

SERVANT

I WAS A STRANGER

A WINDOW ON
THE GLOBAL
REFUGEE CRISIS

MARK MAXWELL

REFUGE IN
THE ROCK

KENT ANNAN

LASTING
CHANGE

ALUMNI IN ACTION

WHEN
HOPE AND
SUFFERING
MEET

Our rock, our refuge

"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,

My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,

My shield, and the horn of my salvation,

My stronghold and my refuge, my savior..."

II Samuel 22: 2, 3

This may go down in history as "The Decade of the Refugee." I was devastated to hear that there were more drowning deaths in the Mediterranean in May than in any previous month as more boats carrying refugees sank before reaching their goal.

According to a report by the UN in June of 2016, "Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety than at any other time since records began." The document, entitled *World at War*, said that the number of people forcibly displaced worldwide rose from 37.5 million a decade ago to a staggering 59.5 million at the end of 2014. Compared to 51.2 million a year earlier, this is the biggest leap ever seen in a single year. All indications are that the situation will continue to worsen since globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. "If this were the population of a country," the report stated, "it would be the world's 24th biggest."

"We are witnessing a paradigm change," says UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, "an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement, as well



One in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum.

as the response required, is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before."

I cannot imagine a better example of the cosmic struggle for every soul than this painful picture of our fellow humans, fleeing for safety, seeking refuge from danger. We live in a country that is beautiful and noted for being a place of peace and productivity. Those of us who follow Jesus can offer hope as well as communities of love, peace and forgiveness. The displaced are uniquely positioned to join us at this time, both in our country and in our Christian communities. We must be about the work of inviting people to safety, especially spiritual safety.

To help achieve that, this fall Prairie is launching a Global Social Justice major as part of our Intercultural Studies program. The advice of exceptional organizations like Samaritan's Purse, World Vision and Dalit Freedom Network has been instrumental in its construction. It is intended to prepare our graduates to work in the field of

international relief and development, giving them a solid grounding in the Scriptures coupled with well-informed exposure to the needs of the world and training in possible responses to those needs.

There is truth in the saying "If God is our refuge, then we are all refugees!" We are most fortunate to personally know a holy God of love and forgiveness, to have him as our eternal refuge. We are most fortunate to live in countries marked by freedom from conflict. Let us do all in our power to welcome those without a spiritual or cultural place of shelter into our communities, for the glory of God. ✠



Mark Maxwell is president of Prairie. He welcomes your comments. Send them to mark.maxwell@prairie.edu

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LETTERS

Many thanks to everyone who contributes to the creation and production of *SERVANT*. It is always an inspiring read from start to finish—and always worth sharing. I like to loan them out.

Ellen Ostero, Edmonton, AB

A graduate of your Bible college recently gave me a copy of your *SERVANT* magazine (Issue 98). How exciting to see my quote in your Quoteworthy section! It's definitely one of my top ten favorites. Thanks for the honor.

Author & speaker Judy Squierr, OR

A copy of *SERVANT* arrives in my mail every so often and although I receive a lot of unsolicited publications, yours' stands out in that it always includes some articles well worth reading. In the latest issue I enjoyed the pieces by Craig Groeschel and especially Liz Mannegren's "*The Happiest, Darkest Day.*" You are producing a relatively small magazine but with some genuinely significant content to help people grow in their faith in Christ. It's all about quality rather than quantity, right? Well done.

Calgary, AB



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| INNERVIEW

SLOW KENT ANNAN KINGDOM COMING

MAKING A LONG-TERM DIFFERENCE IN A HURRY-UP WORLD

Jesus prayed that God's kingdom would come on earth—but why is it taking so long? From sponsoring a child to short-term mission trips to working with refugees in Europe and living in Haiti for seven months, author and speaker Kent Annan has spent more than twenty years of his life sharing God's love in practical ways.

*He has also experienced the discouragements of rushed efforts, poor preparation and failed shortcuts. In his new book *Slow Kingdom Coming*, Kent shares how we can stay committed to the journey and become part of deep and lasting change in a suffering world. He returns to Haiti regularly as co-director of Haiti Partners, a ministry that trains young leaders and transforms lives, churches and communities through education. Kent spoke to SERVANT from his home in Florida where he lives with his wife Shelly and their two children.*

SERVANT: YOU SAY WE SHOULD BE COMMITTED TO THE SLOW WORK OF THE KINGDOM. I HATE SLOW. COULDN'T YOU HAVE WRITTEN A BOOK CALLED *HOW TO SPEED UP THE KINGDOM*?

KENT: If I had written this book fifteen years ago, I would probably have called it *Five Solutions* or something like that. Unfortunately now I know too much, so it's *Five Practices* instead. Working in the area of compassion ministries has been a joy but also a frustration, with change happening slower than I wish it would. But I see now that when I have chosen to slow down and build deeper relationships, change tends to happen quicker and be more lasting than when I try to rush things. If this is how God has decided his kingdom will unfold—and we *do* see it breaking through in hopeful ways all around us—then I want to participate faithfully in it.

THERE'S A STORY IN THE BOOK ABOUT A WOMAN WHO IS OVERWHELMED BY ALL THE APPEALS FROM GOOD ORGANIZATIONS. SHE CAN'T BEAR THE WEIGHT OF ALL THE CLEFT PALATES THAT NEED TO BE FIXED AND THE WOMEN WHO

ARE AT RISK AND THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR. AND YET SHE FEELS SOMETHING AWAKENING IN HER THAT SHE IS BOTH SCARED AND EXCITED TO FOLLOW. HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT WAY?

