even when girls are enrolled in school, they often miss a significant number of days due to household work expectations caring for younger siblings, and when their menstrual period comes, and, they stay home. Social exclusion and traditional views on educating girls hurt their chances of success in many countries.

What could be the impact of focusing on supporting and expanding basic education to girls? It would be significant, with a decrease in child deaths, fewer child marriages and few young pregnancies.⁸

⁶ <https://data.unwomen.org/features/leaving-no-girl-behind-education>

⁷ <https://concernusa.org/news/how-does-education-affect-poverty/>

⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2017/08/22/educating-girls-ending-child-marriage>

To put it into practical steps, there are always ways to support girls' education. Find the girls who are being missed and out of school in the community and find ways to support the parents in sending them to school. If there are no good schools for girls to attend, you can support partners who do schools, provide teacher education to increase the quality of the school, offer after-school tutoring and mentoring, etc. All of this can be done by your own group or through partner organizations.

There is also a wealth of evidence supporting the creation of vocational training-oriented projects in developing countries. Giving women access to training increases their access to employment, financial, and political opportunities and reduces the instances and severity of household poverty. Programs teaching location-specific, marketable skills and targeting the inclusion of young women will help these current and future economic actors to create a more skilled and knowledgeable future generation.

Grow Them into Self-Aware, Confident, Strong Leaders

A key point in any girl-focused outreach should be the girl's emotional growth and strength. This is a crucial age when girls form their ideas about who they are and struggle with self-esteem. Yet, they also have the potential to discover their strengths and move into areas of life that would complement those natural gifts and facilitate great success and joy in their lives.

Emotionally healthy programs should include some or all of the key components below.

- 1. Learn their rights.** Learning about their rights as citizens and the appropriate channels to exercise those rights. This includes knowledge of the government system that governs their laws and social programs. It also focuses on teaching them to use their voice and express their opinions and to have the courage to get involved at the local decision-making level in their communities. Most girls and women do not access their essential rights as citizens because of a mix of lack of knowledge, fear, and social-cultural exclusion factors.
- 2. Decision-making.** Critical thinking is a significant asset to a girl's growth. Many children who lack formal education have never learned critical thinking skills. They struggle to assess potential problems and outcomes in a given situation and are thus ill-equipped to make decisions. Teach them how their choices matter and how they can affect the lives of others in both positive and negative ways.

- 3. Self-confidence.** Girls all around the world struggle with self-confidence. This is a more complex concept to teach, but lessons on her value, abilities, power to lead others, and moral lessons shaping her character will all help increase her self-worth. Another powerful piece not to be left out is the crucial role of mentorship and care. Our program in Niger had mentorship as a central part of our plan. Many young women will walk through difficult situations, and access to a mentor as someone who cares for her, gives good advice, prays with her, and shows up in her hour of need speaks volumes. It is important to set your staffing to have time to mentor and meet with girls one-on-one, talk, be present, share meals, and build a relationship where the girls know they are valued and cherished. Her belief in her self-worth will give her the strength to make good decisions and fight for what she believes is right.
- 4. Map her vision.** Vision is a crucial skill when working to move a community forward together. In the long term, the vision of those impacted matters more than the program designer. Helping them put into words what they see as their ideal society, what social norms need to change, and how to do that will create a community vision for change. A common goal will pull the community along, and as you identify leaders, they will encourage everyone to work together and keep moving towards a common goal. This is their goal and desire for a future, and this vision will carry them forward even when the expat and program are long gone!

Steps to Work with Girls

- 1. Ensure a safe space.** A *safe space* is a formal or informal place where women and *girls* feel physically and emotionally *safe*⁹. Recent research across multiple platforms shows the success of safe spaces for women in areas of crisis, instability, refugee camps, inner cities, and places where trafficking is high. This space is the first step to consistent, culture-appropriate access to women in need. Staffed with local, language and culturally fluent women is also crucial.
- 2. Get them registered.** A birth certificate opens the door to their futures. It grants access to official paperwork, social service programs, access to attend school, registering their own children, etc. A birth certificate, a piece of paper or a digital record with a name, date, and location is crucial to child survival and protection, especially in developing countries. This is a

⁹ Definition from the United Nations Population Fund.



Niger Vocational school fun

fundamental human right. You would be surprised how many poor young women do not have a birth certificate. In Niger, one of the first steps was to help each family get the birth certificate for their daughter, and it was required for formal admittance to the school.

3. **Broad-based, holistic education.** Many young women have substantial knowledge gaps. You have a unique opportunity when working with them to cover issues of health, hygiene, maternal care, childcare, nutrition, crisis response, emotional healing, etc., in addition to vocational options.
4. **Foster a relationship of trust with the parents.** You might think your primary interaction with the girl is all you need, but young girls are still protected by their families. The integrity of your work, the reputation of your project/school/centre, and the long-term success of the girl will all be significantly strengthened if the parents are involved along the way. Honour their investment, trust they *do* love their daughters and want the best for them, and try to do your best to listen to their ideas and integrate them.
5. **Do your research.** What supplementary skills will give her great market access in local conditions? Education, for its own sake, certainly has intrinsic value, but education and training that prove useful in the workplace are also essential. Provide them with job-relevant skills employers demand or

ones they can use to launch their own business.

- 6. Involve the whole community.** It's not just about girls! It will take more than just young girls to analyze and reshape society's attitudes, norms, and behaviours. The viewpoints of what a girl can contribute and what her opportunities should be are part of a broader picture. It will take engagement with the whole community to see changes in how girls are either people to be exploited or protected and what rights they hold.

Given opportunity, support, and resources, adolescent girls can challenge and overcome many of the limitations imposed upon them. If you want to make long-lasting community change that will impact future generations and have significant economic and family benefits, Girls Matter.

Note: This article is an adaptation of an excerpt from the book *Hands: Stories and Lessons of Wholistic Development*, produced by The Christian and Missionary Alliance, USA, in 2019.

Chapter 4

Engaging with a Persecuted People – The Rohingya

by Chantelle

Engaging with One of the World's Most Persecuted People Groups

In 2017, the world watched in horror as images flooded international media of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya fleeing in fear into a small area of Southern Bangladesh. Their homes were burned behind them, and families were separated and killed by both military and neighbouring Buddhist community members. But this eruption of violence had been brewing for a long time.

The Historical Context

The Rohingya conflict is a complex and multifaceted issue with deep historical, political, and social roots. The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority group. The conflict has its origins in a combination of historical, political, economic, and social factors. Here are some key issues that contributed to the simmering Rohingya conflict over the years.

- The Rohingya have a long history in the region, but their status has been a subject of dispute. They have consistently been denied citizenship and are considered illegal immigrants from Bangladesh despite many of their families having been citizens of their birth country for generations.
- They are from a predominantly Buddhist country which has experienced decades of military rule, leading to the marginalization of various ethnic and religious groups. The military junta pursued discriminatory policies against minority groups, including the Rohingya. Long-standing ethnic and religious tensions between the majority Buddhists and minority Muslims exacerbate the conflict. The rise of Buddhist nationalism in the country has fuelled anti-Muslim sentiments.
- For decades, significant restrictions have been placed on their daily lives, including limited freedom of movement and the need for permission to leave their home village, even for a short time. There has always been quite limited access to schools and healthcare and limited personal freedoms

like choosing who and when to marry.

- The Rakhine State, where most Rohingya reside, is resource-rich. Competition for resources, land, and economic opportunities has heightened tensions between the Rohingya and other communities in the region. Different ethnic groups and other countries want increased access to this resource-rich land. Pushing out the Rohingya has been linked to plans of economic development and expansion from internal sources as well as from neighbouring China.

In August 2017, the Rohingya faced a brutal crackdown by the military, ultimately unfolding into a long-protracted genocide. The military launched their violent campaign in response to alleged assorted attacks by small groups of Rohingya insurgents, but the disproportionate force used resulted in widespread atrocities. Villages were burned to the ground, and there were many instances of mass killings, sexual violence, and a large wave of forced displacement that emerged in the days and weeks following.

The Bangladesh Refugee Camps Exodus

Hundreds of thousands of these Rohingya fled on foot over the border into neighbouring Bangladesh. On the southern peninsular tip of Bangladesh, there have long been small refugee camps where groups of Rohingya have sought refuge for decades.

The largest of these camps is called Kutapalong. It went from housing approximately 90,000 people to 600,000 in just one month. Those numbers



Bangladesh camp



Bangladesh camps

continued to climb steadily until close to a million people settled in Kutapalong and surrounding camps. It forms a massive, chaotic complex.

Initially, many refugees lived in makeshift shelters, including tents made of bamboo and tarpaulin. Over time, efforts have been made to provide more durable and semi-permanent housing structures, but living conditions remain challenging.

One of its biggest challenges is overcrowding. The camp has many issues related to limited space and natural resources, and overcrowding has contributed to problems with sanitation, logistics, and health. International organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) have provided essential services such as food, clean water, healthcare, and education in the camp; however, it is challenging to adequately meet all the needs, considering the population's scale and the limited resources. This has led to NGOs withdrawing, while others face tremendous pressure on staff and budgets. Access to clean water, proper sanitation facilities, and health services are vital but in short supply.

There are also limited options for children to attend any school. Some learning centres have been established, but not enough to meet the number of children who live in the camps. Schools often face safety risks because of a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of educational resources.

Overall, security continues to be a massive concern in the camp. There have been outbreaks of violence and attacks, kidnappings for ransom, and drug

trafficking and use throughout the camp, creating ever greater chaos and fear in the lives of the Rohingya who live there. Gangs, drug groups, and extremists have proliferated. It is dangerous for teenagers to be out in the streets as women are attacked, raped, and harassed, and young men are beaten and enticed or forced to join gangs.

All of these reasons paint a bleak picture of life in the camps in Bangladesh, which creates strong push factors for leaving Bangladesh and trafficking themselves and their loved ones to other countries. For years now, refugees have been undertaking perilous boat journeys to countries such as Malaysia due to a combination of push and pull factors. The situation is complex, and individuals may have different reasons for choosing to embark on such journeys. Here are some key factors contributing to Rohingya taking boats to Malaysia.

In the simplest terms, push and pull factors are issues that push people to leave where they are and factors that pull or draw them toward a new location.

Push factors:

- The difficult and dangerous conditions of life in Bangladesh camps.
- Ongoing persecution in their homeland has dampened hopes for a quick return to their homes. The sad reality that they may never be able to return has set in.
- Similar to life in their home country, the camps have very little to offer regarding education for their children, healthcare, or employment.
- Refugee camps have minimal future opportunities for those who live there. There are few jobs within the camp, and taking jobs in the surrounding communities has further deteriorated relations with the locals, who see their jobs being taken away for cheaper labour.
- Tensions are rising between the people who live in the camps and the local communities around them.

Pull factors:

- Many Rohingya perceive there are better economic opportunities and better living conditions in countries such as Malaysia.
- Many Rohingya have family or community who have previously relocated to other countries. The prospect of reuniting with them and joining established communities motivates them to leave the camps.
- The limited legal avenues and lack of legal services for resettlement in Bangladesh may drive some Rohingya to go to new countries where resettlement is a possibility (albeit it is constrained).

- Trafficking for marriage is a common occurrence where the draw of a high dowry and safe marriage situation for their daughters is a significant pull factor for Rohingya families. Desperate to get them out of the camps, the lure of the Rohingya men in Malaysia who are looking for wives and willing to pay for it is hard to turn down by families who desire safety and a future for their daughters and the economic benefit of the dowry.

No matter what factors drive them to migrate, it is crucial to recognize the decision to undertake such journeys is often a result of desperation and limited options rather than a free and informed choice. The international community faces the challenge of addressing the root causes of displacement, ensuring the protection of the rights of the Rohingya, and providing viable solutions to the crisis. Hence, illegal migration isn't the only option they feel they can make.

Refugee Life in Malaysia

In the months and years following the genocide of 2017, Malaysia has become the preferred destination for those looking to escape the tensions and problems encountered in their homeland and the Bangladesh camps. A steady flow of refugees is making their way to Malaysia using both sea and land routes. For many, the alluring promise of jobs in Malaysia and relative safety in a Muslim country has been very appealing.

According to scholars of Islam, Islam requires Muslims to assist and protect vulnerable people and offers several mechanisms for their care and support. According to Islamic migration law (*hijrah*), individuals have the right to seek and be granted asylum in any Muslim state. It obliges host societies to give asylum-seekers a generous reception, for which the hosts will be rewarded. Despite this law's significance and the supposed importance of adherence to the law, most Muslim states rarely follow this today. Many of our Rohingya friends came to Malaysia, fleeing religious persecution, and expected better treatment from this Muslim country. The reality of their continued persecution here has left the door open for many conversations of faith.

Life in Malaysia quickly reveals itself to be nothing like what the Rohingya refugees had hoped for. When they arrive in Malaysia illegally by the thousands every month, they find their path to getting legally registered is many months or years down the road. In the meantime, they are undocumented, lacking any legal status, and constantly at risk of arrest.

While it is illegal for any refugees to work in Malaysia, it is even more risky for those with no legal representation. Once they finally get a United Nations

Refugee Agency (UNHCR) card, they continue to face significant restrictions in lack of education for their children, limited access to most healthcare facilities except for life-threatening events, and no legal way to get a job and provide for their families. Due to their illegal working status, they work in the informal sector, facing low wages and poor working conditions. They are often exploited by unscrupulous employers who take advantage of their vulnerable situations. We have many Rohingya friends who, after working for an employer for several months, are fired without ever being paid. They have no protection and no recourse. The reality for these people is that because Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, the Rohingya in Malaysia can be arrested and detained indefinitely in detention centres.

In Malaysia, there are no refugee camps; rather, the population has quietly merged into many low-income neighbourhoods, worker camps at construction sites, and informal and often inadequate settlements.

Initially, the large majority of Rohingya in Malaysia were men. These men worked and sent money back to their homeland to care for their families; however, since the genocide of 2017 and subsequent problems in Bangladesh, more and more of these young men are paying traffickers to bring their families to Malaysia. Young men also pay for brides from the camp to be sent to Malaysia. This means the percentage of school-aged children in the country is growing regularly. However, refugee children are barred from attending public schools, and private schools are financially out of their grasp. These children are quickly becoming a lost generation where their opportunity to learn is slipping by. This will impact their long-term prospects and integration into society.



Malaysia refugee school

Another area of concern for all refugees in Malaysia is the lack of affordable access to medical care. Without having a valid UNHCR card, many new arrivals find themselves unable to access clinics and hospitals unless they are in life-threatening situations. Some seek care in local health clinics and are threatened with police and immigration action unless they leave, meaning their health needs are consistently not met. However, Penang is quite lucky in that *Medecins sans Frontiers* (MSF) has a direct footprint here and runs mobile clinics along with one fixed medical clinic location. Unfortunately, as the years have

gone by, funding for these crucial clinics has dried up, and the capacity of MSF to meet the burgeoning needs has also faltered. They are slowly withdrawing services, which again leaves most refugees, especially the large number who are undocumented, unable to access any health care.

Yet another area proven to be increasingly difficult is rising racism and xenophobia against refugees in the country. Hate speech, racist TikTok videos, YouTube videos of people harassing refugees, articles speaking out against their presence, and more have become increasingly evident this year. Prejudice and negative perceptions can contribute to social marginalization and exclusion.

Efforts by NGOs, international organizations, local advocates, and some in the Malaysian government have been made to address the various challenges refugees face. However, the situation is highly complex, and every proposed solution has drawbacks. Refugees cannot return home, be deported anywhere, or continue to pour into Malaysia in high numbers without antagonizing an already precarious situation. In many ways, those involved in the situation at a high level say there is no clear way forward.

One final disturbing and deeply troubling issue arising now, seven years after the genocide, is the steadily increasing rates of bride trafficking. In 2017, most of the women and children fled with some of the men and have been living in the camps in Bangladesh. As those teens and children grow up, the situation for teen girls is especially risky. It has been a driving factor for dramatically increasing rates of teenage girls pouring into Malaysia as brides. Human traffickers take advantage of their desperation and make false promises of better living conditions and marriage opportunities. Men from Malaysia are also weaving complex stories of riches and prosperity to draw women here to Malaysia. While all Rohingya in Malaysia are marginalized, Rohingya girls and women are further marginalized by patriarchal social norms in Rohingya culture. The Rohingyas' status as stateless refugees



Malaysia women's community group

and their patriarchal culture lead to the high prevalence of child marriage among the Rohingya in Malaysia.

The viewpoints presented in a recent in-depth study on child and teen girl marriage in Malaysia were surprisingly varied. While many believed child marriage is harmful and should decrease, others shared that it has some positive aspects and cannot be stopped.

There were numerous factors associated with Rohingya child marriage in Malaysia. Many factors were related to their status as stateless refugees, such as poverty, lack of education, marriage laws in Malaysia, and the fact there are more Rohingya men in Malaysia than women. Other factors were dominated by Rohingya culture and norms, such as patriarchy, arranged marriages, Islamic beliefs, girls viewed as needing protection, and preference for younger brides.



Teaching women in Malaysia

No matter what the beliefs or the views on the reasons behind child marriage, it cannot be denied numbers are rising significantly. One of the largest demographics our team works with in Malaysia is young women who have arrived there through human trafficking routes in the past five years. The issue of child marriage is a sensitive one riddled with questions of moral integrity, acceptability within Islam, legal status in Malaysia, the desperation of families, and often the lack of permission given by the girl herself.

A Purposeful Engagement with Refugees

Now that you have a deeper understanding of the roots of the conflict and the reality of refugees living in Malaysia, it is natural to wonder how much impact can occur within such a tragic and complicated context.

The work in Malaysia with refugees began with seeing the people and their needs. God placed on the hearts of individuals to see the refugees and migrant workers in the communities in Penang and began a movement to pray for these individuals and seek ways to reach out. Relationships were formed over many plates of curry and rice. The relationships and the listening came before any projects, outreaches, or efforts. Team members wanted to hear their stories, hearts, and needs. This is how you build lasting relationships – by caring.

