

SENT TO SERVE

**THE TESTIMONIES OF 13 MISSIONARIES
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**



Aweis A. Ali, Editor

Foreword by **Abdi Walalo**

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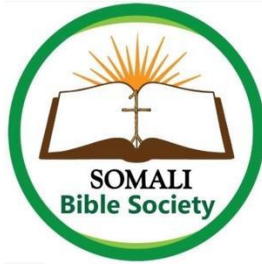
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TESTIMONIES

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Dr. Annalena Tonelli (02 April 1943 – 05 October 2003), who loved the Somali people as herself. Annalena was martyred in Borama, Somaliland, because of her Christian witness.

WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK 1/2

This book offers in-depth narratives of the lives and missionary experiences of thirteen missionary families. It delves into the physical, emotional, and spiritual obstacles they encountered while spreading the gospel, particularly in Africa. These accounts demonstrate the transformative power of Jesus, the missionaries' unwavering commitment, and their resilience in the face of adversity. It is a valuable resource for aspiring missionaries, current mission workers, missiology scholars, and individuals, organizations, and churches involved in supporting and sending missionaries.

Anwar Mehammed Berhe, PhD
Academic Dean for the undergraduate program
Director of the MA in Christian-Muslim Relations program
Evangelical Theological College, Addis Ababa

Sent to Serve: The Testimonies of 13 Missionaries in the Muslim World offers a profound and insightful look into the lives of missionaries dedicated to spreading the gospel in predominantly Muslim world areas, including Somalia. Each chapter showcases their resilience, courage, and unwavering faith as they overcome cultural challenges and personal trials. The missionaries share how the gospel of Jesus Christ has transformed their lives, providing valuable insights into discipleship. This book stands as a powerful testament to the reach of God's grace and is essential reading for those interested in global missions and ministry to people of the Muslim faith.

Gift Mtukwa, PhD.
Dean and Senior Lecturer
School of Religion and Christian Ministry
Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi

The stories in this book are truly incredible. It is a valuable resource for anyone involved in ministry, from the local level to a cross-cultural setting. I would recommend it to anyone thinking about missionary service or any Christian who wants to learn more about what is happening in different mission fields.

Philip Manickam
SIM Missionary

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FOREWORD

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work....” 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (ESV).

One of the longest-serving ministers of the gospel in the Somali Peninsula is Brother Shaafi'i, who resides in Kenya. “Pastor Shaafi'i is the most high-profile living Somali Christian; he is also the oldest known Somali Christian in the world.”¹ He lives among us and is readily accessible to most of us; however, not many of us seek him out. Brother Aweis is an exception; he went looking for Pastor Shaafi'i. He made several trips to sit at the feet of this servant of God and glean from him. By doing this, Aweis modeled for us honoring our elders. He has demonstrated respect for those who labor among us. Aweis' writings and reflections are a testament to his passion and desire to document and preserve the legacy of the men and women on whose shoulders we stand in this ministry, the men and women who have responded to the call and diligently served God among the Somali people.

We are witnessing a significant increase in the number of Somali men and women responding to God's call to follow him.² This is a testament to the growing faith and potential of the Somali church. Our life experiences attest to the peaks and the valleys of church growth among the Somali people. We consistently witness attrition as well as growth and maturity.³ We see the perpetually first-generation body of believers, where the gospel is not transferred from parent to child, as well as strong and vibrant generations of believers. In this season of growth and turbulence, many Somali men and women respond to God's call to serve in the ministry.

As we respond to this call, we acknowledge and internalize that we share a profound and unifying faith.⁴ We share this common faith with the apostles, the pioneer workers among Somalis like the Modrickers, and the Kitchels who invested in training leaders.^{5, 6} This shared faith is a powerful bond that unites us in our mission. We are becoming aware that laborers in the kingdom came to serve our people through their faith and obedient response. To spread the gospel, they had to overcome various obstacles, including geographical, cultural, and linguistic differences. We are starting to understand the importance of our shared faith, which involves serving sacrificially within and across different cultures. This understanding is bolstering our unity and sense of purpose.

We envision the Somali church as a sending church. We want to go; we want to be sent. This compilation of stories of the sent is a timely resource for our growing church. In his testimony, Tonny paints a picture of feeling like a camel walking in the desert sand

¹ Aweis A. Ali, Understanding the Somali Church, KENPRO Publications, 2021, 92.

² Somali Christian Census, 2023, SBS Journal, Vol IV, Issue 2, December 2023, 49.

³ Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities, Don Little, P. 114.

⁴ Titus 1:4.

⁵ Aweis A. Ali, Understanding the Somali Church, 94.

⁶ Aweis A. Ali, Understanding the Somali Church, 93.

with no footprints to follow. These laborers' accounts are valuable footprints to follow. These testimonies, among other things, can be effective maps for upcoming laborers.

Being called to serve at the vision casting stage can be highly romanticized, and a rosy picture of service is often painted. Vision trips that act as a reconnaissance prior to fielding can be skewed towards showing the potential laborer the exciting elements of responding to the call. These candid accounts of faithful laborers paint a more detailed and realistic picture of the implications of responding to the call. We experience the excitement of being God's mouthpiece, the frustration of rejection, the internal turmoil of inadequacy, the consistent wrestling against desires of the flesh, perpetual learning, total dependence on God, sometimes witnessing signs and wonders, and perhaps times when we struggle to hear the voice of God. By acknowledging these challenges, we hope to provide a sense of understanding and support to those considering or already responding to God's call to serve in the ministry.