I have. Sometimes I feel numb and want to bury my head in the sand because it all feels like too much. But being awake to the needs can be overpowering too. My hope in writing this book is to share how we can respond to our sense of compassion but have enough focus that we can stay energized and actually help with change instead of just being overwhelmed. There are so many more needs than we can respond to and we want to find where God is calling us to participate in the kingdom coming. It's hard to say no but the weight of that is lifted a little bit by being clear on where God wants us to focus. It still hurts to turn down people we wish we could help, but we find hope and encouragement and peace when we really put our efforts toward the specific area that God has called us to.

YOU'VE SUGGESTED FIVE PRACTICES THAT CAN HELP GOD'S KINGDOM COME IN DEEPER, MORE LASTING

WAYS. THE FIRST ONE IS PAYING ATTENTION—WAKING UP TO THE NEEDS AROUND US. WHAT AWAKENS A DESIRE FOR JUSTICE AND EFFECTIVE CHANGE MORE THAN ANYTHING?

Often it's a relationship. You meet someone from another country or a friend who has had a different life experience and something we've read about or heard on the news becomes personal. At other times the Holy Spirit just moves. We hear about a need at church or we see a headline in the paper, maybe about the homeless problem in our city, and we just can't rest without doing something about it.

WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN FOR YOU?

Right after college I went to work with a refugee ministry in Europe. I was twenty years old and didn't know what I was getting into, but soon I was meeting people who had fled from a war in Sierra Leone. Their families had been killed and they had left everything behind. My roommate had escaped from Sarajevo during the conflict in his country and it was these relationships that really awakened me and set me on this path in life.

YOU CLAIM THAT THE SECOND PRACTICE, CONFESSION, ALLOWS US TO EXPERIENCE DEEPER JOY. HOW?

The practice of confession, both of my sins and my vulnerabilities, brings me joy because it allows me to connect more deeply with people. I'm freed from my selfishness and my life gets shaped by theirs' so I'm not just helping from a distance. Confession is seldom a fun process, but very worthwhile if it leads to a breakthrough and a partnership that allows us to do something meaningful together. The book of James tells us that confessing to each other helps toward healing and that healing opens us up to more joy.

HOW DO WE BEGIN THE PRACTICE OF RESPECT?

We're supposed to participate in God's kingdom coming, but we're not the ones completely in charge. One of the best ways we can show respect is by listening. Listening helps us to see others, not as projects, but as people. Our imaginations then become engaged and we're able to do what Jesus told us to do, to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we slow down and do the work of listening, it may feel like we're going slower, but it's actually taking us so much deeper into where we need to go together.

YOU ALSO TALK ABOUT PARTNERING. WHY IS THAT IMPORTANT?

I've found that change happens best when we recognize that whoever we are seeking to help is also made in God's image with all sorts of gifts and potential. When we seek to discover their strengths and weaknesses as well as our own, then ultimately we realize that we're sitting at a table that is God's table and we are participating together with him. Partnering removes some of the power imbalances that often crop up in the work of missions or local ministry. Learning from each other is a beautiful experience. We can't view the goal as more important than the people.

WHEN I HAVE CHOSEN TO SLOW DOWN AND BUILD DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS, CHANGE TENDS TO HAPPEN QUICKER AND BE MORE LASTING THAN WHEN I TRY TO RUSH THINGS.



WHAT DO YOU THINK STANDS IN THE WAY OF GOOD PARTNERSHIPS?

I think a lack of humility is part of it, as well as not realizing that to affect serious change you need a variety of people and different perspectives. It isn't necessary to have eighty people around a table before you do anything, but we need to be humble and realize that we can't do it alone. The importance of partnering, of continuing to grow and learn from others, is essential when we're dealing with problems that are full of complexity.

THE FINAL PRACTICE YOU SHARE IS TRUTHING. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

While we want to make sure we have the best ideas and the big picture, it means that we also have our feet on the ground. I want my ideas to be shaped by the latest research and the best data, but I also want that truth to be entering into my bones. I had a friend who worked with refugees in Greece and I wondered why his ministry was so successful. Then I discovered that he had spent several weeks living on the streets with the people he was serving. He was learning the statistics, how many refugees were coming into Athens every year, how to provide the best materials for them in different languages, but he didn't stop there. He also wanted to feel the truth of their lives in a personal way. If we've just done a study, that really doesn't do anything for anybody. But when love and truth work together, we can love our neighbors in beautiful ways, both in our work and in our own lives.

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU WISH YOU HAD UNDERSTOOD EARLIER?

I wish I had understood that the mission of sharing God's mercy is a beautiful invitation to have our own life shaped while we're helping others. It's not just something selfish where we become enlightened or reach some kind of self-help level and it's not just to make the world a "better place." It's the relationship between my inner life and the work that I'm doing. Both of these have so much to do with each other and I want both of them to be shaped by God's love and grace and my love for my neighbor.



The Annan family, committed to the journey: "We can't view the goal as more important than the people."


ARE PEOPLE WHO DO THE KIND OF WORK YOU HAVE DONE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO DEPRESSION AND DISCOURAGEMENT THAN THOSE WHO HAVEN'T BEEN EXPOSED TO THAT KIND OF TRAUMA?