As knowledge and heart connection grew, an ESL ministry outreach was started to reach out to these refugees and migrant workers. Soon, it became clear most of the attendees were Rohingya, who were desperate for both help and relationships. Many of them struggled to find work or worked in the “triple D” jobs—Dangerous, Dirty, Demeaning. The centre and its volunteers offered support, a listening ear, prayers, stories, and lessons. And a safe place.

In addition to the classes, the volunteers interviewed many of the men for

UNHCR registration. Their horrific stories were hard to hear—stories of abuse, torture, and loss. As time went on, many individuals and families went through this outreach. These initial investments in the Rohingya community were critical to its ongoing success.

As time passed, the team expanded, and we began to look for more ways to expand the reach and impact of the ministry to the Rohingya. A prayer and discernment team came from Canada to join in praying for God’s guidance and wisdom over all the potential ways we could engage with refugee work in Malaysia.

Some early projects focused on partnering with existing learning centres for refugee children. These schools are often run by volunteers who have no formal training in education, and thus, we started to partner with schools to train their teachers to a higher level of effectiveness in their lessons and teaching. Our first cohort had 14 teachers from four different refugee schools. While the program was interrupted by COVID-19 and had to switch to online for part of it, it still opened the door to significant relationships in these schools.

Over the next five years, we identified key schools to partner with to help improve the quality of education being offered. This led to many opportunities to volunteer in these schools and to long-term relationships with the teachers. This continues to be an open door for us as we expand our work in the education field and incorporate child protection training as well.

Like everywhere in the world, COVID-19 significantly impacted the population. Malaysia went into a very strict initial lockdown lasting three months, with almost everything shut down and no one allowed in the streets. Our refugee friends had very little economic resilience, and many were suffering. We put together an extensive emergency food aid program. Initially, this was only planned for 12 weeks, but as the year went on and Malaysia implemented two additional 3-month lockdowns, we ran 36 weeks of intensive food aid and cash assistance programming. Hundreds of families were fed every week throughout the program as desperation grew, and our phone numbers were widely shared amongst the Rohingya. We rallied donors and volunteers to meet the needs and even coordinated food drops to larger migrant worker camps locked into worksites and unable to get enough food.



Food aid

While the food aid program had a noticeable initial positive impact in the emergency, the continuing impact has been the greatest encouragement. It built significant trust deep into the communities and opened the doors to doing considerably more home visits and getting to the women and children who previously were more challenging to access. God used the help given in an emergency to position us as trustworthy people of Peace.

As the impact of COVID-19 slowly lessened, the opportunities to visit families and homes increased. As previously mentioned, the most significant change in demographics has been the consistent influx of teenage brides being trafficked to Malaysia for marriage. We coordinate with other like-minded individuals to offer a prenatal care program for these young women, offering a set of six classes on topics like nutrition, family planning, labour, breastfeeding, and baby care. We also provide a bag of newborn supplies, labour support by a midwife, and follow-up visits to support and encourage them. These young moms come to Malaysia with no support systems or parents and are quickly married to men they have never met. Out of many of these initial meetings through prenatal support, strong relationships have been built, and women's groups have been formed.

These groups now regularly meet in various locations for fellowship, food, education, skill development, and storytelling.

Another initiative begun by the team was focused on young Rohingya men. A trades training small business was started in 2021 to train young Rohingya men in various trades skills while mentoring them. A shop was open to run as a business serving the community with contracts and quality construction while also giving an opportunity to have a lot of direct contact with a small group of Rohingya young men. This project has built climbing walls in multiple locations, display cabinets and furniture, completed building renovations, and now has begun to invest in producing high-quality wood products for the



Malaysia prenatal class



Malaysia trades shop

home, such as cutting boards, serving trays, and coaster sets. There are many opportunities for small businesses with positive social impacts.

Another essential piece of ministry is to recognize we are all complex humans, and trauma and loss affect us all deeply at emotional and mental levels. Helping traumatized refugees requires a compassionate and comprehensive approach. Trauma can result from various experiences, including conflict, persecution, displacement, and loss.

While the events around the genocide in their homeland and their lives in Bangladesh camps are dramatic and horrific, they also continue to suffer daily trauma of loss, fear of arrest, lack of language skills where they live, no friends, grieving family members, and uncertainty for their future. Their trauma isn't behind them, and they don't have a safe foundation from which to heal, learn, and make good decisions.

To try to support mental and emotional help, we connected and partnered with other NGOs and mental health professionals who offer counselling and therapy, connected with Rohingya who have been trained in peer counselling skills, and we spent time learning language and culture so we could sit with them, hear their stories, and understand their hearts.

...we spent time learning language and culture so we could sit with them, hear their stories, and understand their hearts.

Personal Application - How can you help refugees?

As the number of refugees worldwide continues to grow at unprecedented rates, many people wonder how they can help. It seems every year there is a new war and a new people group fleeing its border. But as the world shifts its focus to the nearest disaster, the previous people in conflicts are still moving, hurting, struggling, and living in crisis. Listed below are some options to consider for those looking for ways to engage in refugee work anywhere in the world.

1. Donate to reputable organizations and NGOs who are actively working to provide aid and assistance. Many large and small organizations doing excellent work need support as they run programs and provide food, clean water, access to health care, advocacy, and protection programs.
2. Raise awareness. Use your voice, whether it's on social media or within your community, to raise awareness about the refugee crisis. Educate others about the historical background, the challenges faced by the

- Rohingya or other groups, and the need for international support.
3. Volunteer. Consider volunteering your time and skills with organizations actively supporting refugee causes. Your assistance can make a difference in various areas, and building a friendship and engaging intentionally with refugees will also prove to be an eye-opening experience and blessing in your own life!
 4. Support refugee resettlement programs where you live. Support initiatives through government programs and private individuals' options to sponsor refugees. Many refugees desperately desire to be resettled to a safe third country, and those who live in Canada, America, or other countries are needed to help sponsor and settle these arriving individuals.
 5. Stay informed. Knowledge is key to understanding the complexities of the issues and being an effective advocate for positive change.
 6. Engage in interfaith dialogue. Participating in conversations to better understand and befriend those who are different from you, valuing their opinions even if they are different from yours, and developing trust and dialogue is always worth the effort. Don't be afraid, don't believe all you hear or read about them or their religion, and try to make a genuine friendship and discover for yourself.
 7. Remember each person's experience is unique, so flexibility and individualized support are crucial. Collaborate with local organizations, NGOs, and government agencies to create a holistic support system for traumatized refugees.
 8. Spend the time, learn their language, listen to their stories, and let them teach you something. Put yourself in the position of being a learner and see what amazing, hidden talents they can share!

Chapter 5

Tapestry

by Daniel

The Beginnings

It was sweltering and muggy that night. The air was so thick and heavy it seemed to even block out all the starlight as Mrs. Lee and her husband, Tom¹ carefully searched for the house of a woman they planned to visit. Walking through the narrow streets, they barely noticed the small wooden house in the darkness, raised on its stilts with a faint glimmer of light spilling through the doorway. Mrs. Lee and Tom carefully went up the steep staircase and entered the little, one-room space. Here, they found the woman they were looking for. She was lying on the floor, covered in a heap of blankets, struggling to stay warm despite the temperature being well over 40°C. The bare lightbulb dangling from the roof made it clear the illness was winning this battle, and the woman had little time left.

They had come to pray with her, a frequent activity Tom and his wife did to represent Jesus in a country where openly sharing the gospel was illegal. And, as they started to pray with the woman, a faint whisper began to stream from her mouth. She shared how she had lost her husband not long ago and was now in the final stages of cancer. Her teenage daughter worked to pay for her treatment, but the factories weren't paying enough. She went on to say her daughter had begun to sell herself at night to help cover the medical bills. Now, she was in trouble. From under those blankets in the dim light of the room, the dying woman looked at Tom and Mrs. Lee and begged them to please help her daughter. Help her escape that lifestyle and free her from the dangers involved—before it was too late.

Up until this point, Mrs. Lee and her husband had been aware of the sexual exploitation issues in their country. It was hard not to notice once the sun went down. They had always thought it was someone else's problem, someone else would address it, and their ministry was meant to address a different purpose.

Mrs. Lee had been part of a ladies' prayer group that had recently been focussing

¹ Please note: Names and identifiers have been changed to protect the identity of the people involved in this ministry.

more on this topic. She had begun to wonder whether God was asking them to step in, but up until the sweaty night in the dimly lit house of a dying woman, Tom always figured God had other plans for them. They couldn't ignore the problem any longer: something had to be done.

Mrs. Lee and Tom had been deeply impacted by their prayer visit with this woman, and they felt convicted to do something but weren't yet sure what to do. The problem of exploitation just seemed so big and foreign to their worlds; they didn't even know how to begin. So, they prayed. Mrs. Lee prayed, asking the Lord to confirm whether this was something He wanted them to do. If yes, she needed very clear confirmation from Him that this wasn't just a stirring of their hearts, but God truly wanted them purposefully to engage. She asked God to have a local believer specifically approach them about addressing the issues of sexual exploitation. Since local believers didn't talk about such things, Mrs. Lee would have confidence it was, in fact, the Spirit at work.

Two weeks later, Meg, a longtime friend of Mrs. Lee and national believer who had been working in another city a few hours away came over for a visit. She said God was asking her to talk to them about human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Meg had been convicted about the issue herself, having been in a prayer group with foreign women who were praying about it, and she saw some of these women actually trying to do things to help. Meg felt burdened by God to do something, but she didn't know how to begin and had come to them asking for support or advice. Mrs. Lee shared her journey and prayers with Meg, and they resolved to follow where God was leading.

Over the next six months, through intentional prayer and serious work, Meg and Mrs. Lee found the woman's teenage daughter from that small house. A relationship was built, and about a year later, this girl knew she needed to get out, change her life, and follow a new path leading to hope and forgiveness. In May 2008, she left the sex work and began to live in Meg's house, receiving counselling and discipleship in a safe environment while also working to learn a new, skilled job—hairdressing.

But she wasn't alone. Over the next few weeks, seven other girls with whom Meg and Mrs. Lee had been developing relationships also decided to leave their work. The need was exploding. Meg knew the girls couldn't be taken care of as a side project with whatever time was left after work. So, by faith, she resigned from her career working with a high-profile NGO (non-government organization) and resolved to work full-time to care for these girls and create a place of transformational healing for them in the name of Jesus Christ.

Tom and Mrs. Lee were in full agreement with Meg about this need, so they

came alongside and worked with her to develop a structure that could support the ministry with the funding, the skills, and the other resources necessary to sustain it for the long term. A master plan was developed in collaboration with a handful of people from like-minded organizations to outline ministry objectives, accountability structures, and business undertakings for the two women and a new national co-labourer to make the ministry a reality. This master plan was used to secure seed funding for a safe house and to start a couple of businesses to provide both vocational training opportunities and revenue streams to support the ongoing work of the ministry.

And so, from the Lord speaking to a couple of women through prayer, the ministry of *Tapestry* began.

Today, *Tapestry's* scope has grown and evolved considerably from its humble beginnings as a ministry of three women with a rented house. A salon, a jewellery shop, and

a café now serve as commercial anchors in the heart of the capital city's tourist zone. An organic farm and a newly opened vocational training centre further extend the ministry's platform. Presently, four safe homes—two in the capital and two in remote states—provide safe, nurturing environments where women and girls at risk of, or recovering from, exploitation and trafficking can live, thrive, and learn not only occupational skills but also about their Saviour and Creator who loves them. Each participant stays as long as they need until they feel confident enough to go out on their own successfully.

All of these changes didn't happen overnight, though, nor did they always come easily, clearly, or according to anyone's plan. So, how did it happen, and why? Well, let's take a look...

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The Early Years

When Meg left her profession and dedicated her time to work on *Tapestry*, she and Mrs. Lee knew from the beginning that the ministry needed to take on a business-for-transformation paradigm. The women and girls they were targeting needed a new line of work. They also needed a place to practice newly-trained skills to the proficiency required to transition out from *Tapestry's* fold and either open their own shops or work at a business able to pay well enough to support them comfortably. The ministry also needed a predictable source of income to cover the operating costs of housing, feeding, training, counselling, and safeguarding

the girls within *Tapestry's* care.

Given the state of the country's economic development along with the cultural taboos attached to people in the sex trade, securing resources domestically for this work was a non-starter. Mrs. Lee and Meg knew their best chances to find seed money for *Tapestry's* efforts would come from like-minded organizations who knew the country and were keenly aware of the issues. They both turned to their personal networks to see if anyone knew of organizations or groups that may be willing to help. Ideas started to come in, and interest in *Tapestry's* work grew. Not only did they find a handful of organizations potentially willing to help, but even people in their networks—people in the same city—were interested in helping.

Over the next few weeks, a handful of foreigners from mission organizations came alongside Mrs. Lee and Meg to help form a strategic plan and a written proposal for *Tapestry*. They understood that putting the plan on paper would not only help their goals and efforts stay focussed over time, but with an actual document, they could apply for grants, which would be critical to launching the businesses they had in mind.

They prayed, planned, proposed, patiently but actively waited, all while continuing to work with women and girls already filling the single safe house to capacity and reaching out to new ones at night. They constantly developed relationships, hoping that more girls would be moved towards a new life.

They prayed,
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continuing to work...

And then funding started to come.

First, private donors and local businesses sympathetic to the ministry helped cover immediate expenses for the safe house. Then, a substantial grant came in from Samaritan's Purse, enabling *Tapestry* to begin its business and vocational training activities.

The original plan developed for *Tapestry* was to open a couple of restaurants—an industry Mrs. Lee and Tom knew well. As tentmakers², they'd already launched a Western-style café and eatery in the city with great success, so drawing on this expertise seemed like a good fit. First, they intended to open a simple noodle shop, one very much like the dozens of others strewn around the city. It was a strategic choice, as the entry costs and training required to make a good product were low. This meant the girls could learn a skill, and any profits could be

² A tentmaker is a Christian who works in a country where the gospel cannot be preached. Their work provides for their needs and gives them access to people they would not be able to reach otherwise.

directed back into the ministry for future growth. They also envisioned a second, high-quality restaurant to come a couple of years down the road—one to develop skills further and cater to the deeper pockets of expats and the tourist scene.

Problems crept in right from the beginning. Through their relationships with local business owners, Mrs. Lee and Meg discovered margins were razor thin and competition was steep in the noodle shop world. The only way to turn a profit was to sell lots and lots of cheap dishes, and with everything *Tapestry* was trying to do, it became clear this business just wasn't going to work out. A high-quality restaurant might still work in the future, but the ministry couldn't wait that long. They needed something to train and employ the recovering girls pretty much now. With a noodle shop now out of the question, the leadership group did what they always did: they took it up to God in prayer.

Then, one of the girls in the safe home came to talk to Meg. They met and chatted like they usually would, but this time, something the girl said triggered an avalanche within Meg. The young girl mentioned she had always dreamed of opening up a beauty salon of her own, but she figured it would probably never happen since it would be next to impossible to get the diploma she needed for hairdressing. This was just the thing the *Tapestry* leaders had been praying for. They could buy some basic equipment, train a few girls, and, when ready, they could open a hair salon in a strategic part of the city to gain even more access to at-risk women.

It wasn't long before a makeshift carport at the safe home was transformed into a simple hairdressing studio with some mirrors, a few dryers, and a couple of washing stations. The girls were able to learn a new trade while getting counselling and discipleship. They also developed positive relationships and were even able to have some fun doing activities together. Sometimes, they did art projects, like simple beaded jewellery items. The safe home was now bustling with activity, and the half-dozen girls under *Tapestry's* care were excited to go out and share with other girls on the street about the ministry and the hope they had found because of it.

Businesses Open

After a couple of the girls were skilled enough, *Tapestry* began to accept clients for the very small salon running right from the house. It wasn't much, but it was something, and the girls who had spent countless hours training could now earn some money with real clients and learn real-world business skills. The next step was to make a real storefront for the salon.

From the very beginning, Meg and Mrs. Lee wanted to use the salon as a “doorstep ministry,” embedding the business in an area of the city with high exposure to exploited women so relationships could be built organically. They identified a location and opened up a small store. Unfortunately, the concept didn’t work out; working in a red-light district comes with all sorts of unsavoury spillover. The salon couldn’t overcome these drawbacks enough to keep the business afloat, so *Tapestry* was forced to pull back and resume working out of their tiny storefront attached to the first safe house.

Not all of the women and girls in *Tapestry’s* care were interested in salon work. The ministry’s leadership—which in 2009 had become a broader team chaired by Meg and Mrs. Lee—realized they needed to move quickly to provide other vocational opportunities. So, they went with what they knew. With the funding they had available from a few generous sponsors and churches in Canada, a location was secured in early 2010 in the heart of the city’s tourist hub for *Tapestry’s* upcoming bakery café.

The new lease and renovations for the restaurant couldn’t be completed soon enough. *Tapestry’s* office had been running out of the safe home, but over the course of the first year, the number of girls coming to the ministry had more than doubled. With a new building downtown, they could relocate the offices to the upper floor and give the house some much-needed breathing room.

In April 2011, *Parchment* opened as an upscale café and bakery, initially managed by a couple of international workers from the United States who were invited by *Tapestry* to help. Above the restaurant, there was space for *Tapestry’s* administrative work. Girls interested in hospitality and food service were welcome to join the café’s staff and contribute while developing their skills.

“Wake up, Tom! Wake up!” Mrs. Lee nudged Tom awake one night before *Parchment* was under construction.

She had just woken from the strangest dream: a figure had been standing before her, telling her a person would approach her with a piece of land to sell, and she should buy it. Mrs. Lee was convinced this was a message from the Lord. Tom, however, was not. He thanked his wife for sharing the dream with him and suggested they rest some more and think about it again during the daytime. After a quick prayer, they went back to sleep with Tom, thinking this would be the end of things.

Mrs. Lee couldn’t seem to forget the dream as easily. It seemed to stick with her, so she continued in prayer, asking God what it might mean. Then, a short time later, a man randomly approached Mrs. Lee.