As I was getting equipped to serve, 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 spoke to me about being called to serve. I adapted the passage in the form of a poem:⁷

God's servants commend themselves
In great endurance
In troubles
In hardships
In distress
In beatings
In imprisonments
In riots

God's servants commend themselves
In hard work
In sleepless nights and
In hunger

God's servants commend themselves
In purity
In understanding
In patience and
In kindness in the Holy Spirit

God's servants commend themselves
In sincere love
In truthful speech
In the power of God, with weapons of righteousness
In the right and left hand

⁷ Aweis A. Ali, Understanding the Somali Church, 93.

God's servants commend themselves
Through glory and dishonor
Through good and bad report

God's servants are
Genuine yet regarded as impostors
Known yet regarded as unknown
Dying yet live on
Beaten and yet not killed
Sorrowful yet always rejoicing
Poor yet making many rich
Having nothing yet possessing everything!

We are the servants of God
In all these, we commend ourselves

We should definitely show deep appreciation for God's servants and their work. I really hope to hear more stories about the people in the Horn of Africa responding to God's call and sharing their experiences of serving Him. Let us all strive to live our lives in dedicated service to the King of Kings.

Abdikamil Mahmoud "Abdi Walalo"
Elder, Fellowship Baptist Church

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the missionaries who shared their life stories with me, allowing me to tell them the world. This book would never have come to fruition without their cooperation and support. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Rev. LeCrecia M. Ali for her invaluable editing work on the early manuscript when the editorial process was particularly challenging. I am also grateful to everyone who took the time to read and provide endorsements for this book. Their confidence in me as the editor will always be treasured. Additionally, I am thankful to the numerous people who reviewed the manuscript and offered suggestions for improvement. Their insights have unquestionably enriched this book. Despite the contributions of all these individuals, I take full responsibility for any flaws in this book.

INTRODUCTION

I fled to Ethiopia in the summer of 1996 after radical Muslims had killed twelve of the fourteen members of my house church in Mogadishu, Somalia. Upon arriving in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, I met missionaries who received me like a long-lost close family member and gave me much, including spiritual care, stipend, higher education, and jobs. I had never seen generosity, kindness, love, and support of that magnitude before meeting the missionaries.

While in Islamic Somalia, I was always perplexed as to why missionaries who come from distant parts of the world dedicate their lives to people whose languages, cultures, and belief systems are radically different. I found my answer while studying theology in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 1997-2000. During my studies, I witnessed the selfless dedication and tenacious commitment that missionaries displayed to uplift and empower the local communities. It was inspiring to witness how they immersed themselves in the culture, learned the local languages, and genuinely sought to understand and respect the beliefs of the individuals they were serving. Their tireless work in establishing schools and healthcare facilities and advocating for social justice issues profoundly impacted the lives of many.

Their actions spoke volumes about the universal values of compassion, empathy, and solidarity that transcended cultural and religious boundaries. Reflecting on my experiences and observations, I am filled with deep admiration and respect for missionaries' thoughtful dedication and altruism. Their legacy of kindness, service, and advocacy for the marginalized resonates with me, leaving an indelible impression on my understanding of humanitarianism and the universal pursuit of justice and kindness.

Missionaries are known as agents of change, adored by exploited and underprivileged persons but disliked by oppressors. Missionaries are known as a force for good. With limited exception, wherever missionaries establish a mission base, infant mortality drops, literacy rate skyrockets, and unwritten local languages become written, thus preserving the cultures of the local populace. Christian missionaries are also known for advocating for the oppressed, which sometimes jeopardizes their safety and well-being, a price these people of God are willing to pay joyfully.

I am particularly touched by these missionaries' genuine care and empathy towards marginalized and oppressed individuals. Their willingness to risk their safety and well-being to stand up for those who were disenfranchised exemplified their deep sense of moral duty and conviction. The incredible transformations in the neighborhoods where missionaries served are undeniable. It was not just about spreading a religious belief system; it was about holistic development, empowerment, and providing a sense of hope for a better future. Through their efforts, these missionaries addressed not only the spiritual needs but also the practical, tangible needs of the public, such as access to relief and development.

Missionaries consider certain things normal people value as worthless rubbish and choose higher things, just like Saint Paul (Philippians 3:8-21). Missionaries, therefore,

leave behind family and friends and sacrifice comfort and security so that faraway societies can hear the good news and live dignified lives. Missionaries thrive in unfamiliar customs, social norms, and language barriers to help the less fortunate. In these circumstances, missionaries face emotional stress, local illnesses that do not occur back home, and logistical and security challenges, including physical persecution because of their Christian witness.

Missionaries work tirelessly to bridge cultural gaps and establish relationships of trust within the communities they assist. Their commitment to understanding and respecting local customs helps them to effectively communicate the message of hope and love. By immersing themselves in the culture and language of those they serve, missionaries can better address the unique challenges and needs of the community. This often involves adapting their approaches to healthcare, education, and community development to suit the specific context they are working in.