That can happen. Exposing yourself to people's hurts is a painful thing and very unsettling in lots of ways. But I've also seen that putting yourself into hard situations can result in a greater joy than you've known before. Both things have happened to me. I've struggled with doubts and the suffering of others, but those experiences have also led me to some of my deepest joy as well.

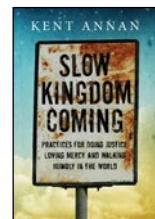
HOW WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE SOMEONE WHO IS IN THAT PLACE? WHAT HAS HELPED YOU?

We can really become isolated in those moments and it's important to take time for friends so you can share your experience with people you trust. Find people to laugh with. Laughter relieves tension and gives us new perspective. For me, writing my own personal Psalm of honest lament has been helpful. And if it's really serious, we need to be free to accept professional help without embarrassment. By God's grace, we all need help at different times to bring us back into healing and joy.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED FOR?

That I was able to seek love and truth faithfully even though I stumbled; that I've loved kindness and walked humbly with God in my pursuit of justice. And I would be grateful to know that I've been able to encourage people by what I write. 

To request your copy of *Slow Kingdom Coming* please see the enclosed envelope.





NOAH'S ARK 'AFLOAT' IN KENTUCKY

At the theme park *Ark Encounter*, which opened this past July in Williamstown, Kentucky, visitors can step inside a 510-foot-long recreation of Noah's Ark. Based on dimensions from the Bible, the five-story structure was built at a cost of \$100 million and is made entirely of wood. Inside are museum-style displays of Noah's family along with rows of cages containing animal replicas, including dinosaurs.

The Indiana-based *Troyer Group* was recruited for the unusual task because of their strong Amish construction influence and the fact that they had already created some of the country's largest freestanding wooden structures. Amish craftsmen, accustomed to working with wood, were recruited from fifteen different communities.

Answers in Genesis, the ministry behind the project, estimates that the exhibit will draw two million visitors in its first year, putting it on par with some of the big-ticket attractions in nearby Cincinnati. The nonprofit Christian group also founded the nearby Creation Museum.

There have been protests from some who feel that the theme park doesn't coincide with current scientific viewpoints. Ken Ham, president of *Answers in Genesis*, on the other hand, believes it will be one of the greatest Christian outreaches of our time.



GOOD MEDICINE

When it comes to facing cancer, marriage can help you live longer. A recent study indicates that being married can boost the survival rates of cancer patients, apparently due to increased social and emotional support. As a result, the study highlighted the importance for unmarried cancer patients of maintaining strong relational networks. *CTV News*

CHILDREN AT WAR

One in five suicide attacks launched by the Islamist extremist group Boko Haram in West Africa in 2015 was carried out by children. 75% were female and some were as young as eight years old.

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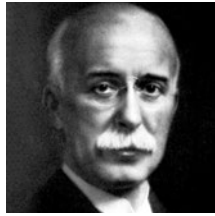
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QUOTE WORTHY

JOHN HENRY JOWETT

(1863 – 1923)

“Men may more than match you in subtlety of argument. In intellectual argument, you may suffer an easy defeat. But the argument of a redeemed life is unassailable.”



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

“I marvel that, whereas the ambitious dreams of myself and [my contemporaries] should have vanished into thin air, a Judean peasant, Jesus, should be able to stretch His hand across the centuries and control the destinies of men and nations...I myself have founded empires; but upon what do these creatures of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love; and to this very day millions would die for Him.”



KENT ANNAN

“Jesus’ invitation...is an invitation to life itself, a life of love, truth and justice. It’s an invitation to kick at the darkness. It’s an invitation to weep at the world but then get up, wipe the tears from our eyes and see a little more clearly the vision for (his) kingdom coming and how we can help it to come.”



AMY CARMICHAEL

“I think of how many unexplained things there are in life. Our Lord Jesus, who could have explained everything, explained nothing. He said there would be tribulation, but he never said why. Sometimes he spoke of suffering being to the glory of God, but he never said how. All through the scriptures it is the same. I cannot recall a single explanation of trial...We are trusted with the unexplained.”

MEDITATION

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER



“The first service one owes to others in the community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God’s Word,

the beginning of love for other Christians is learning to listen to them...So often Christians, especially preachers, think that their only service is always to have to ‘offer’ something when they are together with other people. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking... Christians who can no longer listen to one another will soon no longer be listening to God either...Those who think their time is too precious to spend listening will never really have time for God and others, but only for themselves and for their own words and plans.”

NOW YOU KNOW

Customers line up around the block at a new café in Tokyo that serves no food or drinks. They pay instead for the privilege of playing with hedgehogs.

Reuters

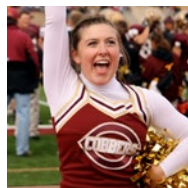
Switzerland officially opened the world’s longest rail tunnel on June 1, 2016. Stretching for 35 miles, the Gotthard Base Tunnel took 17 years to build.

BBC News



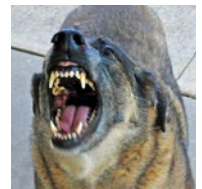
High school cheerleaders don’t get injured as often as athletes in other sports, but when they do, the injuries tend to be more serious.

Pediatrics December 2015



Nina Irslinger of Norway played the organ for 60 hours on March 28 - 30, 2015. The previous record, set in 2009, was 40 hours, 36 minutes.

Guinness World Records



6,549 US mail carriers were attacked by dogs last year.