This man had recently run into financial troubles and desperately needed to

liquidate some assets. Could Mrs. Lee help, he asked? He had a parcel of land a few hours drive outside of the city which he wasn't using. Would she be willing to buy it and help him out? Not long after, another person approached her, asking to sell some land right next to the original man's property. And another one, and another one, until it became obvious something had been arranged, yet not by human hands.

In faith, Mrs. Lee bought the land. Over the next several months, she and Tom prepped the area to become the country's first and only organic farm, *Organicrop*. The initial goal was to develop a wholly independent and profitable business to train and develop rural farmers in more sustainable (and profitable) agriculture techniques. They originally started by asking the local pastor and community what types of plants they could grow, and then they began experimenting with cash crops and a small orchard. Without much success, the couple knew they were well out of their element. They started looking for someone who could help.



A French worker had recently moved to the country from another nearby nation, sensing God wanted him to be there for some reason. He met Tom and Mrs. Lee in passing, and they struck up a conversation about *Organicrop*. This worker, Marvin, was a trained agronomist; after hearing what Mrs. Lee and Tom were doing, he wanted to learn more. Marvin visited the farm, and in discussion with his wife, Sophie,

they prayerfully considered joining the farm. Marvin became the first operations director for *Organicrop*, and soon, a few other like-minded individuals from different organizations also came to help.

Sophie came to work very closely with Meg on some parts of the *Tapestry* ministry. She was a connector with a vibrant spirit, and the girls at the safe house quickly took to her. So did the broader expat community, and soon Sophie was personally connected to people who sympathized with *Tapestry's* efforts. As the diplomatic and NGO expat staff turned over, they frequently left behind high-quality houseware that incoming expats found valuable. Sophie worked with *Tapestry* to open a second-hand shop to sell these goods, most of which were donated, as a source of revenue for the ministry.

At the same time, Sophie was spending a lot of time with the girls in the safe house. During the sessions, she watched as they used art therapy to create simple beadwork and hand-made jewellery. Some of these items were beautiful. They

were so well done that Sophie was convinced she could sell them at markets, with the proceeds going straight back to the girls.

It worked. With a bit of coaching on design and quality, what started as a simple art therapy technique slowly but progressively grew. Selling randomly at markets was working, but after a while, distribution started to become a challenge. Why not use part of the second-hand shop as a storefront for these items? Which is just what Sophie did.

Growth and Regrouping

There was a lot of optimism within *Tapestry* throughout the first five years of the ministry's work. Things were fresh, people were ambitious, appeals for funding were answered favourably, and members of God's Kingdom throughout the world were interested in helping with the work. Year after year, the safe house was filled to capacity. Whenever a girl felt she was ready to go out on her own, her spot was quickly filled by another girl who had been waiting. *Parchment* opened, the girls' handicrafts were steadily increasing sales, and the salon, though still at the original location, maintained a steady stream of clients with potential for more.

As often is the case with international work, continuity became a challenge. Many of the key players helping *Tapestry* operate began to cycle out of the country; even Tom and Mrs. Lee were called to serve in a neighbouring country. By 2013, Meg was the only original founder of *Tapestry* and its businesses still in the country. New people had to be trained to fill in the gaps as people left, and for the most part, this worked out well.

Parchment grew to become a roastery and a wholesale bakery supplying quality products to a new 5-star hotel in the city. The jewellery business continued to grow, too, despite the second-hand shop's supply network drying up after a leadership change. The original shop closed, so in 2019, jewellery created a new storefront inside a brand-new salon concept mirroring *Parchment's* approach to offering top-tier services for tourists and expats.

The *Organicrop* farm struggled with direction after Marvin's departure. Many board members had cycled out of the country, which made leadership challenging, yet its social and spiritual goals were too important to abandon. Seeing this and all of the points of intersection *Organicrop* could have with *Tapestry*, Tom suggested the ministries join forces. He, Meg, and Mrs. Lee saw *Organicrop's* strategic value, especially since it could provide high-quality produce to *Parchment* and the girls in the safe home. So, in 2016, they folded the farm into *Tapestry's* portfolio.

Still, there was a nagging weakness in the ministry everyone knew needed to



be addressed. All of the vocational training efforts *Tapestry* undertook met with roadblocks, one way or another. Although they could train the girls and provide them with exceptional working experiences, it was still difficult for them to gain successful employment after leaving the ministry because they lacked a formal certificate. *Tapestry* had been trying to open a formal training centre recognized by the government for years, but their creative solutions didn't mesh with the national administration's demands. A training centre needed to be purpose-built and could not operate from another business or location (which was what *Tapestry* had been trying to do).

Then, in 2020, when the pandemic hit, it gutted the nation's economy and sent inflation through the roof. Suddenly, everything had become twice as expensive, and people with real estate were looking for ways to sell before all the value evaporated. A friend of Tom's heard *Tapestry* was looking to buy land for a school, and this friend just happened to know somebody eager to let go of a two-building property that might work. Tom sent Alan, who had recently arrived in-country, to check out the land, and about three years later, the school was ready to open.

Final Take Aways

Looking back through the development of *Tapestry*, we see God at work all

along the way, through different people in different seasons and at various times or locations. In each case, where things worked well, people were willing to listen, they were willing to seek God first, and they were willing to take risks in following His guidance—following

first and leading next. *Tapestry's* efforts were generally successful when people did the work God had planned. Things got bumpy when activity was based on their own understandings, yet God redeemed that, too. The common vision of *Tapestry* seems to have been discovered or revealed to people as they served together in community.

Each person's willingness to flex with the project as it grew seemed to be instrumental. Their willingness to serve or to partner and participate in a movement of God was first noticed by some humble, imperfect people who were willing to look for and listen to what He was doing in the world and allowed them to be used. And then, those people obediently took on the work, both in faith and with faith, to restore dignity and hope to people valued greatly by their King.

...we see God at work all along the way, through different people in different seasons and at various times or locations.



Today, *Tapestry* operates four safe homes in two states, housing approximately 35 girls at a time. The ministry and businesses employ around 80 nationals working alongside a dozen expats from six different passport countries. Over 130 women and girls had been lifted out of exploitation risk under *Tapestry's* care, and seven times as many people have made faith decisions because of the ministry. Even after they leave the homes, *Tapestry* provides ongoing connection, discipleship, and support structures to promote long-term success and faithfulness to Christ. *Tapestry* national workers provide anti-human trafficking education to 1,000 people, on average, every year, which has helped shift cultural sentiments around sex work and sexual exploitation.

Even after they leave the homes, *Tapestry* provides ongoing connection, discipleship, and support structures...

As a result, *Tapestry* is leading the charge into preventative work, intercepting women and girls at risk before they even reach the threshold of exploitative networks. Recovery work still occurs, but this has expanded to identify other industries exploiting people in harsh or inhumane environments. There is no shortage of work to be done, yet we praise God continually that the Church remains determined to advance the light of Christ into these regions of darkness.

Chapter 6

The Tikvah Juice Company

by Trevor

The Tikvah Juice Company was founded in 2002 by international workers (IWs) serving in a developing country where unemployment was high and access to the Good News was minimal. The workers believed they could support people's livelihoods and introduce the gospel to their community by establishing a viable business. Over the last 22 years, this business has served the nationals locally and throughout the country in many ways. It has stood with its staff, customers, and friends through civil war, floods, earthquakes, blockades, and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. This unwavering commitment and witness have not only glorified God but also led people to Jesus. This is our story.

Before it was a company, the Tikvah Juice Company (TJC) was an idea fostered by a non-governmental organization (NGO). The NGO wanted to increase economic opportunities in the country and saw the potential to process and market locally grown fruit. Not only was fruit already available, but the possibility for farmers to grow more as cash crops would expand the project's reach. The NGO began researching how to develop both the product and the market for one fruit – the mandarin orange. Orange juice was a popular beverage throughout other parts of the world, and it could be introduced as a healthier alternative to soft drinks already prevalent in the local market. Various machines were imported at significant expense, and a basic production line was set up to produce the juice. Plastic bottles were also secured from a local manufacturer and labels were designed and printed. The NGO was ready to make juice.

Choosing a Product or Service

Don't underestimate the importance of what specific product or service you will use as the foundation of your business. It will have far-reaching consequences for you, your customers, staff, and those you want to reach. At the same time the NGO was developing its product, another international company was also creating a juice brand for the country. While TJC had the health of its customers

and the local economy on its mind, the other company was focused on profits. It was prepared to leverage current trends and the global availability of cheap juice concentrate. Their juice (including an orange variety) was made of imported ingredients and unlimited sugar. This tapped into people's simple love of sweet beverages and was sold at a lower price, which was also desirable to consumers. While TJC has remained small through the years, its brand immediately became the preferred choice of juice for people and has grown to fill the shelves of every small grocery shop in the country. God is faithful, however, and an unplanned benefit of producing a high-quality and healthy product began to show itself. The people group where the factory was established began to become very proud of these products and would brag that, yes, in fact, the TJC juice was made in their village and was made by their people.

When developing a product or service or purchasing an established business, an IW needs to balance the business's profitability and potential with the ethics and responsibilities of Kingdom work. If one side is completely sacrificed for the other, the business will become an unsustainable burden or be unaligned (and even contrary) to God's will. Can a company be both profitable and true to the Word? Yes, but achieving this delicate balance requires a lot of thought and prayer about what it will ultimately sell.

...balance the
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Our Story

After working out some kinks and trying different manufacturing approaches, the NGO decided making orange juice from local fruits would be feasible. A for-profit company was formed to develop the product and begin marketing within the country. The decision was made to move the equipment and establish a factory inside a village of immigrants who struggled to find employment due to their status and, in general, were not accepted by those around them. As a least-reached people group who had not successfully been engaged by other workers, the IW's wanted to support this community and be a witness of God's love for them.

Jobs or no jobs, the community did not want them. Once they found out it was Christians who were setting up the business, the leaders expressed their distrust and refused to grant the IWs access to the community. The immigrants had their own religion, which was held dearly as an essential part of their identity. Much had been lost when they had to leave their homeland, and they felt that any

challenge to their faith was another blow to their culture. It is human nature to hold tight to all our ways during difficult times, regardless of whether those ways are good for us or not.

The IWs went back to their homes and waited upon the Lord. Two weeks later, they knew He had answered when one of the community members found them. The man had a building in the village and said that even though the village leaders did not want to welcome them, he would really like them to rent the building from him to use as a factory. The IWs could not ignore this opportunity, and, with wisdom and humility, they carefully set up the factory inside the village.

At the same time the juice factory was being set up, one of the business partners was also establishing a branch of the same company in the capital city. His family heavily invested their time and money into developing other dry-food products and even bought a building to set up the manufacturing. Because of government restrictions, a good friend of the IW coordinated much of the financial investment. He was a local citizen, and much of the property and business was established in his name until the IWs could work out a better arrangement. The products were coming along nicely, and compared to the juice, they seemed to have more potential for more significant profit margins and less competition. With the greater partnership between the juice and the dry food projects and momentum in developing all the product lines, the IWs felt encouraged and optimistic.



Then, one day, the IW in the capital city got a call from a lawyer who said his name was being removed from all company documents. The local partner was assuming the dry-goods operation, and the IW would need to assist in completing this transaction. The business was being stolen from underneath them.

Managing Risk

One of the most significant factors any business should consider is the types of risk it faces and the extent of each type of risk. Developing or assuming a business in a foreign country adds another level of complexity, as it can take time to understand those risks. For the Tikvah Juice Factory, the most significant sources of risk that have had to be addressed are:

- 1. Operational risk:** Compared to furniture, coffee, or dried foods, juice is a relatively unstable product unless strict processes are followed. The juice will go bad if even one step is not followed to its necessary standard (say, pasteurization temperature or bottle sanitization). Couple this with high input costs (e.g., fruit) and making large batches, and the result can be disastrous to the bottom line.
- 2. Market Risk:** Most businesses will face competition where consumers decide whether to buy your offering or look elsewhere. This can be affected by positioning (for example, our juice's competition now is more freshly squeezed juice in restaurants than mass-produced juice from concentrate) and barriers to entry. TJC's products are not manufactured with advanced technology or packaged with advanced techniques. Neither of these options is available in-country and would not be economical to import at this point. However, this leaves the business open to competitors who can somewhat easily reproduce and market the same products.
- 3. Regulatory risk:** Any business set up in any country will be subject to the regulations of the government and the departments they establish. While regulations in developed countries can be strict, they are likely clearly outlined and can be approached in a systematic way. In a developing country and TJC's context, the rules are often subjective, changing, and unclear. A requirement today will be replaced by a different one tomorrow. Corruption is the norm, and navigating it ethically is a big challenge. At one point, a large local company took TJC's exact logo and placed it on its candy brand. TJC went to the government agency, but they refused to address the issue.
- 4. Environmental risks:** Natural disasters, fluctuations in the economy and workforce, input prices, and many factors outside of the business' control

can have severe impacts. TJC's production model exposes it more to this kind of risk. For each fruit season, sales (demand) for the following year must be forecasted, and the entire batch must be made. The juice must be sold within one year (before the expiry date and the beginning of the following fruit season). With high input costs, there is a lot of pressure on all the inventory to be sold. Significant events like natural disasters and the pandemic destroyed demand, and the cost of unsold juice was high. The appeal of producing more juice to make more sales and profit is tempered by the risk of having it still sitting on the shelf when its expiry date is near.

- 5. People Risk** (the importance and challenges of trust): Most ministries ultimately come down to relationships. We share the Good News through short encounters and long-standing relationships. In business, there is an added layer of need for effective relationships in all parts of the operation; we make commitments to people and expect others to follow through on their promises. The more these mutual agreements are adhered to, the better a business will function, and as Christians, we are morally compelled to keep our side of the bargain. However, it is interesting to note how different cultures put different values on the importance of doing what you have agreed to do. Things like "saving face" or meeting other commitments to family or community may be put above other agreements. Lying, even when a person is caught, may be considered only a minor infraction. In the case where the IW lost most of the business to his friend and business partner, he was surprised to meet him on a bus only a couple of months later. The young man was eager to speak with him; he was getting married soon and invited the IW to come to the wedding.

It can be hard to trust, especially after let-downs and betrayals, but the fact remains it is impossible to carry out ministry or business without trusting others. A big blessing for the factory has always been how the IWs can highly trust people from the immigrant population who work at the factory. There can be some grey around when to show up for work, and sometimes an uncle needs help on a busy production day, but over 20 years, there have never been any thefts or serious problems. They are highly loyal and trustworthy.

Risk cannot be removed from any endeavour; biblically, we are expected to take risks. We are also expected to be wise and steward any investment well. When doing our Father's work, the

Risk cannot be removed from any endeavour; biblically, we are expected to take risks.

temptation is to get excited about the business without looking closely enough at the risks and putting the proper systems and strategy in place. Here are a few things TJC has done over the years to manage risk:

- 1. Continuously focussed on improving systems and reducing the chance of product failure.** In the last few years, the company has shifted from plastic bottles to glass bottles. Recycled glass bottles have less chance of contamination and benefit the environment. They also better present to consumers and raise our product category profile.
- 2. Developed strategies for diversification.** Diversification is essential in managing risk and cash flow. The business has developed a line of peanut butter that can be made regularly and according to demand. It has also established service contracts with another business needing its product packaged and exported. These contracts require labour and use TJC's expertise and facility but do not require any investment or other expense.
- 3. Focussed on quality, consistency, and resiliency.** Because other individuals and businesses can make the same products as TJC, it is vital that the products are consistently available to customers and always of high quality. TJC has seen many local juice and peanut butter businesses start up through the years, often backed by significant investment and impressive advertising budgets. However, almost all these businesses have only lasted one or two years as they face similar challenges but cannot manage risk or have the persistence coming from pursuing a mission greater than simple profit.
- 4. Found the right person to help navigate legal and regulatory matters.** Finding a local partner who can visit government offices and determine what needs to be done to meet requirements is worthwhile. TJC found the right person who understands the explicit and unsaid rules that need to be followed, and he works to fulfill the company's obligations as ethically as possible.



5. **Were realistic about what the business was focused on.** TJC is committed to being a good neighbour and reaching its immigrant friends with the Good News. Because of this commitment, it values inclusivity, and the workforce often consists of the uneducated and marginalized. The business does well in engaging this population, which means capacity can be reduced in other ways. The business strategy, therefore, involves staying small but doing what it does well. More juice, peanut butter, and profit don't necessarily add up to better ministry, but including our friends and reaching out to their community does. Another business in the city, which is also focused on ministry, works with highly educated college graduates to provide IT services for multinational companies. Their business looks different as does their ministry. Both models bring glory to our Father and reach out to those who need Jesus.
6. **Be wise about who to trust and how far to extend it.** Understanding different cultures and learning about how different individuals work within those cultures is essential. Taking time to get to know people and giving them opportunities to build trust is as much of a strategy as anything else. TJC keeps systems in place to manage how much risk we take with new relationships (i.e. New shops only get a small amount of product on credit, whereas older shops get more), and it has learned to keep good records so there is no confusion about transactions. It also ensures not to set up anyone to fail, offering temptation (i.e. access to too much money) or high expectations (setting someone up to fail by giving them too much responsibility).

Our Story

The IW founder of TJC was devastated by the betrayal of his friend and business partner, but he ultimately had little recourse. His local partner was more familiar with government regulations and, more importantly, better connected with those who could make this theft legitimate. Because the juice factory was based in another city and was unprofitable, it was left with the founding IWs. They shifted their focus again to growing and developing it into a viable business. By this time, the village had warmed up to the idea of Christians working amongst them (at least regarding juice), and the many staff employed were grateful for the opportunity to earn income. Even the village leaders came to know and trust the IW's and began supporting them in various ways, including offering to rent them another building. Other juices were developed to provide more work and connection, and the Spirit moved in His way.