As the reader, this book presents to you the stories of thirteen missionaries and their missionary spouses from various countries who walked away from convenience and comfort to help citizens in faraway countries and continents. This book will help you see some of the prices missionaries pay to make Christlike disciples and improve the lives of those they aid. You will also witness missionaries' daily lives, successes, and struggles. You will see many of the local people missionaries serve and the differences the missionaries made in the lives of these precious people. This book details the various challenges that missionaries encounter while working in the field. These challenges include expulsions, the nationalization of mission properties, multifaceted attacks, character assassinations, blackmail, and intimidation. Dark forces orchestrate these attacks, recognizing that missionaries' charitable work threatens their power and control over the population. Despite these obstacles, the missionaries' resolve is not weakened; their love for the persons they help trumps their personal benefits.

Moreover, the book also explores the profound emotional and spiritual journeys of the missionaries and their spouses. It delves into moments of doubt, fear, and personal sacrifice, highlighting the internal battles that accompany the external challenges they face. The stories within these pages bear witness to the resilience and determined dedication of these missionaries as they navigate the turbulent waters of their calling. This book offers a poignant and insightful glimpse into the world of missionaries, painting a vivid portrait of their unwavering faith, relentless determination, and boundless compassion. It is a tribute to their extraordinary courage and selflessness as they embark on a journey to spread love, hope, and redemption in some of the world's most remote and challenging corners.

Aweis A. Ali

CHAPTER 1: HOWIE F. SHUTE

Introduction



Dr. Howie F. Shute in China with North Korea behind him – over the bridge.

I was standing in China with my right foot firmly planted under the border fence in Russia. I stood there gazing across the bridge into North Korea. To my left, I could see the Sea of Japan. Standing in this strategic location, I marveled, “How far God has brought me from my humble beginnings in the small village of Lafayette, New York!”

As a child growing up there, my life centered around my family, sports, and girlfriends. I never imagined that over fifty years later, I would be traveling through mainland China, visiting underground churches, and meeting

with followers of Jesus, who had sacrificed so much. China was not my first encounter with the Persecuted Church. I made multiple trips to Somalia. When I told these underground Chinese Christians what it was like for a Somali to leave Islam and follow Jesus, tears came to their eyes. They said it was like that in China during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s. In Asmara, Eritrea, I also met with Eritrean Christians whom their government persecuted. Many of their young people are in jail for their faith, even today. In my travels to Sudan, I found great persecution against the Church from the Khartoum government. Being a Christian in an Islamic nation is very difficult and often dangerous. As a young person, I never thought about Christians being persecuted.



Dr. Howie and Bev Shute and their ministry team float the Baro River on the Ethio-South Sudan border.

I also had never realized how many people lived in very simple and austere surroundings. On a three-week boat trip down a river system bordering Ethiopia and Southern Sudan, I found people struggling to survive. As my wife, Bev, and I, along with a team of Ethiopian and Sudanese church leaders, floated these rivers which eventually would flow into the Nile, we found none of the standard resources available to civilization – no grocery stores, no fuel stations, nothing but villagers who lived off the maize they raised, the milk from their cows,

and the fish that filled the rivers. There were no roads, no automobiles, no entertainment venues, no medical clinics, and nothing but people struggling for survival in a harsh land.

I spent nearly a year in South Vietnam, working in an underground bunker, taking reports from infantry units in the field, and developing intelligence reports on the

enemy's habits, presence, and expected future movements. I would never have imagined in my early days that I would serve in the military and find myself in combat in a foreign country.

I have had so many experiences in so many distant lands. My travels have taken me to every state except North and South Dakota. I have had my feet on the ground in 46 foreign countries. I had no idea as a young person that God would take me so far and, especially, that He would lead me in the ministry of preaching the Gospel to so many people from such diverse cultures. I had no idea that God, who had created the universe, even knew of my existence and that He would speak to me in tangible ways that I would understand. What follows is not so much my story as it is God's story, working in an unremarkable, insignificant man.

Early Whispers from God

"Howie, you are going to be a pastor." I heard these words over and over again from my maternal grandmother. As a young person, I would often stay overnight at her home. She would read her Bible to me in the evening before we would go to bed, and then she would confidently declare my future vocation as if she were one of God's inspired prophets of old. I never really paid any attention to her prophecy. My interest in spiritual things came sometime later in life. We did attend church on a fairly regular basis, especially after the death of my brother, who died when he was just two and a half years old. We were at my grandmother's home when my brothers and I got the dreaded news that Noel had passed away in the hospital after losing a battle with meningitis. I still remember my mom and dad sitting before us with our pastor at their side as they broke the awful news that my youngest brother had gone to heaven. I do not remember what the pastor said to us, but I remember a sense of God's presence amid the darkness. At the time, I did not understand what I was feeling, but as I looked back at this experience, I realized that God was there amid the tragedy, bringing about the beginning of healing from this immense loss. I was twelve at the time. Little did I know then that God was always present and, in the days, months, and years ahead, would make Himself known to me in manifest ways.