TIME, May 2016



A team of Italian chefs in Naples set a world record by creating a 1.15-mile-long pizza. Stretching along the city’s waterfront, it took 11 hours to construct and bake.

Global News



FACULTY FOCUS JAMES ENNS

Made human by the humanities

In 1938 poet George Faludy fled his native Hungary because of his Jewish heritage and his outspoken criticism of his government's increasingly pro-Nazi leanings. After serving with the U.S. military forces in France during WW II, he returned to his now-Communist homeland, curious to see "a democracy function without democrats." Faludy paid the price for his return when he was imprisoned as an American spy and served three years of hard labor in the infamous Recsk concentration camp.

Over time, Faludy observed that most of the camp's 1,300 inmates fell into one of two groups: those who focused only on their physical survival, and those who, despite their wretched, dehumanizing environment, chose to study and gain knowledge. Even after long hours of bone-crushing labor and in the midst of filthy, crowded living conditions, these men gathered secretly, fighting fatigue and hunger, in order to learn. Faludy and other scholarly inmates ransacked their collective memories to offer up lectures on Shakespeare, Roman law, the Crusades, poetry, mathematics and astronomy.

The first group held these men in contempt for wasting time on such trivial matters. Determined to survive, they focused only on food, warmth and sleep. Ironically, they were the ones who soon lost the will to live and died in large numbers. But without exception, those who participated in the evening classes survived and eventually left the camp. Faludy concluded that in some

mysterious way, "delighting in a good poem or discussing Plato's Socratic dialogues somehow armed the spirit to the point that it could prevent the body's collapse."

This story explains my love for and appreciation of the humanities such as philosophy and literature, and the joy I derive from teaching history. It also gives insight about the truthfulness of these disciplines. Beyond the ability to make factual statements about the world, they allow us to see and understand our fellow human beings more truthfully. Simply put, the humanities make us more fully human in ways congruent with God's purposes for us.

I believe my own journey as a Christ-follower and scholar is a good example of

Simply put, the humanities make us more fully human in ways congruent with God's purposes for us. “ ”

how the Holy Spirit has worked through theology and the humanities to nurture my faith. I was the child of godly missionaries in Germany and some of my earliest memories were our evening devotional times when Dad would read aloud from a Bible story book. The drama of the Old Testament stories especially captured my imagination. That early love of narrative continued right through my school years, thanks to inspiring teachers who opened

to me the worlds of history, short stories, novels, poetry and philosophy. The joy came not merely from devouring the content of what I read, but seeing how often the events and people of my own time were recognizable in the pages from the past.

I experienced that same joy when reading the Bible where the writers used poetry, short story, history and philosophical argumentation to reveal the person and work of God. Thus, the Scriptures became a gift for me on two levels: they revealed the truth of God which leads to salvation; and they were also an invitation to probe for the truthfulness which these disciplines offered. As a teacher and historian for more than thirty years, I have seen how studying the humanities allows us to become authentically human in accordance with God's purposes and delight.

I believe this is why Faludy and his fellow prisoners sensed the importance of studying the humanities under such inhuman conditions, and why they survived their prison camp ordeal. However dimly they may have understood it, they were, in Paul's words to the Athenian intelligentsia, feeling their way toward God in an effort to find him.

As one to whom God in his grace has revealed his Son Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I find that studying and teaching the humanities has only served to increase my delight in him. ✎

James Enns is Professor of History at Prairie College. His book, *Saving Germany: North American Protestants and Christian Mission to West Germany, 1945 -1974*, (McGill-Queen's University Press) is due for release in the spring of 2017.

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Seasons

It was at summer camp that 15-year-old Adam Buyer first met his petite, dark-haired wife-to-be. After dating off and on through high school, he and Jalene became engaged and were married on Thanksgiving Day of 2008. Both were 19 years old.

Adam had always dreamed of being in ministry, just like his pastor father, and so after their wedding the young couple went to Scotland to serve at a retreat centre. Due to visa problems, however, their time was cut short. “When we were sent home from the UK three months earlier than expected,” recalls Adam, “it felt as though we had crash landed back in Canada and we had no idea what God wanted us to do.”

They moved to Calgary in order for Jalene to pursue a Christian Leadership diploma at Rocky Mountain College. There were bills to be paid, however, so Adam’s dreams took a back seat as he jumped into a carpentry job for which he had no experience. To his surprise, he found the work enjoyable and soon he was in school as well, training to become a journeyman carpenter.

“At the time,” says Adam, “we had no idea of the formative season that we were entering, one that would involve a lot of doubt and personal pain. I still had a deep desire to be involved in full-time ministry, but God never gave us the go-ahead to move on, which made me very impatient. Whenever I prayed about a change or a different line of work, I got the same answer: *Keep doing what you’re doing.*”

Four years later, Adam’s hopes were raised when the seemingly-perfect job opened up at a Christian camp. They were dashed again when everything fell through, but the experience made him wonder if perhaps he should get some training and become better-equipped for when the right opportunity *did* come along. As he and Jalene looked at different Bible colleges, Prairie seemed to stand out.

On a visit to the campus in mid-June of 2014, they sensed a release that they hadn’t experienced before. It seemed that God was finally moving them into a period in their lives that would be focused on the desire of their hearts and by mid-August they were settled in Three Hills.