A few years passed, and the founding IWs realized that due to family considerations, they would have to leave the village and be away from the factory. For various technical and business reasons, it could not be fully operational without one of them being there. This left them in a difficult position, and they prayed for a solution. At the same time, in an unrelated church in Canada, people were praying for this immigrant community, and the denomination sent out an IW couple with the mandate to find one of these ethnic communities and begin doing ministry with them. With God's perfect timing and a chance meeting in a coffee shop, a conversation started. One IW said they were looking to work with these people, and the other replied they were leaving their factory in a village populated by this group. So, the transition happened, and the business continued to operate.

With the new owners came new energy and a new focus on discipleship. Thanks to the trust the previous IWs had earned, the new managers were able to begin expanding their reach. The IWs started to share more about their faith and, in simple ways, disciple some of the regular workers. Two immigrants who had become believers in other places searched for them and began partnering with them in business and ministry. A small fellowship began quietly and outside of the community.

The village loved celebrations and highly respected religious holidays. It became evident at one point that people recognized the Christians also had their holy days, and there wouldn't be any problem if they were to celebrate those. Many immigrants had heard about Christmas from movies, and while they didn't know why it was celebrated, they all agreed it looked fun. Thus started the annual Christmas party the whole village would attend. The IWs also realized that because it was their day, they could share whatever they wanted for one day each year. One pastor from the capital city who was of the same ethnicity was able to bring light to the true meaning of Christmas and how it meant God had so much love for their people. He talked about Jesus in their own language, and people were surprised to learn that there were Christians among their own group of people. In the following years, other members from his church (of the same ethnic background) also joined him and performed cultural dances at the celebration, which everyone enjoyed. People in the village were challenged to see that members of their ethnic group could still be part of the community while having a difference in faith.

In addition to employing people at the factory, the IWs worked hard to become part of the community. They spent time drinking tea with friends, attended special events, and helped develop and fund projects assisting the people in the village. Slowly, they established a good reputation and people accepted them and perhaps

wondered what had them giving their lives to a community so far away from their own. Meanwhile, the immigrant believers (one of whom was working at the factory) were still quiet about their new lives following Jesus. Over time, however, as their neighbours gained more respect for the IWs, these immigrant Christians began to be bold and share with other individuals how Jesus had brought them freedom and a new life of hope and grace. This resonated with their friends, who often lived in fear or despair. The same fear and despair, however, would keep most community members from imagining what it would be like to take a leap into a new life.

The Importance of Understanding Culture

Every book, seminar, and guide discussing cross-cultural ministry will emphasize the importance of an IW taking time to learn about and understand the culture they will be working in. Almost every IW who journeys into a new culture will subsequently not take this advice seriously enough and end up frustrated and confused when their own assumptions and perceptions do not mesh with their new home. This isn't an IW problem but simply a human nature problem. We are so conditioned in our own contexts. Many of the things we take as truths are, in fact, not universal but simply a worldview ingrained in our beings. We don't know what we don't know. Breaking out of this is not accomplished easily and is typically only done through time and repeated confrontation in the new culture. One helpful model for the Tikvah Juice Company IWs has been to consider that there are three cultures they work within: culture of origin, culture of the people being ministered to, and Kingdom culture. The temptation, of course, is to equate one's own culture with Kingdom culture. This is challenged, however, when we see believers in other cultures being obedient and their lives and priorities looking different than our own.

From a business perspective, IWs with TJC have had to adjust how they operate. One example is business, which, in their context, is more relational than transactional. This is simply a difference in values (the importance of relationship vs. productivity), which establishes a framework within which to work. This means spending time drinking tea with the hardware store's owner before buying supplies (even when you are in a hurry to get a project done). It means being careful in how you ask a customer for payment, even when their bill is way overdue, to avoid shaming

From a business perspective, IWs with TJC have had to adjust how they operate.

them. Staff are also not simply trading their work hours for pay. A relationship is built where they are doing a favour to you by coming to work, and you are doing a favour to them by giving them some payment. When they need time off to help a family member, it needs to be honoured, and if they are asked to work on holidays or in the evening, they will do so without complaint. In this relational context, it is all a dance of getting the job done but being careful that everyone “saves face.” Loyalties are established, positions (status) are determined, and a subtle unwritten list of give and take is made in everybody’s mind.

This is only one example of how understanding the culture is vital. Outside of the business, the IWs have also had to work hard to understand the culture, trying to know how to honour people and not offend them. People are always watching and appreciative when they see an effort being made, but they also give grace as everyone understands that IWs are outsiders and will never fully grasp some of the intricate nuances within the culture. It is helpful to have a “guide” who can be asked endless questions about what to do in different situations and to be humble and ask for forgiveness when offences (even seemingly minor) are made. Even then, different people from the culture will have various ideas of what is appropriate, and the IW has to have grace with themselves. They will never understand 100 percent, but they must keep trying.

Finally, once the IW has been challenged by the new culture, they can begin to understand what Jesus has told us to value and pursue (i.e. Kingdom culture). This becomes one of the most important avenues of evangelism as IWs can model what Jesus has asked of us vs. what the culture expects. In TJC, one of the ways this is done is through challenging the hierarchy of people’s values (based on their standing in the community). The IWs have created a culture inside the factory where everyone is highly valued regardless of how their own people might see them. The labourers are “lifted up” and honoured at every available opportunity. Equally, the factory’s IWs and local managers are expected to work alongside the other staff; there is no job too dirty or low that they will avoid. This becomes a disruption (in a good way) to the cultural norm and provides a valuable starting point to discuss the Good News. Once IWs at the factory spend time discerning what is Kingdom culture (vs. their own culture), they look for ways to challenge the local norms oppressing and deceiving people.

Our Story

The IWs who began mentoring new believers in the community had felt God calling them to establish a fellowship in the community. After ten years of service, they saw what had been accomplished and knew it was time for them to move



on. A new IW family came and was mentored by the previous IWs for a year. They learned about running the business, connecting with the community, and what had been effective in ministry. However, their predecessors encouraged them to use their God-given gifts and interests to try new ways of doing things. With new energy, the family experimented with creating different products, including peanut butter, dried fruit, dried meat (jerky), and some other snack foods. The peanut butter was a big hit with customers and became a way to employ workers outside of the busy juice seasons.

The new IWs also experimented with new ways to engage the immigrant community in discipleship. Because of the years of commitment, the other IWs had invested, the community was more willing to build relationships and try new things. A baking class was popular with the ladies, and an informal biking group was formed with some of the young men. The IWs partnered with another ministry in their area to host a bike camp for the children in the community, which was well attended by many excited kids, many of whom learned to ride for the first time. Out of this event, biking clubs were formed for girls and boys who came to know the factory as the place to come to drink juice and meet up for fun events. The business also supported local initiatives, sponsoring sports and cultural events for the community and partnering with the school to provide opportunities for the children. During COVID, it helped the village with medical supplies and ways to care

for those affected. This work strengthened relationships with the IW's neighbours, who continued to see how TJC loved and cared for them.

Soon after the new IWs had arrived, a husband and wife from the same immigrant community who were also Christians came to live in the village. They joined the fellowship with the IWs and other immigrant believers. The wife was a new believer, and the husband was already a leader in the greater immigrant church. This was his home village, and they had become workers among their own people. The husband began working at TJC, which gave him a role in the community and employment to sustain his family. The indigenous believers continued to work quietly and carefully, but they shared that as the community came to trust and accept the Christian IWs more, the sentiment was also extended to the immigrant believers. They became bolder in their witness and partnered with the IWs in programs and projects they were undertaking.

One initiative the fellowship undertook was to organize a marriage course. The immigrants' religion does not address or advise about marriage, and families seemed open to exploring what the Bible had to say about it. One of the IWs developed a curriculum exploring the theme and facilitated weekly workshops that were very visual, fun, and interactive. The meetings were held in the TJC factory office which was a neutral place to meet. One primary focus was to explore what cultures tell us about marriage and what the Bible says marriage should be. The IWs were interested in learning about marriage in the immigrants' culture, and the locals were also curious about what marriages looked like for the IWs. There were a lot of laughs during these discussions, and there were also intense emotions as people opened up about topics they had never talked about before. When the IW shared about God's plan for marriage, people were both challenged and inspired. They came out of the program with a new view about marriage and some specific tools on how to better relate and communicate. Both during and after the program, the participants shared touching stories about overcoming challenges in their marriage and coming closer together as husband and wife.

Business and Ministry Approaches

One criticism of the business for transformation (B4T) community is that practitioners can be quite rigid in their own approach and critical of other businesses not following their particular formula. Some will argue a company must be profitable, while others might say the only important thing is time spent evangelizing. TJC has consistently held that it will work hard to glorify God and discern and follow His will. As in any entrepreneurial endeavour, different seasons

will call for different approaches. The peanut butter would not have sold well 15 years ago as many people in the country hadn't even heard of it. The first TJC IWs could not have held a Christian marriage course inside the factory. Different approaches are called for as things change, either through our own efforts or as different influences and circumstances arise. This is true for both business and ministry. IWs with an entrepreneurial mindset are uniquely positioned to have the desire and skills to try new approaches, especially within pioneering fields. They can build off of what goes well and not be discouraged when things don't work.

The community and business environment continues to change for Tikvah Juice Factory. There is more disposable income in the country for people to spend on goods, the younger generations are seeking new and novel products, and young entrepreneurs are stepping up to compete with existing businesses. The immigrant community where the factory resides is also changing. Many families have worked hard to send their young men and women overseas where they can find more opportunities. This has resulted in a shifting demographic where the families have less need for income, and the factory has fewer workers available for production. This has also led to a shift in who the IWs and local fellowship are ministering to. God has opened doors to work with children in the village, and the team has renovated the main office into an arts centre. The immigrant families are excited for their children to go where they can have fun, learn new skills and be surrounded by positive people.

IWs with an entrepreneurial mindset are uniquely positioned to have the desire and skills to try new approaches...

Our Story

It is a Friday at the TJC factory. Downstairs is a group of college students who are on holiday and came to help put labels on bottles. Their music is playing, and somebody just told a joke everyone is laughing at. At the end of the day, they will all go home with some money in their pockets, most likely to be used for a new shirt or perhaps a trip for everyone to see a movie. In the storeroom beside them is the manager, who is getting a small box of juice ready for one of the grandmas from the village. She will proudly serve it to her guests later that day—juice from “our” factory. She reminds the manager her son used to work here and she is always a good customer; isn't it possible to get a small discount?

Going upstairs, one can see colourful splashes and handprints on the (also

newly-painted) black steel railing. Inside the room is a group of kids working intently on paper-mache birds, talking excitedly and spreading glue everywhere—on their creations, the table, and their friends. The teacher moves from one table to the next, helping and encouraging each one. A mother comes up with her five-year-old and asks if she can leave him there for a few minutes. Yes, she knows he is too young for the art project, but can't he hang out while she runs to buy vegetables for lunch?

Passing through the busy art space, another room comes into view. It is bright and warm, filled with windows, and used for drying peanuts. On one side is a member of the staff busy roasting peanuts, and on the other stands a group of ladies trying to perfect the recipe for a new snack product. One is saying it is too sweet, and the other is convinced it is not sweet enough.

Today will be busy, but the factory will be closed tomorrow as the Christians observe their sabbath day. From a small house in the village will come songs of praise in a unique language God loves, from a people He loves. After worship and some teaching everyone will share food together and perhaps a glass of juice.

Chapter 7

Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

by Drew

The path before us has often been covered with mist and fog. Not being able to see far down the path, we have learned to wait on God. As we sought to bring transformation to communities who didn't know Him, He often gave us just enough to see the next step on the path but no further.

Before the Beginning

Early in our marriage, we sensed God leading us to minister cross-culturally. Drew¹ had a tech background, and Destiny worked in small business finance. As a first step towards serving Christ overseas, we enrolled in seminary to gain some practical skills in theology and cross-cultural communication. An apprenticeship in an inner-city church then gave us some much-needed ministry experience and exposure to other cultures as we worked with recent immigrants to Canada. We knew we could benefit from some focused preparation.

Beyond leading us to serve cross-culturally, God gave us a particular people group to live among – Buddhists residing in and around the Himalayas. We call them the Highland people. Without a viable witness, the Highland people would not learn about Jesus unless believers went and lived among them, sharing the message of Christ through word and deed.

After training in Canada and with the Highland people in our hearts, we moved to our new Asian home as students. Language and cultural studies occupied our first few years, but the question, "How do we stay?" wasn't far from our minds.

We would need a visa to remain in

...the Highland people would not learn about Jesus unless believers went and lived among them, sharing the message of Christ through word and deed.

¹ Some of the details have been changed to protect the identity of Drew, Destiny, and the people they worked with.

the country long-term and live among the Highland people. More than a visa, we would need a natural way to be part of the community, both in the eyes of the community and the government. Running a small business seemed to be a great solution. It was important that whatever we did, we did it with integrity. This wouldn't be a "business-for-visa" kind of solution. It would be business-for-transformation. We would run the business well (with everything "well" means) as followers of Christ. It was a way to be fully present in the community. Business was something people understood. And it's something the government understood. It was a way for us to live out our faith in Christ.

First Few Attempts

Starting a business cross-culturally is no simple feat. Our first idea was to start a website development business for customers in Canada. We brought on two business advisers, drafted a business plan, and raised some startup capital. The Alliance Canada couldn't provide us with the capital but permitted us to find missions-minded investors in churches even as we promoted the Global Advance Fund. With ten donors, we raised enough capital to get us started.

With great excitement in our hearts and with the prayers of our supporters behind us, we ventured into the capital city in the Highlands to talk to government officials about opening a business. There had been significant social unrest in the city the previous year. Foreigners weren't allowed in the area unless they came as tourists and hired a tour guide to watch over them. Drew and a co-worker arrived in the city as tourists and made arrangements to meet an official in the commerce department. When the time came, we each presented our business ideas to the official.

It was a short meeting. We were told we weren't allowed to open any business. The government official seemed a little overwhelmed at having foreigners in her office so soon after the unrest the year before. The official reason she gave Drew for denying his request to open a business was, "We don't need help using computers." This was a complete misunderstanding of the business proposal. Deflated, we left the capital. Living in the capital city had been our dream. This had been the culmination of years of preparation.

Within weeks, we visited two other towns in the Highlands. Our visas would expire soon, the website development business wouldn't work outside the capital city, and we needed a long-term business opportunity. One of the towns we visited was a tourist town welcoming foreign business owners. And so, with visas about to expire and startup capital in our pockets, we decided to open an outdoor

adventure company with our co-workers.

This was a shocking pivot for our supporters. The change had taken place over a matter of weeks. It took some time to explain the reasons for such a radical shift from tech to tourism, but the underlying desire to live and work among the Highland people hadn't changed.

This second attempt at starting a cross-cultural business didn't last long. Tensions between us and our co-workers soon saw us parting ways and looking for a third business idea.

We were learning flexibility, creativity, and resilience.

An Existing Business

Brian, a fellow believer and expat in town, had recently started his own business. He had driven around the rural villages outside of town, looking for ways to help the subsistence farmers. He learned the women in these villages spun their own wool. With this marketable skill, he started a business to buy high-quality wool from another town in the Highlands, employ the ladies to spin the wool into yarn, and then sell the yarn in markets both locally and internationally. The business provided the raw materials and access to the market, and the women provided the skilled labour. Brian's need? He needed a business partner



Photo by Mehmet Turgut Kirkgoz, [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

to bring in more capital, help with the business finances, and develop a line of hand-knit products.

Over the year we had been in town, we had watched each other interact in the community. The thought of working together seemed promising, so we talked with Brian about what a partnership might look like. After recognizing a similar approach to ministry (i.e., this business is not “business-for-visa”) and passing this on to our advisers and supporters back in Canada, we bought a share in the business and opened a second office.

We now had a business opportunity, which allowed us to settle among the Highland people.

Local Acceptance

Opening a second office and obtaining a visa for a foreigner required a massive amount of paperwork and permission from half a dozen government bureaus. At one stage, with twelve hours’ notice, Drew needed to travel to the provincial capital to meet with the head of the labour department. He didn’t have his work permit yet, and the labour department was the issuing authority. The meeting was brief and to the point. Relations were good with Canada. Drew would have no problem getting a work permit annually if the two countries remained on good terms. At the end of the interview, knowing what type of business we were running, the official said, “May you make a lot of money and employ a lot of women.”

The labour department official made it clear how we would be measured as we ran our business.

Towards a Sustainable Not-for-Profit Business

The business was started as a for-profit, at least officially. Operating a non-governmental organization (NGO) or not-for-profit was becoming increasingly difficult. The government was even starting to close smaller NGOs, but they were much more welcoming toward for-profit businesses. When we joined the business, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Brian, our new partner, saying neither of us would profit financially from this business as owners. All profits would be used to grow the business or for ministry. We desired to see the business eventually pay for our local expenses (e.g. rent and vehicle operating costs). The government required us to receive a salary. We decided on an amount that was small enough not to hinder the growth of the business at the start but big enough to satisfy the government and not draw too many

questions. The salary was put into a fund and used for non-business expenses, such as helping the ladies with medical costs.

The business was started in 2009, and we joined as co-owners in 2010. Brian retired and left the country in 2014 because of some health concerns and declining support. Later, in 2014, a grant from The Alliance Canada helped us increase our stock of raw materials and hand-knit products.

By 2018, we were starting to see some profits, enabling us to pay rent for the rooms being used in our house for the business.

We ran the business as a for-profit on paper but as a not-for-profit in reality. In both cases, as far as the government could see, and as our accounting books would tell, we were moving towards a sustainable business.

Beyond the challenge of sustainability, there were other obstacles to overcome.

Beyond the challenge of sustainability, there were other obstacles to overcome.

Obstacles Along the Way

A significant obstacle we faced was sales and marketing. We could scale production, order fulfilment, and shipping but lacked sufficient sales and marketing skills. Because our market was mostly international, we tried to bring on additional foreign help, but visa issues, difficult living conditions, and language barriers made our search difficult. Looking back, our mistake was not finding someone to fill this need.