My mom and dad were two of the most outstanding people I have ever known. My mother was the most vocal about her faith in Jesus. It was Mom who would say grace. It was Mom who expressed her faith in Christ without hesitation. My dad, however, was quiet about his faith. He was reserved about sharing his personal feelings about anything. However, I remember when Noel passed away, seeing my father bow at an altar, crying out to the Lord. I knew that he was reaching out to God at that moment. It was a sight I have never forgotten. Later in life, he shared with me for the first time that he trusted Jesus for his salvation. I doubt that he ever shared this with anyone else (except for my mother).

It was the way my parents lived that made you know they were Christians. They were givers. They gave of themselves sacrificially to their family and friends, and even those they did not know personally. We had a great home life. My brothers and I never doubted that our parents loved us. My dad provided for our family when I lived at home,

but we were far from wealthy. We have much, but we never felt in need. Life was good. Our parents loved and cared for us in every way. After I was off to college and out of the home, my father's business began to prosper, and my mom and dad had more significant financial resources. Still, even then, they gave much of what they had to their children and other family members. No one who knew my father and mother escaped their generosity. At my father's funeral, a New York State Trooper approached me to tell me how much my dad meant to him. This trooper told me he learned generosity from my mom and dad. He said that he had never known anyone more generous than my parents. I grew up knowing love and that my parents would always be there for me. My earthly father and mother's life bolstered my concept of God as my loving Heavenly Father. It became easy to believe that my Heavenly Father really loved me and that He would sacrificially give to me. It was my mom and dad that made it so easy to believe.

Soon after my brother died, my parents sent me to a summer church camp. I believe I was in sixth grade at the time. Two things took place at that camp that made a great impression on me. The first impacted me in a very negative way. One of the pastors serving as a camp counselor got very angry at a group of us boys. He yelled at us using very obscene language. I was shocked. I had not heard language like that in our home, and I certainly did not expect such language from someone referred to as "Reverend." I realized then that the institutional church was far from perfect and that "not everyone who says to [Jesus,] 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."⁸ Attending church, being religious, or even being a church leader does not guarantee true spirituality.

The second experience, however, left a very positive influence on my life. It was very early in the morning, just before dawn. Our camp counselor had instructed us to find a place to get alone with God and sit quietly with Him. Except for a very vague feeling of His presence that day at my grandmother's house when my parents told my brothers and me about Noel's death, I had never really known the presence of God. So, when I found my quiet place, sitting under a tree that early morning at church camp, I was not expecting much of anything to happen. But, as I sat there quietly, something did happen. I did not understand what it was then, but the woods around me seemed to come to life. Something unexplainable was present. I did not see anyone, but I knew something (or someone) was right there with me. It was not until later years, after I again experienced the presence of God, that I realized that God had made himself known to me on that early morning at church camp so many years before.

In my senior year of high school, my pastor asked me if I would preach the sermon on a Sunday morning. As far as I know, our pastor had never asked any youth to preach a sermon, especially on a Sunday morning. I had been active in the youth group through high school but had not come to a personal knowledge of God yet. In fact, at that time, I did not even know that you could have a personal relationship with God. I saw the Bible as a good book. It put forth principles in which to live. I studied the Bible in Sunday School and at our high school's optional religious training program. I read Bible stories with interest, but I never believed that the Bible was the inspired Word of God. I do not

⁸ Matthew 7:21, New International Version.

remember my pastor teaching that, nor do I remember him speaking of my need to confess my sins, repent, and put my faith in Christ to receive eternal life. I agreed to preach to the Sunday morning congregation, but I was ill-prepared, having no personal knowledge of God, for such a tremendous responsibility. I remember preaching something about God having a calling on each person's life and sharing that my calling was to study physical education and become a gym teacher and a coach. Knowing what to do after high school graduation confused me. Up until that time, sports were my life. I only studied enough to keep me playing sports in high school.

Life was all about sports. I loved football, but lacrosse was my greatest passion. I was captain of our football and lacrosse teams and excelled in both. Playing sports was my life through my high school years. I never entertained thoughts about what would come after high school, so I looked at my guidance counselor and shrugged when confronted with where I would attend college and what I would study. I had no idea. When he reminded me of what a good athlete I was and how much I loved sports, his suggestion of learning to be a physical education teacher and coach sounded reasonable. At his suggestion, I applied to Brockport State University, pursuing a career in physical education. I made a decision that would provide some direction for the next couple of years of my life, but I had this aching feeling that I was pursuing a future that lacked real purpose. With this lack of purpose, I stood before the congregation that Sunday morning to convince a church full of people that God had a purpose for us all. Looking back, I still wonder why the pastor made an exception for me to preach that Sunday morning. I can only surmise that God still found ways to speak into my life.

From my early years in childhood, God was speaking to me. My grandmother knew something that I did not understand. God was calling me to a personal relationship with Him. He also called me to give my life to serve Him in full-time ministry. He was speaking, but I did not understand what I was hearing. I was not running away from His calling. I was not listening.