Adam found a perfect fit in Prairie’s pastoral program. “I have a heart for the church,” he says, “and I want to see it strengthened, encouraged, and equipped to spread the gospel in a very lost world. I

I believe the church is God’s plan for reaching the world, and we need pastors who are committed to nurturing the next generation of church leaders.

love teaching and preaching, mentoring and leadership development. I believe the church is God’s plan for reaching the world, and we need pastors who are committed to nurturing the next generation of church leaders.”

The Buyers are both gifted musicians and have produced a CD of their original songs. Jalene also released her own EP this year with the Music & Worship Arts program and they have enriched the campus by sharing their talents in concerts and chapels.

Coming to Prairie was, Adam believes, “a transition to a season of healing. There is a slower pace of life here and I’ve been able to just focus on my

studies. We’re enjoying the company of other young couples who are in a similar place and what I’ve been learning in the classroom has challenged me and shaped my understanding of God in ways I could never have imagined. Being able to teach and preach as well as leading worship and being involved in campus life has given me opportunity to grow and mature.

“I don’t know what’s next, but I’m

excited and very content. I really believe that Jalene and I are where we’re supposed to be and I want to enjoy all that God has for us here. A thread for me through the years has been the thought: *What does faithfulness look like in this season of my life?* Coming to terms with that question has always brought me comfort. It’s helped me to set aside my own agenda and focus on being faithful even when the experience is not what I anticipated. To me, that’s authentic worship.”

You can enjoy Adam and Jalene’s music and learn more about their ministry at elsaandfoster.com





DEBORAH WAS BORN IN A RURAL FARMING COMMUNITY IN BURMA'S CHIN STATE.

THE CHIN ARE ONE OF MANY ETHNIC MINORITIES WITHIN BURMA, ALSO KNOWN AS MYANMAR. HAVING BEEN EVANGELIZED BY AMERICAN MISSIONARIES, MOST CHIN ARE BAPTIST CHRISTIANS, WHICH ALSO MAKES THEM *RELIGIOUS* MINORITIES IN THEIR MOSTLY BUDDHIST COUNTRY. THEIR COMMITMENT TO FOLLOWING JESUS HAS LED TO MISTREATMENT BY THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT.

WELCOMING THE STRANGER

“We, the Christians, were persecuted very badly,” Deborah explains. The government expected her to produce a certain amount of food on their farm. Threatened with arrest and imprisonment if she failed to meet an unrealistic quota, Deborah, a widowed single mother, ultimately decided to flee with her nine-year-old son and six-year-old daughter, following in the footsteps of many other Chin Christian refugees. Traveling by foot and occasionally hitching a ride in a small van crammed with other refugees, they finally reached the border with Thailand. From there, Deborah used the little money she had and some jewelry to pay a guide to help them cross through Thailand, traveling only by night and hiding during the day, to reach Malaysia.

Once safely in Kuala Lumpur, the largest city in Malaysia, Deborah and her kids lived with several other refugee families crammed into a small apartment with a single bathroom. Life there was also difficult: police officers would harass Chin refugees, most of whom had to work illegally to cover their basic living expenses, and threaten them if they did not pay a bribe. But Deborah found solace in a local church and a church-operated school that provided education for her children. Hav-

ing learned to speak English through her Christian college in Chin State, she was able to find work as a translator with a global relief organization. Through those connections, she also was registered as a refugee with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Four years after registering, in May 2013, Deborah and her children boarded an airplane for the first time in their lives and headed to their new home in the United States. In Chicago her uncle met them and drove them to their apartment where they found flowers and mangoes waiting on the table. At last, Deborah felt she was at home.

“THREATENED WITH ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT, THE WIDOWED SINGLE MOTHER DECIDED TO FLEE.”

The transition was not always easy, though. It took a few weeks before she would allow her children to go outside and play, the images of police harassing Chin refugees in Malaysia seared in her memory. Work is challenging too and most of her income goes toward covering her rent. Still, Deborah says, she is proud of herself. She is also very involved in her church where she teaches Sunday school and preaches on some Sundays. Her faith is really what gave her the strength to seek refuge. And in each location of her journey, she notes that the one common thread has been the importance of the local church.

While much of the recent media coverage has been focused on the shores of the Mediterranean and on the refugee crisis emanating from Syria’s civil war in particular, the issue is much broader. It is indeed global, affecting people in Africa, Southeast Asia and Central America, among others. Given the scope of this crisis, how Christ followers respond could define the church for a generation or more.

Some contemporary social or political issues are not addressed directly in Scripture. But on the question of how to treat refugees and other immigrants, the Bible has much to say. The Hebrew word translated variously into English

as *foreigner, resident alien, stranger, sojourner, or immigrant* appears ninety-two times in the Old Testament. By the count of theologian Orlando Espín, welcoming the stranger is the second most frequently repeated command in the Hebrew Scriptures. There are valid and important questions of foreign policy, economics, security, and cultural cohesion that we can address as well. But for those of us who profess that the Scriptures are authoritative, that is where we ought to begin the conversation about how we interact with those who come as foreigners into our country.

The reality that many refugees are not yet Christ followers presents a remarkable opportunity to live out the Great Commission right within our communities. God has a sovereign purpose in the migration of people and he invites his church throughout the world to join him in that work. Just as was the case with the scattering of the apostles in the early church and has been true throughout church history, God uses migration as a tool to advance his purposes. The arrival of non-Christian refugees is actually an invitation for local churches to love, welcome, and as we build relationships, share the hope of the gospel.