A potential market was supporting churches in Canada, but this came with some complications. We needed to protect our identity in these churches and couldn't openly promote the business. Connecting our names and the company with The Alliance Canada would eventually be noticed by the government. If the government learned about the connection, they would need to respond, which would cause problems for us, the business, and, more importantly, the local women who worked with us. We needed to stay under the radar. We decided sales needed to come from outside the church even though we had great supporters within the church. This tension was a significant concern as we lived and worked in a country that was not very welcoming to religious workers.

As we worked on finding international customers, we noticed something was missing. We didn't have the skills or network to find domestic customers. We should have prioritized hiring a more capable local worker to pursue domestic markets. We hired a local office worker, but he lacked all the needed skills. We

recognized this too late.

There were obstacles on the sourcing side of the business as well. The place where we bought the raw wool fibre and machine-spun yarn was asking for increasingly large minimum orders. Cash flow was tight, and we could not purchase the fibre and yarn in these larger quantities. A grant from the Alliance helped, but we would need to scale our sales for these larger purchases to be sustainable in the future.

Other obstacles were in our path. Some were overcome with creativity, flexibility, and prayer, while others stood in our way. As we worked to overcome these obstacles, the community watched and learned Christ-like principles as we put them into practice in the business.

Good Practices

Business, with the goal of transforming a community, requires good business and development procedures. Here is a smattering of practices and Christ-like principles we strived to follow.

We did what we said we were going to do.

We ran a business, and there was evidence the government could see. One year, Drew was at the local labour department submitting paperwork for his work permit, which he needed to renew annually. This particular year, the official said, "Where do you do your work?" Drew said most of the work was done in the village. The official continued, "Where do you keep the fibre, yarn, and knitted products?" Drew replied, "In my house, we use a few rooms for the business." The official stood up and said, "Let's go and see." They came to the house together so he could look around. Standing in our inventory room, with shelves full of hand-knit products, he smiled and said, "I'd love to visit the village you work in sometime. Maybe I can help with some business connections."

Rather than seeing something wrong, he saw what we were doing right. We were running a business. The evidence was there. The government was satisfied we were doing what we said we would be doing.

We kept good records.

We always wrote down the IDs of the ladies we employed and the details of each contract we made with each spinner or knitter each month.

In the spinning village one day, a woman tried to argue we were cheating her. The weight of the spun yarn she brought back to us differed from that of the

fibre we had given her the previous month. Before we could answer, our village manager pointed to the printed contracts we always carried and said to the woman, “You are the one who is mistaken. The owners keep outstanding records of everything. If it says you were given this much fibre last month, then that is what we will assume.” Keeping good records saved us from several arguments and helped build trust with the women who worked with us.

The tax department was also happy with our printed contracts. When they saw the stacks of them being submitted each month, each with an ID number, a picture of the worker, and details of how they earned their money, they said, “This is the kind of paperwork we like to see!” Keeping good records demonstrated integrity to the government.

We paid our workers on time.

During each visit to the village, we inspected the women’s work that month and then paid them in full. At the beginning of the knitting season one year, the ladies said, “We’ve already put our kids in school because we knew you would be back.” They knew we would pay them for their work without any tricks or excuses.

Not paying workers was a common practice in the country. Employers would hire workers but, at the end of the month, have no cash to pay them, saying, “Next month, I’ll have the money.” The workers were then trapped. They had to continue working, or they would lose the unpaid wages. Even if the employer said they had no money at the end of the second or third month, the workers would stay and continue working. They had no choice.

In one situation, the power company was building a tower for power lines near a village. The supervisor was given the money to pay his workers, to be paid once the tower was complete. The unexpected happened (as it often does). The supervisor’s daughter was in a car accident, and the car needed to be repaired, which was done with the money intended for the workers. When the workers had completed the tower, the supervisor had no money for payment. In a trickle-down effect, the workers now had no money to pay what they owed for food and accommodations to our village manager, who had let them stay in her house while they worked those few months. Paying workers and paying them on time was not a guarantee in the area.

We provided training.

The women we hired to spin yarn and knit hats and scarves had been taught these skills by their mothers and grandmothers. They were artisans. However, they needed to learn additional skills as they worked with us. To appeal to an



Photo by Charan Sai, [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

international market, we designed hats, mitts, and scarves targeted towards our customers. This meant teaching the women how to knit these items. Unfortunately, none of the women could read patterns. None of the women could read a simple child's book. In the past, they would look at a sample product and figure out how to knit a duplicate, which meant the products were not always consistent. To be able to teach the women a new product, we knit a sample and wrote out a pattern without using words. The patterns used symbols in common use in the knitting community in Asia. Quickly, they had the patterns memorized.

We provided opportunities, not handouts.

Rather than visiting these villages and giving them money or food to help them when times were tough, we learned it was better to provide them with an opportunity to earn money. This gave them self-worth and improved their standing in the community.

We hired quality spinners and knitters, not just anyone.

This raised the value of the work in the women's minds. They didn't lose respect for us as they had with other foreign businesses that didn't care about the quality of work.

These may seem like trivial practices or principles, but they are powerful witnesses for Christ in a culture that rarely sees them. A foundation of integrity

was essential for us to earn the right to be heard, not just speak. Offering transformation in people's lives, families, and communities required them to trust us and really consider what we brought to share with them.

Transforming the Local Community

During the time we were involved with the business, we saw women in these rural villages earn an income to help their families. We employed more than 50 workers in spinning and knitting and processed hundreds of contracts. There was dignity in their labour, and we could see it on their faces. This money they earned meant they could do more than merely survive on what could be grown in the fields.



The women were able to purchase medicine. They purchased vitamins to augment their meagre diets, pain medication for their arthritis, and visits to the doctor in the larger town down the mountain.

The women could also send their children to school in a nearby town. The government provided education for the children but didn't pay for transportation or school supplies. These small expenses meant several of the children in the village didn't go to school. Some of the wages earned by the women went to pay for these extra fees.

The women's income from spinning and knitting gave them the cash they needed to meet some of their and their families' needs.

Beyond opportunities to bring transformation to their physical realities, we wanted to share opportunities that would bring transformation to their spiritual realities.

Photo by Vlada Karpovich, [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

Introducing Them to Christ

The Highland people we worked with didn't know who Jesus was. Their knowledge of Christianity was non-existent. Before they could understand the teachings of Christ, they needed to experience Him and see Him through His followers. This was a sobering reality for us.

We had been tasked with sharing Christ with those who had never heard of Him. We prayed with them whenever the opportunity arose, usually related to health matters. We did life together with them and shared what we had. They used our vehicle to transport food, medicines, friends, and even live piglets and chickens as we drove to and from the village. We were even able to help the women who worked with us with overbearing medical bills.

We worked more closely with the village managers. These ladies spoke the language of the country and the local language of their village. We couldn't learn all of the village dialects, so we relied on these managers to help with translation and getting around the community. One was a believer, but the others were not.

One day in the cold of winter, we visited one of our village managers in her home. Her name was Darlene. It was their New Year's celebration, and we were invited to stop by for a visit. We sat with her and her husband and enjoyed some drinks and snacks. Drew mentioned to her husband how similar their New Year's celebration was to our Christmas celebrations. We, too, would travel to visit relatives, share gifts, and eat special foods. All at once, he looked at Drew and said, "I know. But I'm not interested in hearing anything about your Christmas or your being a Christian."

We went home that day quite dejected. We had spent years in cultural and language study. We had started a business in the city near this family's village. And now, one of the first opportunities we had to share our faith in words was shot down before it started.

A few years later, Darlene asked us if she could borrow some money for a week so they could buy a new car. The financing would come soon, and she would pay us back next week. We didn't have the money but said we would happily pray with her and her husband and ask God to supply the funds. Although she wasn't a believer in Jesus, she agreed. We had recently prayed for her daughter to get into a better school and God had provided in an amazing way; Darlene had seen God work. Her husband was reluctant. With some prodding from his wife, he agreed. We sat down to pray. Before we could start, the husband got a phone call, and his friend found some money and could lend it to them. Again, we were dejected. It seemed God had missed an opportunity to reveal Himself to this couple who didn't yet know him. But He was working where we could not see it.

The next morning, Darlene came to work and, as usual, had a story to share with us. She said, “Last night, I had an argument with my husband. He was saying how stupid it was for Drew and Destiny to pray. But I told him not to disrespect you by saying that. When Drew and Destiny pray, things happen!” God was working in Darlene’s heart!

While Darlene hasn’t become a Christian, she has worked beside Christians for several years. We provided a shoulder to cry on and a workplace of peace. She can bear witness to the character of Christ through His people. And she influences the knitting village.

A Third Season for the Business

We’ve been privileged to participate in the second season of the business Brian, our pioneering co-owner, started.

Drew’s sickness kept us away from the business on two separate occasions. While COVID-19 was the particular reason we couldn’t get back in the country most recently, we felt God was leading us to a new ministry. After much wrestling and talking, we decided to sell everything and close the business.

It had been our desire to bring another expat couple on board. They would continue running the business and working in the village in place of us. However, finding a replacement owner for these kinds of foreign-run enterprises is difficult, and we could not find anyone.

Given our foreign customer base, a local from the Highlands would not want to or be able to run the business. Most of the businesses we knew started by foreigners and transferred to locals had not done well.

Having decided to sell everything and close the business, we drafted an email to our regular customers offering them a steep discount on our existing stock ... and pressed send.

One morning, a few days later, we received an unexpected email. It was from Ron and Carrie, a local believing couple we knew. They had been working in a restaurant in town where our hand-knit products were sold. They had watched us as we ran the business and wondered how they could help. Carrie has excellent English, and they both have experience working with foreign customers. In their email, they offered to help.

After more talking, we decided to sell the business to them. This local couple, who watched us run the business and offered to help, will continue with it after we have gone... a third season for the company. They are local believers who have grasped the vision of business for transformation.

God provided in ways we couldn't have foreseen. The path before us has often been covered with mist and fog, but that's okay. As Paul wrote, "Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?" (Romans 11:33-34 NLT²)

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Chapter 8

Service Plus in Central Asia

by Cara Kennedy

God's love for the people: this was my husband's and my prayer request nearly 20 years ago when we first visited the unreached people group we now live amongst. We initially travelled to live overseas as a young married couple, hopeful to use our career-built proficiencies and skills to minister and serve a people group holistically we knew barely anything about.

They were said to be hospitable, fairly conservative Muslims. They were also economically underdeveloped and plagued by problems of poor health care, shaky education, high unemployment, and deep, complex layers of corruption. We felt confident we could make some positive difference economically and were hopeful God would use our lives and work to draw Muslims into His loving embrace.

So, we prayed, left our corporate Canadian workplaces, and were sent out by loving church brothers and sisters. We specifically asked God to confirm if we should stay overseas by giving us "His love for the people." And we believe He did just that!

Aside from the growing, vibrant business which now employs and provides livelihood for over 150 people, we have seen over 10 people become followers of Jesus. Many others have deepened their faith, and there are even a few second-generation believers. This is especially exciting since our mission is to advance the gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom into the nations through spiritual generations of labourers living and discipling among the lost. Through it all, our hearts grew larger with a deep love for these new friends and spiritual family.

Service Plus Start Up

One of our workers, Marcus, lifted his buckets, dirty rags, and toolbox into the back of the taxi. "Please head to Rimus Street," he told the driver. He'd just finished a small plumbing job at a Mexican restaurant, *Fimors*, restoring their flush porcelain squatty potty to working condition.

By the time Marcus arrived at the Service Plus headquarters office, the owner of *Fimors* had already called to express her appreciation.

Victor, the owner and director of this all-purpose service company, answered the phone, received the thanks, and set to work on the billing. He will go to present the invoice and collect payment tomorrow. Such is the way of a small start-up company—long hours, endless details to manage, constant problem-solving, and almost no one to help do the work.

Victor started this company himself, with Marcus as the only staff member. At only 21, Victor was vibrant, full of energy and passion, and still finishing school. He was inspired to start a business, grow it, sell it, and start another. His aspirations included one day becoming the country's president. When he met Wade, he leapt at the chance to have someone with Western business education and experience come alongside him. He immediately made Wade an equal partner, and the two were inseparable. They were not a bad pair since Victor had so much "do" energy, and Wade was stronger at vision and "thinking."

Victor was also a believer and passionate about Jesus. He was excited to work with Wade to build a Kingdom business that would be run in a God-honouring way and be the light of Jesus to their employees, clients, suppliers, and the world around them. Victor and Wade pursued Jesus together in prayer and Bible study. They travelled together to client meetings, often praying before connecting with clients or before a tender reveal. They included Marcus in some of these times, too.

Marcus, Service Plus' original employee, was also newly learning about following Jesus. At 19, and still in university, he'd met Victor at a local church meeting and taken the job part-time while he continued his studies. It was new territory for all of them—how do you live out your faith as a follower of Jesus in a Muslim culture and the business world?

The three of them struggled in those early years, but they did it together. Initially, they would do many of the service jobs themselves, sometimes working all through the night, or they would hire contract employees where needed for their expertise.

Eventually, Victor and Wade took on a few more full-time employees but often struggled to pay them. It was a chicken and egg problem—how to grow a business without resources and provide staffing for new work contracts when employees are limited, how to keep employees busy when there are no contracts on the table. And the most challenging question of all—how to pay employees when there is absolutely no money coming in. There were many months like that: the company had no cash, and Victor and Wade were taking loans or digging deep into their own pockets to pay employees. And, of course, there were months upon months when they weren't paying themselves.

Sometimes, clients refused to pay, perhaps saying they couldn't pay while knowing Service Plus didn't have the resources to escalate a non-payment. Some

companies were protected by a “Roof.” In Central Asia, this means someone with real power—maybe connected or related to the president—owned or was kept on retainer with a specific company. If you ask too many questions or bother the wrong person, the Roof ensures that you find a host of problems coming your way. More about that later.

The Right Client?

In Year 3, a friendly phone call came from a large, trusted bank. The call was urgent, requiring immediate repairs on entranceway flooring only hours before a large ribbon-cutting ceremony. Service Plus accepted the call. Banks have money, right? They can make their payments on time, helping to enable this month’s payroll. All other jobs were put on hold; this one became a priority.

Victor went himself, with Marcus in tow. Marcus was now the lead service supervisor on top of his primary role as bookkeeper. They could see immediately that the tiles needed to be removed and replaced, a water pipe needed to be moved, and parts of the wall would need to be destroyed and rebuilt. It was a stressful day—running here and there to find materials and mouldings while trying to match



tiles that weren’t readily available. And all this under tight bank security.

When the day was saved and the job completed, the bank manager told them to contact him “after tomorrow.”

“Oh, and in the meantime,” he said matter-of-factly, not asking, “attend to these service items at my house.” He handed Marcus a list of eight repair or fix-it jobs and his address.

At first, Victor and Marcus thought they had it made. “We’ve got the trust of a high-up manager in a reliable bank!” But over time, and a few jobs later, it became apparent the requests for work would keep coming, but never any payment. At first, the deferrals for payment were polite and friendly, but later, they were more abrupt, and finally, Mr. Bank Manager stopped answering his phone. Finding him at his workplace became more challenging, or Victor was denied security access to the bank offices. Maybe the bank thought the honour of working for them, even for free, was enough of a reward. After all, using their name on a client list could potentially help them earn other contracts.

In the spirit of following God's lead in Ephesians 4:32, it was decided that Service Plus would forgive these debts and pursue work elsewhere. But even this course of action had to be handled carefully. It's dangerous to blatantly turn down an important person's request. So, slowly but surely, excuses were made for Service Plus. They were "too busy," "equipment was broken down," or "employees are off sick." This is how to gently divorce a bad client in Central Asia.

Navigating Bureaucracy

Was there fear? Yes! Fear is always a good driver to come before a loving, all-knowing Father on your knees and beg for His direction and a dose of renewed faith. There is nothing like living daily on the edge of failure, just one move away from a collapse of everything you've dreamed of and worked for. Not to mention the employees who've trusted you to provide their daily bread. The risks overseas are much higher, but so is the exhilaration accompanying them. That's what it means to step out of the comfort and safety of the boat and experience the delight of walking on water with Jesus! There is intense joy in seeing God part the seas of the impossible, provide fish and loaves for one more day, or raise a dead work contract to life just in time.

The risks overseas are much higher, but so is the exhilaration accompanying them.

So why fear? One consequence of being too rash or upsetting the wrong person could result in extraneous or overly detailed inspections. Government officials of various departments are constantly looking to extort or extract money. The fire department, the police department, the electricity provider, the tax department, the Ministry of Public Service, or Transportation, or Labour. They all loved to send inspectors and authorities, as well as representatives, boxes full of binders detailing regulations, policies, and laws. It could tie up weeks and months of employees' time and brain power trying to prove compliance with detailed and specific requirements. Some of the requirements even contradicted themselves, which means you had to prove you met regulation A and then separately prove you met regulation B by denouncing regulation A. Exasperating!

One fire inspection took weeks, with different officials popping up unannounced at random times and asking to see this and that. When they found most things were in order, they would leave frustrated but with the resolve not to be undone. Finally, a senior fire inspector returned and announced the Service Plus office attics needed to be inspected. He then required each attic to be spray-coated with

fire retardant spray and the landlord's yard overhangs to be replaced with less flammable material. Guess who gets to do the work? The tenants. The landlord has no responsibility or interest in investing in his property or building. Suitable rental units are hard to find, and many landlords love to oust their tenants right after they have completed significant upgrades and renovations. So, all renovations are done with considerable consideration and hope for rental longevity in order to get payback.

These inspections were too much for Wade, a Western, second language learner, as well as for Victor, a youthful, spirited entrepreneur, who succeeded best when he was put to action, not locked in a vault of paperwork. Victor and Wade were forced to hire a contract lawyer to keep their business alive and get necessary government approvals and licences. To maintain compliance as the company grew, they also had to hire a human resources manager, a company safety inspector, an official accountant familiar with the government-certified computer accounting software, and a few others. At times, Victor and Wade were sure that the government required Service Plus to hire their preferred employees just so they could keep an internal watch on the daily work.

Unequally Yoked

Victor grew antsy in Year 4. He was a pioneer at heart and ready for something new, someplace new. After finishing his history degree, he paused his original plan to pursue law. As his business grew, he met more and more influential people and began to gain their respect. He recognized the unspoken requirements of leadership in Central Asia and began staying out late with associates, often with alcohol. Relationships are everything in Central Asia.