Youthful Experiences Without God

Throughout high school, I lived a good, moral life. I did not smoke or drink alcohol. My mother and father never did either. They raised me to live an upright life. I kept my body in good shape and constantly trained for the sports I loved. I was always seen as a leader and lived in such a way that I was an excellent example for others. My coaches recognized me at an athletic banquet with a leadership award for exhibiting superior leadership ability. As captain of my football and lacrosse teams, I expected excellence from my teammates and myself. One night, my girlfriend and I were double-dating with a good friend and his girlfriend. Dick was one of the top players on our lacrosse team. I was driving and was surprised when I looked in the rearview mirror to see Dick light up a cigarette. I told him that his smoking would hurt our team and that he should put his cigarette out immediately. Dick laughed it off and continued to smoke. He could hardly believe his ears when I told him he would not be playing in the next game if he did not put it out immediately. I was dead serious, and Dick must have known it because he put it out, even though he complained bitterly. Bev has often said that this is one of the early signs of my future leadership potential. She says I tend to have tunnel vision when I

have a task. I only see what needs to be done to accomplish the task and do whatever it takes to make it happen.

The second thing Bev mentions that exemplifies my approach to getting things done is something that happened when I was at the town swimming pool. I watched other young people jump off the diving board, swim back to the pool's edge, and climb out. As I watched this happen repeatedly, I thought, "That does not look difficult at all. I can do that!" Although I had never attempted swimming before, it looked easy. I mounted the board and jumped, propelling myself far into the deep end. It was then I finally realized that I really could not swim. I tried, but I kept going under. My cousin was there, and he was the one who pulled me out and prevented a drowning that day. I think I was twelve at the time. I should have known enough to attempt swimming for the first time in shallow water. Instead of telling me how foolish I had been, Bev looks at this nearly tragic event as a sign of my confidence to do anything and take on any challenge.

I prefer to see it as Bev sees it. No one wants to admit their thoughtlessness. Bev has said many times that these two events were early indicators of how I would attack future challenges in my life. She says that (1) I put everything I have into accomplishing the tasks before me (nothing gets in the way) and that (2) I have complete confidence in myself that I can get it done. I believe God has worked in me in these ways (even though there is a fine line between foolishness and acceptable risk-taking).

My first two years of college were disastrous. Going to college without any real purpose for my life did not help, and then a breakup with my girlfriend led to a night of drinking (a first at that time). After that fateful night, life consisted of seeking a good time without considering the consequences. I continuously ignored my studies. Life was one big party. Church attendance was a thing of the past. Even my number one interest in sports took a back seat. I was now so out of shape that my athletic abilities significantly suffered. And then, one morning, I woke up on a train, hearing the conductor announce our arrival in Chicago. We were on our way to California. The night before, I had been drinking with a friend in a Rochester, New York bar. We were in the middle of a significant snowstorm. The mural on the wall that night of the sunny beaches of Southern California had caught our attention, and the next thing we knew, we were on a train destined for those sunny beaches.

I hated contacting my parents and letting them know I had left college behind and was now pursuing life in southern California. I knew that would be a big disappointment to them, but I could not back up now. I worked in a gas station, bought a motorcycle, and stayed at my aunt's home in Southern California. After a short stay enjoying the sunshine, my parents came to California to spend Christmas with me. They brought with them a letter addressed to me from Uncle Sam. My dropping out of school had not gone without notice by the draft board, and I received my obligatory invitation to appear for active military duty. The Marine Corps had drafted me. My choices over the next two years would not be my own. Uncle Sam became my decision-maker.

Through all of this time, I was unaware that God loved me and was calling me into a personal relationship with Him. Now, I marvel at His patience. He never gave up on me

through the many years when I lived in spiritual apathy. Life was all about me. God was the farthest thing from my mind. And yet God never gave up on me.

God's Protection Through it All

I spent two years in the Marine Corps, one of which I saw combat in South Vietnam. Although I was not often in a combat situation, there were times that danger crept into my assignment as an Intelligence Analyst. Having a basic command of the Vietnamese language,⁹ I would often fly by helicopter to pick up a prisoner and escort him back to a rear location, where an interpreter would interrogate him. Immediately after capture, a prisoner would be most vulnerable, making him more susceptible to revealing facts he might otherwise not reveal. My responsibility to escort prisoners to rear locations included some initial interrogation (using my rudimentary language skills) en route. The danger came when the helicopters I was flying in would be rerouted into hot areas¹⁰ to evacuate our troops, whom the enemy was overrunning.

Although I had not personally met the Lord then, His hand was always on me. He kept me safe, even though I was unaware. Maybe the most dangerous experience I had in Vietnam came one night when one of our infantry units was under heavy fire not far from our camp.

The situation was so severe that officers called out my squad, the Reactionary Squad, that night. We were sitting outside the tank that carried us through that frightful night as we approached this ongoing battle. We were the rescue team. However, we were ill-prepared for a rescue attempt that night. It was late at night, and it seemed the whole camp had been drinking heavily when the call came. As we were cutting through the absolute darkness, I could not believe that my fellow Marines who were going into battle with me had not yet sobered up. They sang and laughed in abandonment as we approached what could potentially be the end of our lives. I was shocked at their state of unreadiness, and I feared the worst. I know that none of us would have survived if the enemy that night, for some unexplained reason, had not turned from the battle and departed in haste just before our arrival. At the time, I felt fortunate. However, in hindsight, I see the hand of God protecting me even before I knew Him.