Unfortunately, while some local churches are engaging this missional moment, many others are missing it. When asked their views of immigrants arriving in the US, a majority of evangelical Christians saw them as a “threat” or a “burden” in some way. Only a minority said that the arrival of immigrants represented an “opportunity to introduce them to Jesus Christ.” We risk ignoring a divine mandate if our sole priorities are safety,

comfort and convenience. God is working through the migration of refugees and other migrants. If we are to join him in that mission, we need to recognize that “the harvest

“ **THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY GOD HAS USED THE MIGRATION OF PEOPLE TO ADVANCE HIS PURPOSES.** ”

is plentiful” (Matt. 9:37) and that will require us to commit to thinking biblically about the reality of refugees. We can see them as a potential threat, or we can get to know them individually, hear their stories, and begin to appreciate that each is loved by God.

The testimony of Afshin Ziafat, lead pastor of Providence Church in Frisco, Texas, is a remarkable illustration of why this approach is so essential. In 1979, Afshin’s family fled persecution in Iran, where the Iranian Revolution was erupting. Upon settling in Houston at a time when Americans were being held hostage in Iran, the family experienced further persecution: rocks thrown through their windows, tires slashed, bullying at school. But one woman, second-grader Afshin’s English tutor, treated him differently: she showed Afshin kindness and love, and she gave him a Bible, which he read years later and became a follower of Jesus. Ultimately, he became a pastor and leader reaching tens of thousands of others, including those raised as Muslims.

“Had anyone else given me that New Testament,” Afshin says, “I would have thrown it away because I didn’t trust them. You want to win a Muslim for Christ? I believe you’ve got to earn the right to be heard.”

The plight of refugees in our world today is an unprecedented global crisis. For the church, though, it also presents a unique moment to live out our theology. The refugees of the world—some of them persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, others of them not yet followers of Jesus—are watching how the church will respond, whether guided by faith or by fear.

While Western media attention about the refugee crisis tends to focus on those being resettled into the United States or Canada or seeking asylum in Europe, in reality only a small percentage of today’s estimated sixty million forcibly displaced people will ever reach communities in the West. The vast majority remain in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The church’s response to the global refugee crisis must also include supporting local churches and relief efforts in the countries most impacted. By doing so, we can both express God’s love by meeting human needs and minimize the number who will be forced to flee their countries and become refugees.

In his farewell address to the nation in 1989, President Ronald Reagan, borrowing a line from Jesus, described his country as a “shining city on a hill” for those seeking freedom, a place where people of all kinds could live in harmony and peace and whose doors were open to anyone who made the effort to come.

The United States certainly has been a place of refuge for many fleeing persecution, which is an honorable legacy. But when Jesus talked about a “city on a hill,” he was not referring to a nation. Jesus told his followers that *they*—those early disciples who would go on to form the church—were the light of the world, which, like a city atop a hill, could not be hidden (Matt.5:14). Now is the time for the church to shine, not to hide our light.

Across the world, local churches and members of the body of Christ are seeing this moment of crisis as a chance to live out Jesus’ instructions so others may look to and glorify God. Too often, however, the church has allowed politicians or media who describe refugees as a menace to speak for us on these questions. If we cheer them on, or if we merely stay silent, millions of vulnerable, displaced people throughout the world will associate Christians—and the Jesus we claim to follow—with apathy or, worse, hostility toward refugees.

Our ultimate hope is that the church would shine its light through the refugee crisis, that God’s people would rise up as never before to welcome strangers, each doing what God has called all of us to do:

- To bind up the brokenhearted.
- To love our neighbors.
- To do justice.
- To love mercy.
- To practice hospitality.
- To stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

To proclaim the love of Christ in word and deed to those who do not yet know him.

As the church steps into the good works God has “prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10), the displaced of our world will praise our Father in heaven. ❏

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please see
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KRISTI HOPF WITH PAT MASSEY



EVEN A CHICKEN

WAWA is a term used by expats in my adopted country rather frequently. Translation: “West Africa Wins Again.” The meaning can range from mild bemusement at how the complexities of life here in Niger, West Africa, can make one’s plans go awry to complete and utter frustration. Like when a perfectly good work day is interrupted by the disappearance of your water meter.

Since my house is listed first under the landlord’s name, whenever the other tenants renege on their water bill, my meter is repossessed. In addition to going for hours without water, I must chase down the workers with proof of payment and sit in my front yard until they bring the meter back. It seems, however, that those WAWA moments are becoming fewer, perhaps because I am learning to go with the ebb and flow of life and allowing God’s timing to become mine. As I look back through the pages of my journal, I see the mixture of hope and struggle that has been shaping me toward that goal:

OCTOBER 2013

My dream to work in relief and development among a people closed to the gospel was born during a trip to Mexico after my graduation from Prairie Bible College. It was there that I saw how powerfully compassion ministry could show God’s love and open the door for his good news. This country involves everything God has put on my heart. Our work among the Fulani people is shaped by the needs and desires of the local villagers. Often the men want to focus on agriculture and animals, while the women are interested in health training and a village savings program. The needs are so diverse, but what a joy it is to walk alongside my friends as they strive to improve their lives. My other goal—Bible story telling—moves far more slowly. Every development lesson is paired with something from Scripture, but though they are eager to discuss the Word in that context, there is no greater interest as yet in hearing the stories of God. I pray that a few will seek truth and take it back to their families. At the same time, I know that if my friends choose to trust in the hope of Jesus Christ, their sufferings will increase in persecution for their new faith.