He no longer had political aspirations; he'd lost his idealistic, hopeful views for a better homeland. He was beginning to drift from God. Then his parents died suddenly, only six months apart from each other, and Victor started a journey of identity crisis, which ended with him walking away from God, his business, and ultimately his country. He took his wife and four small kids and moved away, hoping to start over.

Deeply disappointed at this loss, Wade didn't have much time to grieve. But the questions remained and sometimes haunted him: What went wrong? Did Wade fail at disciplining Victor? Was it better for Victor to leave his country to escape the negative influences and pressures of those deeply entrenched in corruption? And what happened to the massive amount of cash which had been locked in the safe until recently?

Service Plus was growing, and Wade desperately needed a new local business partner who could manage client relationships and the government side of things. Along came Ali, who was already working as an accountant for Service Plus. Outside of the service job, he was a business-minded farmer with sound negotiation skills who appreciated the opportunity to have a Western business partner. He was Muslim and adherent to his faith. Wade and Ali got along well and seemed to have shared values and goals in doing business. Though some warned Wade about entering business with one who was not equally yoked in the faith (2 Corinthians 6:13-15), Wade decided this may be an excellent opportunity to let someone else in on running God's business, the business for transformation way. He took Ali out for dinner and disclosed his heart, "I believe that all things belong to God first. He puts them in our hands to steward them and wants us to live according to His ways and laws to honour Him. This business is God's, and I'm just helping Him run it."

Ali considered this momentarily, "You are bringing your faith into the workplace?"

"Yes, because I think God brought me here and wants me to honour Him in all I do, including the work He gives me. As a Jesus-follower, I want to show God's love to everyone around me, including our employees, managers, clients, and suppliers."

Ali agreed to "run the business God's way," but the two men still had to work out the intricacies of what that meant.

Shortly after Ali stepped into ownership, his cousin took over inventory and warehouse management, and slowly but surely, inventory went missing, with some of it eventually being used by their competitors; so puzzling! Then it comes out Ali's cousin has been selling off the inventory to line his own pockets. This all comes to light when a "lost" piece of inventory equipment is offered for sale back to Service Plus. This particular buffer and polisher machine had originally been ordered and imported but then was reported to be broken and finally 'missing.' When a young man knocked on Wade's door, boasting a unique piece of quality equipment, Wade's jaw dropped...

This is How Things Are Done

Recognition of idols, whether in life or business, is challenging, but God always uses it as an opportunity for His good and our transformation. In Year 5, the idol of financial security came to light, showing how employees, even believers, were willing to put honesty and integrity aside and embrace corruption to secure it. Thankfully, the gospel of Jesus offers believers freedom from idols. Jesus promises that if we seek His Kingdom first, everything we need will be provided (Matthew 6:33).

In a meeting with their management team, Wade and Ali decided that Service Plus would not pay kickbacks to purchasing managers for awarding new contracts.

...Service Plus would not pay kickbacks to purchasing managers for awarding new contracts.

In the early years of business, Service Plus primarily performed specialty service contracts, which tended to be one-time in nature. This meant cash flow was dependent on finding the next contract, and as a result, Service Plus struggled to fulfill employee payroll and other payments.

Then, one day, a significant breakthrough came. After being pleased with the results of a few smaller contracts, the largest energy company in the area offered Service Plus a long-term agreement to attend to their new 15-story headquarters building. The approach, however, was unusual.

The operations officer was tall and lanky, with a clean-shaven face but sunken eyes and long bangs he kept sweeping out of his eyes. He barely made eye contact as he met with Ali, scrolling on his phone the whole time, signalling he was too busy for the conversation.

“Thanks for helping us structure our new building! We’re delighted with the way you set up our vestibule and installed the coffee and kitchen areas on each floor. We want to take you guys on as our overall maintenance and repair company. It means a big long-term contract for you. You keep a few employees at our location, managing our facility on an ongoing basis. Bill monthly whatever time and expenses you have.”

Ali could hardly keep from grinning, thinking how much this could ease the monthly anxiety of paying out expenses. He tried not to be too eager as he asked for details.

“Well, of course, the contract has to go to tender. That’s expected. But no need to worry. If you agree, the contract’s yours. You only need to gross up your monthly invoices by 10 percent. And you pay that 10 percent to me. It’s my management fee, see?”

Knowing this was often how business is done in his context, Ali shook on it. But when he brought the news back to the team, not all staff were on board. There was great discussion and debate over the next few weeks leading up to the tender. Service Plus’ lead project manager, who thoroughly understood the motivation and purpose of a Kingdom business, was positively animated, “This is how things are done in this part of the world. If we want to work here and stay in business to have an impact, we need to do this. With this kind of regular inflow, we can hire even more employees and grow. More influence to be had in even more lives!”

As lead bookkeeper, Marcus also advocated for moving forward: “If we get this contract, we will be rid of our cashflow problems and can make payroll each month. We’ll all sleep better at night.”

Wade brought everyone to attention: “I think it’s about the Golden Rule. As a business owner, I wouldn’t want a supplier conspiring with one of you to drive up my costs. How, then, can I do it to this company?”

Marcus spoke up. “With all due respect, Mr. Wade, you are making the wrong decision. We’re constantly stressed out and don’t know if we will survive even one more month. Every month, it’s the same. How can you do this to all of us? To your employees who trust you?”

Wade took a deep breath, thinking it over. A people pleaser at heart, he hated to let his employees down. “Well, I just have to believe that if we do business God’s way, He will provide for us.”

“Well, I just have to believe that if we do business God’s way, He will provide for us.”

After more debate, Marcus eventually conceded, sighed, and almost whispered, “I guess I just don’t have faith to believe that we will be okay.”

“Maybe that’s why this is happening – so your faith will be strengthened.”

With some reluctance, Ali told the operations officer that Service Plus was unwilling to participate unfairly in a tender. But they still competed and, not too unexpectedly, lost the contract to a competitor.

But God...

A more amazing outcome couldn’t have been imagined. Three months later, the energy company called up Service Plus directly. They panicked, “The company we hired is completely incompetent. They can’t do the work at all! Please come and take over.”

Upon further conversations, their desperation was revealed. The contract was being offered without a kickback—just honest work! The contract provided Service Plus with much-needed cash flow and entered them into daily maintenance service contracts, which became core to their current growth of 150 employees. Wade learned the vital importance of living out the gospel daily, where it has the power to bring redemption, and by doing so, earning a hearing for the gospel.

Into the Business, Into the Kingdom

The next five years were filled with the growth and development of the management team, alongside constant turnover of employees and clients. Service Plus worked hard to examine its processes and develop best practices. It also established an advisory board of God-loving businessmen and women who listened well and asked great questions.

Ali left the company to pursue his own business interests. Due to differences with Wade, there was some concern Ali would expose the company as a B4T (Business for Transformation) company, which could leave Service Plus vulnerable to attack.

Around Year 10, Wade, with a hopeful vision of having him shine the light of Jesus brightly in the workplace, hired Neil, a mature second-generation believer. Over time, Neil became a multi-site manager gifted at connecting deeply with many employees.

Highly charismatic, Neil loved the daily interactions with employees, suppliers, and clients. Unashamed of his identity in Christ and with a good understanding of the B4T vision, he often easily entered into spiritual conversations while at work on a project. He joined Wade and a few other believing employees for lunchtime or evening prayer times or Bible studies.

With such a sizeable relational network, Neil was exceptionally skilled at finding temporary contract employees on short notice. On one occasion, he brought in his cousin Owen, a student who'd moved to the city for university but was happy to work here and there to help pay his tuition bills. Owen was a good worker and began to take on regular contracts. He also began to attend a weekly men's Bible study. Over time, through constant exposure to God's Word and to a loving Christian community, Owen decided to put his trust in Jesus.

Wade recounts his privilege of meeting with Owen weekly for discipleship times. "As we met over lunch, Owen would share his experience of God that week and tears of joy would flow down his cheeks. He would tell me how God was changing his heart. His desire to become wealthy and successful and to gratify himself by chasing after young ladies were fading away. These yearnings were losing interest in him as he was overwhelmed with a desire for God. They were replaced with a longing to know and love God with his life and serve God and others around him."

The availability and intentionality of Neil and others in the workplace allowed God to work out his beautiful plan for Owen.



Women Workers

Though it was an honour to see God at work in this deeply touching and personal way, we'd often spoken about a conundrum we'd noticed years before—how to spiritually reach the many women who worked at Service Plus. Over the years, Service Plus was hiring more women, many of whom were in the at-risk or vulnerable sector.

Women of all types: divorced, widowed, abandoned, oppressed, unloved, single moms, most of them desperate for work as they struggled to source a daily meal.

Among them were a couple of believing employees, even ones who lovingly shared their faith, but mostly, these women were positioned at small, private service sites. Wade and I prayed about opportunities to share the good news with the broader, growing female workforce and asked many in the churches in Canada to pray.

In answer, God miraculously provided Villia in Year 11. Peruvian in descent, Villia had a background in engineering maintenance and had already spent a few years working in an NGO and learning the local language. She had a vivacious love for Jesus and a desire to see holistic transformation in women's lives.

At Service Plus, Villia took on the position of daily maintenance supervisor. She worked with teams of employees for months at a time but then rotated to different teams at various job sites. Her commanding presence, coupled with her warm, loving smile, made all who met her love her; at the same time, employees listened to her expertise with a healthy, respectful fear.

At the beginning of the workday, Villia would gather her team and say, "Let's pray and ask God for strength to get through this day." At the end of the day, she'd gather them again and thank God for providing for one more day. Throughout the day, she would listen to the women's stories, show them compassion, and offer them scriptural truth to apply to their lives.

She threw them birthday celebrations or invited them to her home for a meal. On more than one occasion, she opened her home to women who needed to escape abusive situations. And twice, whether you believe it or not, she's had to deal with demonic manifestation in the workplace. Villia would tell you herself she barely believed the experience while it was happening. Yet, her closeness to Jesus led her to pray in Spanish over a demon-possessed, agitated lady to shut the mouths of the demons. Immediately, the lady's entire face and demeanour relaxed, calmed, and quieted.

Villia is truly the hands and feet of Jesus, living out life-on-life discipleship in the workplace, bringing the light of Jesus to the darkness. She can access unreached people at and through Service Plus who would otherwise not have an opportunity to hear the gospel. So many of these women employees accept work in desperation to earn a paycheck but end up appreciating the purpose, dignity, and meaningful community they find in the workplace.

Working With Integrity

Even after 13 years of business, Service Plus continues to experience the wearisome challenges of operating in a corrupt environment. The accepted wisdom among the business community in Central Asia is that your business won't survive if you operate according to the laws. The government officials also understand this and work from the

assumption that everyone's books are falsified. It is an environment of complete mistrust, where corruption is hard-wired into the system.

As Wade and I partnered with Victor and Ali to establish the business, they firmly believed it was impossible to run a business abiding by every law. As an owner, Wade failed to demonstrate faith that the company would survive if Service Plus walked with complete integrity. From there, it was easy to justify minor indiscretions for the sake of the greater good.

As God convicted Wade's heart of his lack of faith and trust, he began to work towards restoring fuller integrity in the business. After months of conversations, he called his finance and accounting staff to give them these final instructions, "It's time to clean up our books. We are no longer going to have two sets of reporting. We are going to operate with full integrity and truth. I believe this is God's way, and He wants us to do it. Some companies have important government officials or relatives of the president as their roof, but God is our roof! Let's see how He protects and provides for us."

Heads nodded respectfully. People left the room quietly with work to be done.

But, months later, while scrutinizing the following quarterly report, Wade was stunned by the numbers. The books were still the same as months previous. Upon inquiry, Wade discovered the accounting department had not followed his instructions. The employees, including the chief accountant in charge, feared making

The accepted wisdom among the business community in Central Asia is that your business won't survive if you operate according to the laws.

the changes would ruin the company financially. They feared the potential impact it would have on their livelihood and the livelihood of all Service Plus employees.

And so, Wade once again began discussions with the accounting team. “I understand you are concerned, but if we do things with integrity, God will honour that.”

The chief accountant tilted his head. As a devout Muslim, he longed to do the right thing but understood the Central Asian environment all too well. He was comfortable making small, moral compromises to accomplish the greater good. Carefully choosing his words, he said, “By making these changes, aren’t you testing God?”

“Well, God isn’t asking us to be dishonest to accomplish His purposes. Maybe it is God who is testing us?” That initial conversation led to several great spiritual conversations with him and the other staff. So, the accounting department took a step of faith and cleaned up their books.

Over the next few years, Service Plus saw God answer their prayers in amazing ways, and the chief accountant saw it, too! He became an advocate for integrity and trust in God. Once, while in the middle of a daunting tax audit with pressures to make payments, he told the tax department, “Last audit, God answered Mr. Wade’s prayers to pay our taxes on time, and He’ll do it again this time.”

Thankfully, as Service Plus moved towards full reporting integrity, they did not experience financial ruin; instead, the opposite happened. In the last year, they have seen record sales and profits. God is trustworthy, and He glorifies Himself, even in business!

What does running a business for transformation company require in a dark place?

- God’s help and strength;
- faith;
- steadfastness to cling to Jesus through highs and lows;
- grit, perseverance, and resilience;
- prayer; and
- support of the body of believers, both in the country of service and worldwide.

It’s a stepping out of the boat, beyond your capabilities and skills, relying on the One who owns the company anyway and graciously grants breath to your lungs to live and work another day. Where the risks are significant, the rewards are incredible. There is nothing like a journey of total dependence on a God who comes through in remarkable, unpredictable ways and invites you to grow more in His likeness through the process!

PART C

WISDOM FROM THE SAGES, GUIDELINES and LESSONS LEARNED

Chapter 9

Two Decades in the Trenches

by Mark Jones

After 31 years of participation in relief and development, I realized that my own development and God's work in me have been vital to my ability to participate well in community development and to come alongside others in their personal development. Please allow me to share with you some of the things I have learned and continue to learn that affect my ability to be a successful community development worker.

As a young married man, I moved with my wife to the other side of the world to a communist country, finding itself at a pretty low point on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). It had been through war and experienced significant closure to the outside world. I had sensed a call to serve internationally early in my life, and this move seemed the culmination of a long journey to get there. At 26 years of age, I felt well-prepared to go out and change the world. Those first two years were two of the most challenging years of my life. Those years were the starting point for realizing my own needs and poverties and how I did not have what it takes to fix and change the world.

Years later, I read *White Man's Burden* by William Easterly, and it helped bring some clarity to where I had started and where I was growing in relation to seeing myself as someone with answers and solutions to circumstances. Easterly (2006) wrote about *Searchers* and *Planners*. He wrote about how Westerners, which is my background, have a strong leaning and tendency towards studying an issue or a problem (quite possibly from afar), devising a plan to address the issue, and then implementing it. In general, the Planners do this to the exclusion of significant interaction with the ones living with "the problem." He contrasts those Planners with Searchers. He describes Searchers as people who come in, not with preconceived ideas and plans of fixing things but with the intent of listening well to what those living in the situation see as their need and how they believe their needs should be addressed. This "searching" results in marrying the

self-diagnosed needs and prioritizing those needs with potential resources, often local in origin.

I had come in as a Planner. The people I had come to serve had suffered greatly, lived in poverty, had terrible health care, poor education, low life expectancy, high child mortality rates, and the list goes on. I, with my Western education, middle-class upbringing, and a desire to see these people have the “rich and satisfying life” Jesus said He came to give in John 10:10, felt I had the answers these people needed or, at the least, had good access to the answers. Instead, what was needed was for me to become a Searcher. So, how did I start this journey, and what character traits did I need to develop in order to become a Searcher rather than a Planner? Let me tell you my story.

Learning to Listen

In Chapter 1, I shared my manure story, showing how I came in as a Planner and eventually learned the hard way to be a Searcher.

So, big lesson number one? Find ways to “search” in your work as a development worker over “finding plans.” Talk with people early and often. Listen well. Accept the idea that if you present a mainly formed idea or plan to people living in poverty, they will likely tell you your idea is great and that they need it, even if they feel differently. The place to start is not with a planned presentation but with relationships and good listening.

Talk with people early
and often. Listen well.

Many years ago, I saw a diagram Myers (1999) presented that provides a simple pattern for doing this work intentionally.

- **Discovery/Appreciation** - Myers asks, “What gives life?” to help us consider what good things already exist in this context and what is valued.
- **Dreaming/Envisioning Impact** - Asking questions such as “What might be?” and “What is God calling for?” can help those we are working with dream and cast vision for the future.
- **Dialogue** - After imagining what could be, Myers encourages us to discuss with our friends and partners “What should be?” or what the “ideal” is.
- **Delivery/Sustaining** - During this step, it is helpful to consider what is already working, ask how we can work together to grow what is working, and possibly how to build off it. After this fourth step, the cycle begins again.

Working through these together helps those of us coming in from the outside be better Searchers. In addition, when it does come time to incorporate some

planning, we are now doing it alongside those in the context and supporting what they see as important versus starting with our own plans.

Keep Growing

An understanding of being a co-participant and a co-learner is important. The idea of us coming in as fully functional givers and suppliers does not lend itself well to communities and individuals accepting ownership of their own stories and walking towards greater health. When we come across as fully put-together and complete providers, how do we expect those we work with to relate to us? How can we expect others to walk towards greater health if we are unwilling to address and be vulnerable about our needs to move towards greater health?

Bryant Myers brings up an essential point about poverty. He says, “Poverty is a result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable” (2011, 86). In their book *When Helping Hurts*, Fikkert and Corbett (2009) flesh this out by showing how poverty is about broken relationships in the different spheres of our lives: a broken relationship with God, a broken relationship with ourselves, a broken relationship with community, and a broken relationship with systems (like government and economy). I write this not as a reminder of who you are working with but as a suggestion for you to locate yourself in this list of brokenness. Ask yourself in what area you are experiencing poverty.