In January 1968, the Tet Offensive began. North Vietnam changed its tactics and mounted a surprise offensive that continued over the months ahead. North Vietnam troops overran the small camp that I was working out of (which was near the city of Hue) and killed the majority of Marines at that location. I was not there. One of my friends there told me years later that most of our friends did not make it that night. I had applied for an early out to go back to college. After many months of frustration in writing

⁹ Before deployment to Vietnam, I studied the Vietnamese language for three months at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. Interpreters spent a full one year studying the language, but since I only had a little over a year before my two-year tour of military duty would end, the Marine Corps put me in the 3-month program to aid in my work as an intelligence analyst.

¹⁰ These areas would be considered *hot* because the helicopters would take on enemy fire during the evacuation attempts.

back and forth to Washington, DC, my approval came one day before the deadline for this early release. Again, I look back and see the hand of God protecting me from death.

From birth, God has been looking out for me. I was a breech baby with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck, but God looked out for me and my mother during that risky birth. Then, there was that time that I foolishly dove over my head when I could not swim. God used my cousin to save me that day. On another occasion, a severe auto accident just before graduating from seminary could have taken my life. Once in Ethiopia, I was standing on the hood of my Land Cruiser. When I jumped off, I tripped backward at break-neck speed. The back of my head took a terrifying blow against a concrete wall. I had violent shaking in my head for days. The diagnosis from a Swedish missionary doctor was that I had bleeding in the brain. I know I should not have survived that accident, but I did. Another time in Ethiopia, I was riding in a Toyota pickup with four Ethiopian church leaders when the driver lost control, hit and tumbled a high-tension electric pole. We continued over a ravine, rolling over and over again for the distance of about two football fields, finally coming to rest on a flat spot, saving us from a continued descent into a river below. No one had been wearing seat belts, but we all survived without serious injury. After looking over our vehicle and the accident scene, our insurance company commented that no one should have survived that accident. Again, God's hand!

On that three-week boat trip between Ethiopia and Sudan, we were shot at by rebels, survived cholera and malaria-infested waters, and escaped the evil intent of villagers who were going to kill us so that they could steal our boat. On another occasion, I narrowly escaped death from some angry villagers, pursuing me and some church leaders who were with me because we had entered their animistic worship center. They came after us, wielding machetes, to take our heads. God miraculously distracted these men so that we could escape from their grasp. I was well aware that God's providential and miraculous hand of protection averted these Ethiopian near-death experiences. God has performed miracles in my life from the very beginning.

Signs & Miracles

I was approaching the pulpit to begin the Sunday morning sermon early in my first pastorate when I heard that unmistakable voice again. It was not audible, although it was clear and distinctive to me. I heard God say to me, "Do not Preach!" I stood before the pulpit, staring at the congregation, unsure of what to do next. Then the voice returned, "I want to heal someone today." I announced to the congregation that God told me not to preach, but instead, He wanted to heal someone. I gave the invitation, "God wants to heal someone. Come to the altar if you need healing this morning." No one moved. I invited them again. Still, no one moved.

Then I noticed that Aileen, one of our faithful members, had both hands on Gretchen's shoulder, pushing her toward the aisle. Gretchen was Aileen's daughter, visiting from Syracuse, NY, about two hours' drive to the southwest. She resisted her mother's forceful influence until Aileen gave one final push, causing Gretchen to stumble into the aisle. I met Gretchen at the altar. As she stood somewhat in embarrassment before me,

I asked her if she thought God wanted to heal her this morning. Her reply was, "Well, my mother thinks so." Gretchen went on, telling me that she had diabetes and that one kidney had dried up and was dead. She said that the other kidney was in the process of failing. As Gretchen stood before me that morning, it was with her mother's faith that she was leaning on. It appeared to me that she was not expecting healing. I confess that my faith was not soaring at that moment either, but I knew that I had heard the voice of God. He wanted to heal someone, so I prayed that God would heal her body completely. She sat down at her mother's side, and I preached. As the days progressed, I forgot my prayer for Gretchen until someone knocked at the door of the parsonage one Saturday night, about two to three weeks after that prayer. It was Gretchen. She asked to talk with Bev and me. As she sat before us, she told us her story:

Pastor, when you prayed for me that morning at church, I felt a warm sensation move through my whole body. I did not know what happened but knew God had done something in me. When I returned home after the weekend, I returned to my doctor and asked him to run tests on my kidneys. He hesitated to put me through these tests again because I had just recently had them done, and the results were so definitive. I insisted, however, that these tests be performed again. When the new testing results were complete, Pastor, the doctor, came into the room with a shocked look on his face. He said that he could not understand what had happened. The dead kidney was now healthy and fully functioning, and the other kidney had also been completely restored. My diabetes was gone, and my kidneys were both perfect. I told the doctor I understood what happened. God touched me.

The following day, Gretchen stood before the church and told her story to the congregation. At the end of her testimony, many moved to the altar, seeking healing for a variety of diseases. That morning, God healed a little boy with kidney failure and a middle-aged woman with chronic back pain. God healed others with various physical and emotional issues. Spiritual victories also took place during this time. Weeks later, Gretchen returned on a Saturday night and knocked on the parsonage door again. She said that she wanted to tell us the rest of the story:

I did not share something else in the doctor's original prognosis with you before, Pastor. He told me that I would never be able to have a child and that if, by some miracle, I would get pregnant, I could never give birth to a boy. The rest of the story is that I am pregnant, and it is a boy.