NOVEMBER 2013

Malaria is the number one killer in Niger, especially of children and the elderly. The rainy season is always a “catch 22.” If it is a

good one, the crops will be better, but the rate of malaria will increase as well. A few years ago I taught on the prevention and treatment of malaria and distributed mosquito nets around the community. Since I was going to be gone for a while, however, I didn’t expect that the lessons would stay with them. But today, as I travelled around the village, it was encouraging to hear the people talk about sleeping under the nets, decreasing standing water by their huts, and taking their children to the clinic when they become sick. A young one had still died of malaria, but one death in a population of 1,400 is a huge step forward. I was amazed at the degree to which they took the lessons to heart. “Every time we went to bed under the nets,” said one, “we remembered you in your absence.” I am touched.

APRIL 2014

Last month I flew to eastern Niger to observe field work projects being done by another mission. I returned home overwhelmed by how much there is to learn in order to help my village regenerate their land and better support their families. It will take years of work and the caprice of nature is ever-present. Our hope and prayer is that the village will be able to improve harvest yields to the point where they can better withstand the shocks of drought and famine when they do come. During our stop at the mission station, I



Kristi teaching nutrition classes: "What a joy to walk alongside my friends as they strive to improve their lives."

visited their hospital where a doctor was just finishing his shift. I asked how his day had gone. "No one died today," he replied. I cannot imagine the strength of character it takes to work year in and year out where that is the highlight of the day. I long for the time when my friends can have enough income from their harvest to enrich their diets, to buy clothing, to send their children to school. Beyond all that, I dream of the day when the Fulani will be with God in heaven where their suffering is wiped away—no more hunger, no more sickness, no more death.

JUNE 2014

Since most of the villagers earn money through selling chickens, guinea fowl and eggs, I brought in a local vet to teach them about raising healthy flocks. One older man was shocked by the concept of vaccinations and declared that he was going to take his new chicken to a village with sick birds to see if the vet was telling the truth. If it died, he would tell everyone I had brought the vet who taught them lies. If the chicken lived, he would let everyone know that Kristi had brought knowledge that is true. I never expected my integrity to depend on a bird! How difficult it is for the human nature to accept new ideas. I wonder how willing they will be to accept God's truth when I bring it to them. The man later informed me that he had taken his chicken among the sick ones and while all the others died, his had not been "caught by any disease." I know you care for the sparrows, Lord. Thank you for including chickens.

SEPTEMBER 2015

This country has both simplified and broadened my understanding of suffering. My chosen people live on the edge of the Sahara

Desert and are among the poorest of the poor. In their religion they are twice bound: by fear from curses and the fatalistic view of "God wills it." There is little hope of relief from physical suffering or of finding eternal life. This is the broad picture, but today hope and suffering will become more personal. I must travel to the village to give funeral greetings to the family of a young lady who died. Waiting for my passengers, I cradle a small child whose body is burning with malarial fever. I bathe her gently with a wet cloth, hoping to bring the fever down, praying the medicine will start to work and that God will heal her. We drive past field after field of burnt millet stalks, only half their normal height. The people will likely only harvest enough to feed their families for a few months, which means another lean year of hunger and suffering.

Hope and suffering are so deeply intertwined here and my heart weeps as Satan whispers, "Your work is hopeless. Give up and go home."

When I arrive at the hut, a tiny premature infant is placed in my arms. On this seventh day from the death of the mother, many will gather to offer prayers that her good deeds be found greater than her sins so she may be granted entrance to paradise. In stark contrast, her newborn baby will be celebrated this same day and given a name. Hope and suffering are so deeply intertwined here and my heart weeps. At these times Satan

whispers, "Your work is hopeless. Give up and go home." It is then that I need most to cling "unswervingly to the hope (I) profess, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23). I long to see the Fulani find something greater than their circumstances of life.

OCTOBER 2015

I have always loved teaching and was so excited to help open a primary school in our village. One little student is especially precious to me. When she was just nine days old, her mother asked me to pray that her daughter could go to school and become a doctor. I never dreamed that one day I might have a small part in answering that prayer. Now we work towards starting a school for older children as well. Some go to relatives in the city to continue their education, but many of our girls between the ages of twelve and fifteen are simply married off. The parents will choose schooling if it is available; but if not, their only option is to sell their daughters in marriage. We ache to see them have a childhood and a chance in life.

Sometimes my goals for serving in this place are met and the results are what I aimed for, but sometimes not. And yet God is at work. The crops depend on the rains and this year they came early. Not everyone had seed ready to plant, the chief's son told me, but those who did shared with those who didn't. This had never happened before and he declared that it was because of my work in the village. Before I came, although everyone was related, there was no unity. Now people were not only helping one another in their needs, but they were socializing together, even marrying from village to village. I did not anticipate or even hope for this, but it gives me courage to pray for the day when this unity will become all it can be in Christ.

I have come to love living in this country, assimilating the Fulani culture, laughing with my friends, feeling accepted into their lives. The motto of my graduating class at Prairie in 1998 became my life verse as well: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). It reminds me that no matter what I do, whether in my personal and spiritual journey or in all the ways that I strive to bring hope in this place, it is all for him, and that everything—even a chicken—can be a reflection of his beautiful name. ❧

Going bananas

Some stories are just too good not to tell.