...poverty is about
broken relationships in
the different spheres
of our lives...

Before heading overseas, I would never have listed myself as having a poverty of community. After living among people with a rich and developed sense of family and community, I realized I had a lot of room for growth. What a pleasure it was to grow in this area. The rich sense of family and community I developed with many in our early working context continues to bless me today.

When we identify, accept, and share openly about our own growth and movement in these areas of brokenness, we become more human and acceptable to those to whom we come to serve. As an old football coach of mine used to say, “When you are green, you grow, and when you ripen, you rot.” We need to stay on the growing edge ourselves, along with others, and not come across as finished products.

Choose Humility

To be co-learners and co-participants, we need to be humble. Humility may not be the first thing that comes to mind when considering how to be a good development worker. But if being a Searcher is better than being a Planner, and I firmly believe it is, one will find it difficult to do without humility. As I noted earlier, I left Canada for a far-off communist land with a strong dose of self-assurance and purpose resulting from good preparation and a strong sense of call on my life. What those things didn't make a lot of room for was humility. I was young, full of ideas and passion, and ready to change the world. What happened in those early years helped to humble me and, eventually, helped me appreciate humility.

When you come into a new context, language, culture, and relationships, many, if not all, of the things that once helped you have a healthy sense of who you are and how you can contribute take a pretty serious bashing. Suddenly, you can't communicate. When you do communicate, you unknowingly use a gesture that is highly offensive and leave the situation with no idea why it's offensive. To top it all off, the relationships you took years to develop into your support system are now on the other side of the world, and you are at square one again. If you can accept your limitations and be humble in the midst of everything, it will go a long way to help you be a co-learner and participant with the goal of being a Searcher.

If you can accept your
limitations and be
humble...it will go a
long way to help you...

Build a Tolerance for Ambiguity

"Ambiguity leads to advance, and clarity leads to closure." So said Phil Skellie, our beloved leader of CAMA¹ for many years. It's a strange saying, and I think your average Westerner will react quite negatively to this statement. But in our bid to be a Searcher, I believe a high tolerance for ambiguity is needed. If we go for complete clarity too early in the search process, we can shut down discussion and create short-sighted solutions. We short-circuit the development process by bringing our sense of clarity to something not yet ready for it. Sometimes, as co-learners, we must learn to hold ourselves back for a while. It is not helpful if the clarity we experience is only with one party and not the whole. If we can find a way to live in the uncomfortable area of questions, half answers, and ideas with no action plans attached, I believe we will help to free people up to fully enter into

¹ Compassion and Mercy Associates, The Christian and Missionary Alliance

their own development and that of their communities.

In many cases, there will eventually be clarity, but we need to give the process much more time than what we are used to as Westerners.

Become More Self-Aware

My last word of advice on how to develop as a development worker, is to increasingly work on your own self-awareness. Who are you? What do you bring to the table? What do you need to be brought to the table because you don't have it? How do you react under stress? What does it look like when you are functioning at your best? Your worst? Are you a loner or a team player? Are you contemplative or action-oriented? Are you loud? Are you quiet? What is your relationship with God like? Are you harbouring secrets? (I don't believe you can overdo it in the endeavour to understand yourself better.) There is a plethora of tools out there to help you understand yourself better. Don't be satisfied with one. Try out a few, and see what they tell you about yourself. Here is a list of some worth trying: DISC, Birkman, Myers-Briggs, Strength Finders, and Enneagram.

Don't do them all at once, and don't keep the results to yourself. Draw others into the discussion of who you are and what it might mean for the work you have been called to. Ask them what they agree with and what they don't. Learn, grow, and develop. It is what you have been called to help others do. Don't deprive yourself of similar growth.

In conclusion, if you have been called to service, including development work, acknowledge early on that you also need continued development. Walk into your own need, and it will go much, much better than being only a provider and not a receiver.

Note: This article is an adaptation of an excerpt from the book *Hands: Stories and Lessons of Wholistic Development*, produced by The Christian and Missionary Alliance, USA, in 2019.

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Chapter 10

Six Principles for Good Practice in Development

by Bruce Piercey

After a lifetime in development ministry, I believe I've discovered the most crucial principles of good practice for Christian ministries engaged in development, regardless of scale. These principles are theoretical concepts and practical guidelines that can significantly impact your ministry's effectiveness.

1. Care Before Cure

The first and most fundamental principle is prioritizing caring for the people we serve over fixing their problems. This principle sets the tone for the rest of our approach and is key to building trust and relationships.

Suppose you have been raised in a Western culture and education system and live in a developed country, especially if you have technical know-how (and we all have the access and ability to search for answers on the internet). In that case, you will instinctively start by identifying the problems in any given community and planning an effective solution. You will look for a fix or cure. If the solution doesn't fix the problem (achieve results), you will examine the problem cycle, make changes, and try again. I have seen three or four cycles before the solution is abandoned.

Usually, along the way, you will identify "cultural" barriers or passive resistance from the community. Eventually, the solution will incorporate fixing the people to correct the problem. Then congratulations—your solution might technically work.

But now you have a new problem—people don't like to be fixed. They don't like outsiders telling them about their culture, that they are the problem. They resist the "transformation" we think they need. Relationships and trust have not been established to overcome this. You have unconsciously put fixing the problem ahead of caring for the people.

The English verb *to care* has its etymological root with *to lament*. We must be willing to share in the suffering of the people we wish to serve. This sharing

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of the people we
wish to serve.

takes time, patience, and real listening. They must discover their problems and start small, high-risk, experimental, creative ways to address them. If the project fails, you remain a faithful presence and try, try again. Persistence, relationship, and trust form around the bond of caring you have established.

Eventually, the question arises, “You really care for us? Why?” A door opens to share the truth of the gospel in the manner described in 1 Peter 3:15ff.

2. Balance Accountability and Trust

“I trust this man with my life. I would never ask him for receipts.” Less than a year later (albeit under tremendous pressure from persecution and death threats), “this man” absconded with all the funds in the church account.

In Christian communities, asking for an accounting of funds or results is often interpreted as a lack of trust. On the other hand, putting large amounts of cash in the hands of someone without adequate accountability, boundaries, and expectations is placing temptation in front of them.

This is even truer in cultures structured with patron-client expectations—the person you trust is under incredible pressure to use their access to the funds to benefit his own clients. We, in turn, stand in the position of being a bad or stingy patron if we don’t look the other way. Getting this balance right is one of the most complex challenges. The value of accountability for all stakeholders needs to be taught/learned, never assumed.

3. Ownership of the Problem

The patron-client (or power/fear) dynamic surfaces in the issue of problem ownership. We arrive as a well-funded outsider seeking to fix a problem. Our motivation may be entirely altruistic, but altruism is an alien concept to the people we serve. They think *we must want something in return*. The dynamic is that if we are willing to buy their problem, we are getting something in return. They may not know what the something is, but they assume it exists. In communities with a high level of experience in development projects, they know several things:

- We on the frontline are obviously receiving a good salary and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- We are putting our expertise to work solving what has now become “our” problem.
- We are helping them grow more food, drill a well, and make a product to sell—we must be selling this at a profit or kickback.

- We will return to fix any future problems with “our” solution to “our” problem.
- We are likely to want something from them in return in the future, i.e., we are buying their problem, and they are willing to pay the price of a client’s obligation.

The result is obvious. We are good patrons if we have bought the problem and the solution belongs to us. A relationship built on this transactional basis means we will remain good patrons and keep everything we have fixed. This is what we end up calling dependency. Take, for example, a district in one country where food was distributed after a famine in 1989 and continued to be distributed due to chronic food shortages until at least 2012. However, as long as the aid companies continued to bring the food, a great deal of back-breaking labour to scratch food out of the soil was avoided (an utterly rational choice to make). Food distribution had become a job for government workers and a source of income from foreign governments. Thus, a generation passed, making it so that if the aid ever stopped, too few actually knew how to grow food to feed themselves.

4. What are Your Expectations for Helping?

Charity is a relatively unknown idea in most cultures. Alms for the poor generates merit with their god or gods. They think the giver is expecting some measure of repayment, if not in kind, then in loyalty from the recipient. Acceptance of your help puts them in debt and makes them your client.

Charity is a relatively unknown idea in most cultures.

One of the best questions is, “Why are you doing this?” This question is not often asked in the development sector, as our motive is assumed. With persistence, building relationships, and fulfilling our commitments, the question of ‘Why?’ results, opening the door to the subject of the love of the God who sent us and His mercy and grace.

But beware: If you hurry the relationship or press for their hearing and acceptance of the gospel—to make a decision for Christ—your motivation will seem offensive. This is a significant pitfall for ministry in a development context.

5. Understanding Worldview: Honour/Shame, Power/Fear, Innocence/Guilt

A Christian and biblical worldview understands how the gospel can be

contextualized and effectively communicated to all three worldviews, providing freedom from guilt, fear, or shame. Sin accounts for all three, and Christ's work on the cross and His resurrection deal with all three.

For an international worker educated only in a reformation theology focused on the problem of sin, guilt, and punishment (death), it is almost impossible to understand why our atonement arguments fall on deaf ears. For someone raised in an honour/shame culture, that version of the gospel utterly fails to address their existential problem of unbearable shame. The gospel messenger in this worldview must continually highlight how Christ came to take away our shame and give us a place of honour before the heavenly Father. Only someone of impeccable honour can restore their honour—Jesus on the cross for them.

When working with people in a power/fear worldview, the gospel must be announced as coming to take away our fears, fears of evil spirits, fears of curses, and fears of the witch doctor. The messenger proclaims the good news that Christ came to give us the power to live without fear through His Holy Spirit.

6. Freewill and Determinism

The majority of humanity, from all religions and worldviews, sees life through the lens of fate. Their outcomes are either predetermined by merit or lack of merit in a previous life (Hinduism and Buddhism) or by the will of their god or gods based on their karma. This is the most critical barrier to development I have encountered. The poor believe that being poor is their fate/karma, regardless of whether their sin or wrongdoing is unknown in a previous life or known in the present life.

This is also another opportunity to open the door to spiritual change. A good development project will demonstrate to the beneficiary how the positive change in their life (handwashing, hygiene, improved health, school attendance) directly results from their own efforts. It will plant the seed of the concept that they can overcome fate by making different choices and efforts. That seed will become the basis for any number of transformational changes, including receptivity to the gospel.

...they can
overcome fate
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and efforts.

So, in summary, here are six fundamental principles to think through before participating in a development project:

1. Relationship, relationship, relationship – putting CARE before CURE .
2. Finding the right balance of trust and accountability.

3. You must own the problem to own the solution – avoiding handouts and dependency.
4. What's in it for you? (or what do they think your *quid pro quo* is?)
5. Understanding worldview – honour/shame, power/fear or guilt/innocence.
6. Freewill and determinism – self-help vs karma.

Chapter 11

Partnership: We Are Better Together

by Joanne Beach

Traditionally, churches, mission agencies, and para-church organizations have tended to focus on their own priorities and ‘plant their flag’ for projects in which they were individually engaged. For 20 years, I served on Canadian international development boards where that was an important priority, especially when reporting back to donors. This began to change during the early years of my tenure, as organizations realized associating in partnership brought greater strength to the projects they were involved in. It also provided more significant amounts of funding, shared training, expertise, and resources. In the last two decades the church as a whole has learned we are better together.

Examples of Partnerships

1. The [Canadian Foodgrains Bank](https://foodgrainsbank.ca/)¹ (CFGB) is a partnership of 15 Canadian churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. CFGB members work with locally based organizations in developing countries to meet emergency food needs, achieve long-term solutions to hunger, and work to foster informed action by Canadians and governments to support this international cause.

When I joined the CFGB board in 2008, many of the 15 member churches, for the most part, were working with their own locally identified partners. We began to realize some of the members were working in the same countries, and sometimes in the same region. A working group of the members’ programmers was formed to meet regularly to share information about the countries they were working in, what kinds of projects they were focused on, and with which partners. The members developed the vision to strengthen their work together in the various countries to connect local partners and perhaps share in the process of purchasing local commodities. Purchasing larger volumes together would offer better pricing.

There was also the initiative to identify local agricultural experts, nutritionists, food assistance specialists, self-help group trainers, and husbandry consultants

¹ <https://foodgrainsbank.ca/>

who could coordinate training and bring the experienced in-country implementors together for mutual encouragement and shared learning. This soon expanded to establish multi-country regional training events.

These intentional partnerships have advanced and enhanced the CFGB network's food and livelihood-related programming. This value of working together as Canadian churches and agencies committed to partnering with local organizations has also caught the attention of the Canadian Government's Global Affairs Ministry, which has been providing annual core grants to CFGB to support members to benefit from matching funds for their projects. In recent years, Global Affairs announced that because they have observed the unique way these 15 CFGB member churches have worked together for over 35 years and their commitment to work with local overseas partners, they see CFGB as one of their main go-to Canadian organizations. As a result, Global Affairs provided additional larger amounts of funding for specific disaster-related food relief in war zones, disaster areas, or places where extreme famine has made it necessary for food assistance. One organization could not possibly respond to all the needs as often thousands are displaced in the same area, so working together has been extremely important.

2. A Canadian example of partnership could be replicated worldwide for other specific initiatives. One church in a small southern Ontario town had a vision to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. The Canadian Government provides a Private Sponsorship of Refugee program, where local groups in Canada can apply to sponsor specific eligible refugees to settle in Canada. The program requires a group to support the refugees financially and relationally for a minimum of one year as they assist them in securing affordable housing, learning the language, understanding the culture and responsibilities of Canadian permanent residency, and securing their own financial security through finding jobs.

The leaders who caught this original vision to sponsor fleeing refugees due to the war thought it would be great to create a larger community of Syrians and not sponsor just one family to a community that did have other Syrians. They set a goal to apply to bring six families. To do this, they envisioned establishing a partnership not only with six other churches but also with local organizations. That is when the [Better Together](#)² network was formed.

The Better Together partnership core leadership team came together to learn how to write applications, draft required budgets, and all other responsibilities they would have for the specific sponsorships. In the end, it was a beautiful picture of collaboration with local churches, but the idea of reaching out to local organizations

² <https://www.facebook.com/BetterTogetherCobourg/>

brought significant relevance and importance to the Church in that community.

Better Together reached its goal of six families through that partnership. Working together is key and allows the opportunity to accomplish more.

Working
together is key...

3. The Alliance Canada, the denomination I have served for more than two decades, is part of a global [Alliance World Fellowship](https://awf.world/)³ (AWF) made up of national churches in over 80 countries and has a strong history of supporting one another. However, through the pandemic, this global network was tremendously strengthened.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, the AWF president formed a relief and development committee. When lockdowns were mandated in countries all over the world, this committee held four global, regional meetings on Zoom, inviting national presidents to join their region's call to share how local churches and their communities were being affected in their country and how we, as a network might support each other in relief responses. Many presidents shared they did not have the resources to fund their local churches, so we invited them to provide relief proposals to the AWF relief committee. The countries with more resources contributed to a pool fund. As a result, this relief response banded together and over 170,000 people were served through local churches in various countries.

Another benefit of the regional meetings was an understanding of how churches were suffering because of the lockdown. Pastors asked for shared learning on adapting to new ways of ministry. Leaders who were doing this well provided webinars to pass on shared knowledge. The strong network for relief continues to transition to community development projects as relationships and trust through the first phase have been established. I know other denominations and global missional organizations had similar experiences. By working together, countless more people are served because of strengthened networks.

4. Cultivating relationships with churches or other mission organizations provides another strength. An organization The Alliance Canada had supported for a project in the Caribbean in the past reached out, letting us know they had received relief donations for a disaster in Asia but had no relationship on the ground to oversee projects in this Asian country. When they knew we did have those relationships, they wanted to support the project we were committing to with our partners. There was a mutual trust in sharing funds, and we were able to receive their donations and make sure it was used according to their donor's designation. That is the importance of connecting with and building relationships

³ <https://awf.world/>

with other organizations.

5. Another example of partnership is [Tearfund Canada](https://tearfund.ca/)⁴ (formerly World Relief Canada), which, in 2018, joined the Tearfund global family, comprised of members from 10 countries. Together, they partner with 350 church-based organizations in over 50 countries around the world. Because Tearfund Canada saw the potential to join this network, it now has an increased reach to impact this many countries. Tearfund is also a member of the CFGB, so it also works with other CFGB members on joint projects. They highly value working together. I saw this first-hand as I served on their board for 20 years. Their global impact increased substantially as they continued to join networks and form partnerships.

Key Principles for Forming Strong Partnerships

Most of the examples above are from the perspective of international partnerships involving funding. When entering partnerships with other organizations, particularly from a funder's perspective, it is important to ensure some key principles are followed; these include assessing the partners' governance structures, capacities, and administration abilities. However, ensuring each organization's values align is foundational to forming partnerships. Are the vision, goals, and principles of operation similar? Are there mutual objectives and aims? Here are some of the primary principles that are important to consider:

...ensuring each organization's values align is foundational to forming partnerships.

- One of the key assessment areas is the governance structure. Some key areas to explore before entering a formal partnership:
 - Is the partner a registered entity with an accountability structure, such as a board that does not receive remuneration except for justifiable expenses? Does the expenditure of funds need at least two signatures to be disbursed?
 - Do they have a well-documented structure, role, and description of responsibility for the board and staff? Do board members have terms?
 - Does the board approve an annual budget for the organization/church body? Do they have accounting records reviewed by the board?
 - Do they have proper financial systems in place for accounting and reporting back to the funding partner for all monies that they receive

⁴ <https://tearfund.ca/>

and spend? For example, a Canadian charity must ensure care, custody, and direction of the funds provided to non-Canadian charities. In regard to this, we are required to have an Agency Agreement in place that includes the right to speak into how the funds are spent and a schedule for financial reporting. It is essential to understand the requirements of the governmental financial regulators in the country where the funding organization is situated so compliance is ensured.