Gretchen carried that baby full-term and gave birth to a healthy baby boy. The doctor was wrong again, and God put a strong exclamation mark at the end of Gretchen's story. Several weeks passed, and healing occurred consistently during our Sunday morning worship services. I will never forget these precious weeks of the Lord's presence manifested in a wave of physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. As a new pastor, my faith in God was exploding. I was increasingly realizing that this God, who speaks today, also performs signs and miracles. He is still writing the Book of Acts.

Even though the wave of healing began to wane over time, our church was changed by what God had done. Our Wednesday prayer meetings began to grow. Our faith in God was on the increase. Our prayers were not as quickly and consistently answered as at first, but new life breathed into our church. We were expecting God to do the impossible.

On Wednesday night, we gathered to pray when a tragedy hit our community. It was June, and seniors were graduating from high school. One group of seniors was out celebrating. Their celebration came to a tragic end in a terrible auto accident. Doctors put the driver on life support. The prognosis was not good, and he was pronounced brain-dead. The mother refused to remove life support, even though the doctors counseled her to change her mind. She had recently lost her husband and was ill-prepared to let go of her son. She could not come to grips with reality. Our prayer meeting that night began to focus on this grief-stricken mother. We agreed in prayer, asking God to touch this mother's heart so that she would face the inevitable and let go of her son. We prayed that God would help her to get through her overwhelming loss and find healing in God's presence. Billy interrupted our prayer. Billy was a faithful member of our church, but he was mentally disabled. He often would interrupt and say crazy things, so it was no surprise when he exclaimed, "God, Pastor Shute does not have the faith for you to heal this boy, but I do. Heal him, Lord, and may he be walking the hallways in the hospital by tomorrow morning." We were not surprised at his prayer, but we were surprised at the answer that came. The very next morning, that brain-dead boy was completely well and was walking the hospital hallways. Once again, God was doing things around me and in me. I was learning that through the simple faith of a child, or even a mentally disabled man, Jesus was still today raising the dead to life.

It was not until I found myself on the mission field that God began to show me a whole new realm of healing. While I was still pastoring at my first church, God began to lead me to do short-term mission work. I would go to various locations in the Caribbean and East Africa. On one such short-term assignment, we were training pastors in Kenya and Tanzania on how to share their faith in Christ. I led a team of pastors to a simple home with mud walls and a grass-thatched roof. I was sharing with a Kenyan man that our hearts are dark with sin but that Jesus was the Light of the World¹¹. I told him that if he invited Jesus into his heart, Jesus would come in with His light and drive the darkness out of him.

This Kenyan man prayed that day to invite Jesus into his heart. We were standing just outside the door of his home, getting ready to leave, but before we left, I asked one of the Kenyan pastors we were training to pray a prayer of thanksgiving. As the pastor was praying, I heard a loud barking sound. I was afraid that a wild animal was attacking us. I quickly opened my eyes to see and hear that this wild, barking sound was coming out of this man who had just given his heart to Jesus. His body was going through all kinds of contortions, and these strange noises were coming from his mouth. As we walked away, the Kenyan pastors with me explained that evil spirits had come out of the man. They had confirmed what I had already been thinking. I had not even known that the man was

¹¹ John 8:12, New International Version.

demon-possessed when I was sharing Christ with him. It was a good lesson for this pastor, who soon became a missionary in countries just north of where we were standing. It is not so much the words and techniques of our prayer when we cast out evil spirits. It is much more the power of the Light of the World. Light and darkness cannot exist in the same place. When light comes in, darkness will flee. God had just confirmed the truth I was sharing with this Kenyan man.

My next confrontation with demon possession came after I had become a global missionary for my denomination, serving in the Horn of Africa. Someone had compromised the security of one of our house churches in a creative access country (CAC). Officials jailed some of our members, while others escaped the CAC, fearing for their lives. Four young Christians - two men and two women - made it into Ethiopia, where we temporarily accommodated them in a safe house. One of the women was a seeker who had not yet given her life to Jesus. She was a troubled young lady. Her mother and her grandmother were both Muslims who engaged in witchcraft. This practice had been in their family for many generations, passing from mother to daughter. This young lady would cry out in pain throughout the night. Night after night, she kept everyone awake, including their disgruntled neighbors. Some of our CAC leaders came to me to report what was taking place in our safe house.

I went with them and found this young lady lying on a mattress on the floor, doubled up in pain, groaning continuously. Although I had not yet heard the story that there was this generational curse in this young woman's family, I was certain upon arrival that this young lady was demon-possessed. Unlike the ease of casting out the demons in the Kenyan man, it was more of a struggle to set this girl free. We continued to demand the evil spirits to come out of this CAC girl in the Name of Jesus. Eventually, freedom came. There was an obvious peace that settled over the girl. She was free for the first time.