This past May, I spoke at a leadership banquet for Canada's National Prayer Breakfast in Ottawa. With the dinner set to begin, my host told me we would be delayed at least an hour as Members of Parliament coming to the dinner were in the midst of an important vote.

Minutes later, the MPs began to arrive. When I asked what happened, I was told that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had "lost it" and walked across the floor of the House of Commons to "manhandle" people he disagreed with. The footage had already gone viral and the vote was postponed.

"Are you ready to speak?" someone asked. "I think so," I replied.

I had chosen to talk about integrity—you know, how to live so the preacher won't have to lie at your funeral. Laughter is good at such times, so I told a joke I once made the mistake of telling my mother.

"Bananas are the politician's fruit," I began. "They're yellow, they're crooked, and they hang out in bunches." Thankfully, the leaders laughed, but my mother hadn't.

"Son," she said, "we are to pray for our leaders." And she was right.

Jack Murta, who oversees the event, later told me that the prime minister sat in bed that night after the vote, reading the Bible. Scripture is a good place to go when you've blown it. You find plenty of company. The next morning, Mr. Trudeau, the first sitting prime minister to attend the prayer breakfast in twenty-five years, read verses from the Bible that he chose himself. Without fanfare, he read from Romans 12: *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another... Do not be proud"* (vs 3, 14-16).



Phil and former British MP Jonathan Aitken take in Canada's capital city. "Prisoners and politicians aren't so very different," says Aitken, who has been both.

Then, according to Jack, prayer breakfast officials forgot to usher the prime minister from the room. So he sat a few feet away as former British MP and Cabinet Minister, Jonathan Aitken, told his story.

In 1999, Jonathan pled guilty to perjury. Divorce followed. Then bankruptcy. Then an 18-month prison sentence. One day, his cellmate, an Irish guy named Paddy, said, "You've been good to me. I'd like to give you a gift."

Aitken was intrigued. "A gift?"

Paddy wriggled beneath his bed and pulled out a box of pornographic magazines.

asked to do the same. In time, both Paddy and Jonathan put their faith in Jesus Christ.

After the prayer breakfast, I had lunch with Jonathan. "There are Aitkens on my family tree," I told him. "Maybe we're related." He informed me that in Scotland the name Aitken is as common as Smith is here.

We talked about his time behind bars. "Prisoners and politicians aren't so different," he said thoughtfully. "In fact, we're *all* the same. We all need a Saviour."

How true. Psalm 130 says, "If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could

I don't have to agree with people for God to be at work in them.

"No thanks," said Aitken.

("I'd gone to church for years," he later told me. "I said the right things, but failed to do the right things in life. My faith was flawed.")

Paddy wasn't happy. "Why won't you take my gift?"

"Well," answered the disgraced politician, "I've been reading the Bible and I know my life must change."

Paddy looked down. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I read the Bible and pray."

"Can I join you?"

Before long, others in the prison had

stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you."

I'm not a political guy, but I'm more aware than ever that—thank God—I don't have to agree with people for God to be at work in them. And when it comes to politicians, the Bible simply asks me to pray for them. I'm doing that like never before.

We all need do-overs, don't we? Divine Mulligans. We all need to be reminded of God's amazing grace.

Some stories are too good not to tell. ❏

Phil is the host of Laugh Again Radio. Check it out at philcallaway.com



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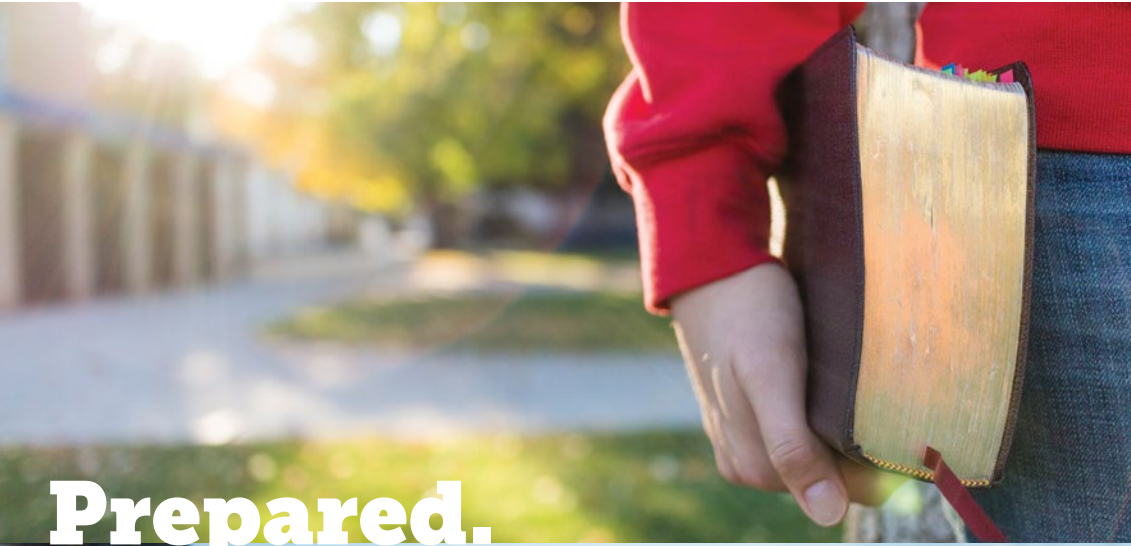
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