- Do they have policies and procedures in place for the board and for the organization/church body? Some policies to consider are:
 - Safeguarding children and adults at risk;
 - Anti-fraud and bribery;
 - Anti-terrorism/criminal activities;
 - Whistleblowing;
 - Conflict of interest;
 - Physical and emotional welfare and security, including the security of staff;
 - Code of conduct or equivalent;
 - Complaints, disciplinary and grievance;
 - Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Does the partner have the capacity to deliver/execute the project? Areas to consider:
 - Experience of staff; adequate staff to administer and implement the project.
 - Ability to prepare project budgets.
 - Program/project management. This includes identifying key objectives and then monitoring and evaluating to ensure project/ministry objectives are met.
 - Commitment to the local community involved in project planning.
 - Ensure logistics are adequately planned for.
- Quality Standards:
 - Behaviour expectations: A code of conduct for program staff.
 - Impartiality and targeting: Community leaders input into the selection of beneficiaries/participants in the project.
 - Gender: A commitment to a balance of men, women, boys, and girls' involvement as appropriate.
 - Resilience: Ensure the project will not depend on long-term outside funding with a plan to ensure sustainability.
 - Empowerment: A commitment to community involvement in planning

and executing the program.

Some existing or potential partners will not have structures, practices, or expertise in these areas, so an important goal would be for the funding partner to provide training to build capacity for the partner and ensure that there is mutual understanding and commitment to these best practices.

A Final Note

Partnering is not just about funding from one organization to another. It is about relationship. It involves learning from each other, inspiring each other, becoming friends, and engaging in accomplishing shared goals together. It is working together to achieve outcomes by supporting one another. This is why it is essential for two-way communication on goals and expectations to be identified. What are the outcomes and hopes for both organizations? Partnership takes much effort, but it is worth it as more is accomplished by working together. In the end, we are better together than we are when we try to do it alone.

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Chapter 12

A Ministry in-DEED

by Buzz Maxey

A few weeks ago, we visited Lincoln and Star, a CAMA¹ couple who are working together with an Axxcess couple, Brad and Abby, among an unreached people group on our island. As we drove into their experimental farm, Brad was helping the local men on a community work project fixing potholes in the street. He was covered in dust and dripping with sweat but having a great time shovelling gravel and joking with the men. Star and Abby were getting ready for their regular Zumba classes while Lincoln was preparing to show some visitors the milk goats the team was raising. He yelled a greeting to several of his soccer players who were riding by and invited us to join the farm tour he was about to lead.

We joined them and learned how they avoided the use of pesticides and observed they were quite successful in growing organic vegetables. They are also introducing new crops like okra, hibiscus, Surinam cherry, and forage crops to feed cattle and goats. Their goal as a team is to first learn all they can from the local farmers and to share some agricultural innovations they have learned themselves. This unique farm attracts local farmers from the area, but the biggest attraction is the new breed of goats they are raising.

Their goal as a team is to first learn all they can from the local farmers...

Lincoln, Star, Brad, and Abby do an impressive job of authenticating the gospel in word and deed. Today they are attending the funeral of the husband of Yuyun, one of the women from the Zumba team. They will sit and cry with her and her family and then go to the graveyard along with the procession. They will come back to her house, drink tea together, and try to be a comfort as friends and family come and go. No foreigners have ever done this before in this community, and the neighbours are amazed. The community knows that these two couples and their kids love them and are here to help them be productive in farming. Everyone knows too that they are “*Nasrani*” or Christ followers. They are the Nasrani who

¹ Compassion and Mercy Associates, The Christian and Missionary Alliance

now occupy the house everyone said was haunted.

When John the Baptist's disciples asked Jesus, "Are you the one?" He answered, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor (Matthew 11:5). Our ministries should follow Christ's example. Too often, in our Western worldview, we cut the Word of God to pieces and come up with a very lopsided understanding of Christ's ministry. If we remove our cultural lenses, we see a very wholistic ministry in the Gospels.

In the past, many Christian leaders believed development was "a tool to attract people to the gospel" or "a means to get into a closed country." I would suggest holding a carrot out to gain followers or using good deeds "as a means" of getting a foot in the door, but this is not the correct approach. Most of those who follow will quickly disperse and feel betrayed when they see the real motivation.

Some people still have a wrong idea of what development is. Some think of it as building bridges, digging wells, raising goats, or growing crops. For myself, the two couples from the farm, and the close to 100 CAMA workers worldwide, our work is way more than that. Our development work *is* Christ-centred ministry. Development done right means discipling people to become all God intended them to be. Our people are not only involved in development projects.

Although we are often involved in these kinds of projects as we deal with peoples' physical needs, the most important and sustainable development occurs inside the mind and heart. Development is about building unity, compassion, integrity, and love. As one development worker put it, "Our methodology is discipleship, with development being the outcome."

"Our methodology is discipleship, with development being the outcome."

We should always be discipling people to use their gifting to build their communities and to build them on sound Christian principles. We don't want a successful goat project and have people care less for their neighbours. We don't want a greater harvest of crops only producing greedy people. It is far better to have all the goats die, the crops fail and have more godly, generous, compassionate, honest, and loving people. This is what discipleship development strives for and what we are committed to, but it takes lots and lots of time.

People development rarely happens quickly. It means being willing to fail in a project if failure is the way the people are to grow and learn. It means really slowing down our activities to develop deep relationships, build trust, learn from farmers, and implement new innovations in the community. Too often we have

seen projects fail simply because activities have not been slowed down enough. Funders and leaders may not like this, but as we slow our activities down, some amazing things can happen, leading to sustainability. One development practitioner I know well has said, “Good development is time expensive and money cheap.” However, the present trend in some organizations is to make a budget, finish the project, and liquidate the funds in the allotted time. Too often, the projects I see are money, expensive, and time cheap, leaving only rusting equipment, broken water pumps and burned-out people.

“Good development is time expensive and money cheap.”

The four ambassadors on the farm are in it for the long haul. They have learned the language well and have been trained in development, agriculture, and theology. They understand contextualization and are experts in the people’s culture and belief system. Although they have been in their village for only a few years, they are already making quite an impact.

But tonight, they are mourning, not just because Yuyun lost her husband, and they see the tears in the eyes of her children, Galang and Gafin, but because they knew their father, Eddy. He is gone. Yuyun is left without her husband. They feel the loss and wish Eddy had followed the One whom they proclaim. But they are not daunted. They will say their farewells tonight, go home, get up in the morning to feed the goats, work in the garden, plan for Zumba, and take care of the many things that need to be done.

As we leave the farm, three little neighbour girls swing on the tire swing Lincoln put up. This used to be a haunted house, but now it’s safe in this yard and even fun. The girls smile and wave. We head out of the driveway and notice Brad still shovelling gravel in the street. Lincoln heads back to the garden, and Star and Abby return to Zumba class, planning and doing what Jesus claimed was **ministry in-DEED**.

*workers’ names have been changed for security reasons

Chapter 13

Practice and Deepen Your Spiritual Disciplines

by Mike Sohm

Serving in a cross-cultural context tests you in ways you could not have imagined. Sustained pressure, frustration, uncertainty, and the drain from adjusting to the new and different can erode your sense of well-being. It will also drain you emotionally, making it more challenging to learn the language and adapt to a culture and people you once loved until you get to know them. My comments reflect my personal experience and the experience of over a hundred new international workers I interacted with during their first term. I understand the challenges you face and the importance of finding sustenance in a healthy way during those months. The answers are few, one of which is a consistent and meaningful spiritual discipline.

God brought me to Himself through the influence of a young man who was very involved with the Navigator student ministry. He volunteered at the university I was going to attend in just a month. This individual led me to faith in Christ days before classes started and, for the next two years, disciplined me – Navigator style. That meant first learning to have a daily quiet time, how to pray, study the Bible, memorize verses, lead a Bible study, and share my faith with others. The focus was on learning by doing, and soon, I was helping other young believers have a daily quiet time and share their faith. I also attended two summer training programs with the Navigators during my years at university, where I was tested and my faith deepened. Whether on campus or at a training program, I was part of a team and a community, and we grew together. What a wonderful gift from God that prepared me well for future ministry in Thailand and other locations.

Developing spiritual habits or disciplines that have become deeply ingrained in my everyday life has been a key to enduring hardship. They also have been the pathway to experiencing God in the midst of trials and discerning God's voice when decisions had to be made. What are those habits? Simply, spending time every day in God's Word and praying. I was taught to spend time each morning reading and meditating on God's Word, followed by a short time of prayer. I was also taught to spend time each evening reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture, and studying the Bible each week.

Over the years, my daily time in prayer expanded from responding to what I had read to praying for family, close friends, and those I serve. Keeping a journal became a habit early on in my faith and has helped me capture what I learned and keep track of those I prayed for each day. I mentioned reading the Bible in the evening, partly from a Navigator tradition of “His Word, last word.” I still read my Bible every night before I go to sleep. Keeping this commitment was difficult when travelling internationally and wrestling with jet lag, but for the most part, I’ve read the Bible every night.

Weekly disciplines are another set of habits to form and maintain. In university, the Navigators stressed scripture memory, Bible study, and attending a local church each Sunday. In the years following, I have learned how essential it is to develop and maintain a regular weekly sabbath. Studying the Bible, memorizing Scripture, and attending a local church will likely be some things you do as part of your role and responsibility, but a weekly sabbath is not. And yet, this one weekly discipline is the means to knowing Christ more intimately, enjoying Him more fully, and finding true rest for your soul.

...develop and maintain a regular weekly sabbath.

I’m not overstating the case for a regular sabbath here, as the day-to-day demands of overseas living and ministry can easily drain your soul. Unless you set aside and guard a regular sabbath, you will only rest from your work but not work from your rest. I urge you to establish a regular sabbath with the necessary boundaries to keep your commitment. Travel and unexpected circumstances will require you to make some changes, but keep this one weekly commitment for the most part.

Along with daily and weekly disciplines, consider a personal retreat twice a year. This is a time for extended solitude, rest, and nurturing through teaching and worship. Your organization might schedule these for you; if not, plan them yourself and stick to the plan. I can guarantee this: one week before you go on a scheduled retreat, you will have a few good reasons to postpone or cancel it—don’t!

Here are a couple of confessions and observations about daily, weekly, and annual disciplines in my life and the lives of other workers. I’ve always been a driven person, even in my spiritual life. My area of growth is to become more reflective, learning to relax on a retreat and sit silently in the presence of God. This is why I set a timer for ten minutes in the morning to be silent before God and why I schedule personal retreats.

I have noticed that less driven people struggle with consistency in their devotional lives. In fact, I did not meet many pastors and international workers in

seminary and on the field who spent time with God daily. If you don't believe me, survey ten other Christian workers you know. The number of workers who keep a weekly sabbath is even less.

This leads me to share a quote attributed to Greg Laurie, "When your output exceeds your input, your upkeep will be your downfall." I'll add one more warning; admittedly, this is anecdotal, yet something I've observed a half dozen times. When someone was struggling morally, their devotional life was inconsistent or non-existent. Don't read too much into this, but staying closely connected to God is preventative, and not being closely connected to Him can increase your vulnerability.

I jumped right into my spiritual practices without stating "why" I practiced them. Well, at first, I thought it was the normal thing to do, and I was eager to fit into this new family of believers on campus. I already confessed I'm a driven person. However, a part of me genuinely wanted to know God better. I also discovered that if I were quiet long enough and listened intently, God would often speak through His Word. Over the months and years, my hunger for God grew along with my desire to hear His voice. I grew in my knowledge of God, my experience of His presence, and my concern for others. At times, my hunger was more like desperation as I found myself in the midst of great emotional pain from loss, failure, and discouragement. God sustained me through time alone with Him in His Word and time in prayer – often without words. So, I encourage you to establish some daily, weekly, and annual disciplines and maintain them. When something derails your plans, don't overthink it; get back to your regular practices.

My second encouragement to you is to learn from those who have gone before you by interviewing them or reading their work. We can gain so much from reading authors like Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton, Richard Foster, C.S. Lewis, A.W. Tozer, Dallas Willard, and many others. You will not agree with all they say, but allow God to use them to help you grow in ways new to you.

I mentioned interviewing people, and I want to suggest you identify five to ten people in their 60s and 70s who are walking closely with Christ and ask them about their life in Christ. How did they come to know Him? How did Christ sustain them through the most challenging times of their lives?

I met Rev. Eunice and her mom, Grandma Huff, when I was 20. Eunice was in her 60's, and Grandma Huff was 92. Eunice had been a pastor for many years but cared for her mother after her husband passed away. A group of us drove to the little community in northern Minnesota where they lived to put storm windows on her home, do minor repairs, and add some insulation here and there. Generally, we helped her get ready for winter.

We had plenty of time over meals and in the evening to sit and listen to them tell stories from their lives. They spoke of hardship, losses, and the goodness of God. At times in their stories, when the trial they faced was severe, Grandma Huff would start singing a hymn followed by quoting a long passage of Scripture that fit the context of the story. This was even more impactful to me because Grandma Huff had been blind for many years, and she was quoting from memory. There was depth and sweetness to their lives I had not encountered before, and I realized that being in the Word, seeking God for all my needs, and trusting God in hard times would one day prove to be the best decisions I could make.

The last word of encouragement to you is simply this, “Don’t go it alone.” You will need spiritual friends along the way. If you are in your 20s or 30s, begin now to cultivate relationships with other believers seeking to follow Christ and stay current with those people. The number of close spiritual friends you will have in your 50s will be minimal if you do not intentionally work to grow and maintain these relationships. Today, I am grateful for a small group of friends I continue to connect with regularly, pray with, and encourage each other.

Along these lines, I want to encourage you to seek out and develop a close spiritual friend from the people group you serve. There is a richness to these relationships that is difficult to describe because, in many ways, all you have in common is Christ. You are so different from them, and they are from you, but you are friends at the deepest level in Christ. I have a few of these friends and remain very grateful for them and in debt to them for their contribution to my life.

As you journey through your cross-cultural service, navigating the challenges you will face, you will find your greatest strength comes from holding on to these spiritual disciplines as an anchor for your life.

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Canadian Alliance Missions Engagement

Books that tell our story



The God You May Not Know: Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

In *The God You May Not Know*, Ron and Charles provide a compelling collection of true-life stories. This autobiographical material by people who have "been there, done that" is both informative and inspirational. As Alliance international workers, when they tell their stories, they are telling our story. They provide a window through which you catch a glimpse of our mission.

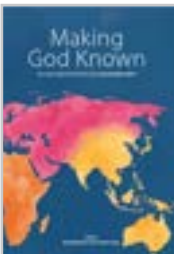
Mel Sylvester, President of C&MA in Canada, 1980-1992



The God Made Known: Through Ordinary People Leading Extraordinary Lives, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

The God Made Known should be required reading for anyone ministering or leading within our Alliance churches, as well as for anyone looking to be inspired and encouraged by God's hand and provision in the joys and deep challenges of reaching out to the nations with the Good News of Christ. How does God work in the world? For some insight, read through the pages of this compelling history.

Clyde Glass, Lead Pastor, Southview Alliance Church, Calgary



Making God Known: To Least-Reached People In Extraordinary Ways, edited by Ronald Brown and Charles Cook.

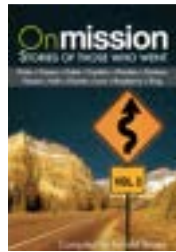
This book tells our story.... As with any good family narrative, you'll also discover connections and explanations about people and initiatives that were previously unknown to you. It is like reading a collection of family stories. This book chronicles how our denomination got the gospel message out to people and places where Christ is unknown. It recounts how it all came together and the people who made it happen in a world where there was war, uncertainty, chaos, and upheaval....

Pamela Nordstrom, Ph.D., Vice President, Academic Affairs, Ambrose University

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<https://www.cmacan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Book-Series-CMA.zip>

ON MISSION Series



ON MISSION: Stories of Those Who Went, Vol. 1-3, 6, edited by Ronald Brown

These books describe how workers, in obedience to God's call, engaged in His redeeming activities all over the world by going to some of the toughest, most difficult places. They persevered, some under horrible conditions, having survived traumatic events, in order to see communities of faith established amongst least-reached peoples.

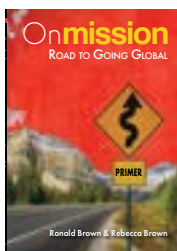
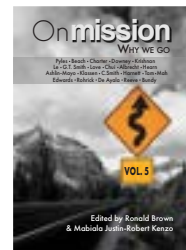


ON MISSION: Caring for Those Who Go, Vol. 4, edited by Ronald Brown

The chapters in this book show how the international worker's sending church, team leader, agency office, and member care provider can all better lean into their roles; namely, being the presence of Jesus walking alongside the workers and "keeping" them as they carry out the Great Commission.

ON MISSION: Why We Go, Vol. 5, edited by Ronald Brown and Mabilia Justin-Robert Kenzo

Knowing clearly why we go, how we go, and what issues must be considered as one goes is absolutely crucial in the life of every Christ-follower and their obedience to both Christ's example and command.



ON MISSION: Road to Going Global, Vol. 7, edited by Ronald Brown and Rebecca Brown

Based on their combined 58 years of living in seven different countries, Ron Brown and his daughter put together a cultural missions primer for those in the process of going global and needing cultural intelligence. This primer is in the cultural stream of missions.

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On mission

TOWARDS BETTER DEVELOPMENT

Offering a theological framework, best practices, and examples of successful and less-than-successful endeavours, this book is essential reading. - *Bryce Ashlin-Mayo, President, Ambrose University*

This volume would have been an encouragement to me in the start of my journey and pointed me to important lessons on how best to love and honour context, staying ever-adaptable and assisting others in addressing their needs as defined by them. - *Nicole Jones-Qandah, Director of World Partners, Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada*

...a must-read for every Christian seriously concerned for the least reached and most vulnerable. Let's not dare to ignore the paths worn by those who have (recently) gone before. - *Valerie Penney, GlobalEd Programs Manager, Mission Global of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*

This volume provides a sample of what is working and what did not work. It persuasively compels further Spirit-directed exploits by many more to vigorously expand God's Kingdom. - *T.V. Thomas, Chairman, Lausanne Global Diaspora Network*

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