Most American Christians believe that demon possession is something you see only in places like Africa (if they believe in demon possession at all). Janet's experience would testify against that belief. I was preaching at revival services in New Hampshire. All week, Janet attended the services. The revival service was her first contact with the people of this church. She seemed like everything was okay with her spiritually until the last night. She came to the altar for prayer. She confessed that she had very little control over her life. She was constantly doing things she did not want to do. She felt like something or someone was controlling her actions, not her. As she shared her need with me, I recognized the symptoms of demon possession. The pastor of the church was a friend of mine. Together, we began to command in the Name of Jesus for the evil spirit(s) to come out of her. Suddenly, this young woman began to speak to us in a very low, growling voice. I looked up to see the congregation all grabbing the back of the pews in front of them, praying intensely. Everyone in the church seemed to know we were in a real spiritual battle. The battle was not ours, however. The battle was the Lord's, and He prevailed. Janet was set free. She no longer was under the control of the enemy. As far as I know, Janet is still free from evil forces within.

Another time, I was in Swaziland, where I had taken two of our Ethiopian leaders to train churches and pastors in putting principles to work to facilitate a Movement of God, like

the movements we had been experiencing in the Horn of Africa. Our leader from the Africa South Field was taking us to various locations for our training. During one of the stops between trainings, we stopped at the home of a church leader he knew. The lady of the house was in the final stage of cancer. The doctor had given her no hope for survival. Our team gathered around her as one of our Ethiopian leaders prayed for healing. Later, our field leader from that area contacted me and told me of the woman's complete healing. She was set free from that dreaded and deadly disease. I saw Jesus at work again.

In my last church in Kansas City, I was preaching one Sunday morning when I noticed a woman I did not recognize. She was sitting toward the back of the congregation. I approached her after the service to greet her and make her feel welcomed to our church. Sandy immediately told me that she wanted to get baptized and join our church. I was surprised to hear such great interest in spiritual things on her first visit to the church. Inquiring into her motives, I found that her doctor had told her that she was in stage 4 of cancer. Her doctor advised her to get things in order because she had only weeks to live. She wanted to make sure that she was right with God before she died. I explained that getting baptized and becoming a church member would not make her right with God. She needed to confess her sins and trust Christ for the forgiveness of those sins. During the membership class, I explained the Gospel more thoroughly. She gave her heart to Jesus and began a walk of faith in Christ. Soon after, Sandy came down the aisle and approached me at the altar on a Sunday morning. I had given an invitation for healing that morning. She came to ask Jesus to heal her of cancer. I laid my hands on her and prayed for healing. A few weeks later, she reported that her doctor's diagnosis had changed. The doctor had reported that the cancer was completely gone.

Sandy had a daughter named Daphne. Both Daphne and her husband were drug addicts. She had five small children that her aunt brought to the church weekly. We all felt great compassion for these children because their home life was a mess. Their parents were so addicted to drugs that they were constantly in trouble with the law. They were either in jail or at home under the influence. Eventually, Sandy and her husband moved out of state to get away from their daughter. Daphne had stolen so much from her mother to support her habit.

One night, Daphne and her husband stole two cars. They wanted to race one another. The police gave pursuit. Daphne's car rolled over, throwing her from the vehicle. The vehicle ended up on top of Daphne, crushing her beneath the load. When word came to her family, they discovered Daphne was in the hospital in a coma. The police went to the hospital to take her into custody so that she would be tried and imprisoned for her crimes after release from the hospital. The doctor told the police that they would be wasting their time. She would most likely die in the hospital, and if by some miracle she would live, she would be a vegetable. Authorities dropped the criminal case against her. Bev and I began to visit the hospital regularly, praying for a miracle. Some from our church joined us. Then, our whole congregation began to consistently intercede for a miracle. On one visit, we noticed Daphne opening her eyes. On another, she began to move her arm. She continued to improve over time. I still remember that day that

Daphne started to talk with Bev and me as we sat at the side of her bed. We shared with Daphne how much Jesus loved her. On one visit, she gave her heart to Jesus. Eventually, she walked out of that hospital, healed both physically and spiritually.

While pastoring at Kansas City Victory Hills Church, we saw many miracles. Some were physical healings. Others were spiritual. Jeremiah had been addicted to drugs, alcohol, and pornography. He gave his heart to Jesus one Palm Sunday morning. He was completely set free and has become one of the most vibrant Christians I know. Megan gave her heart to Jesus in my office one Wednesday morning and was similarly transformed from a life of sin. She is now studying for the ministry. Lyn was in church on one Easter morning. After the message, she stood up and testified that she was “all in” for Jesus from that moment on. Today, she is enrolled in a Bible college and studying for the ministry. Before this time, she had been deep in a life of sin. DeAnn had been following Jesus for years, but during our time at this church, she graduated from Bible college and became an ordained elder in our denomination. Her husband, Stuart, our worship leader, also responded to God’s call during our time and is now studying for ministry and pursuing ordination. Stuart and DeAnn recently accepted a call to co-pastor the Kansas City Victory Hills Church. Their oldest son, Gabe, is attending

one of our denomination’s universities and preparing for youth ministry. Stuart and DeAnn are sensing a future call to be global missionaries. God changed many lives as Bev and I served as pastors of this church. I have mentioned only a few. During our ministry at Victory Hills, we saw a congregation become hungry for more of God. Our Tuesday night prayer meetings became a highlight of the week. Our people were crying out for God’s manifest presence. So many of our people wanted God more than they wanted his blessings. We left Kansas City knowing God was still on the throne, speaking to people and moving in tangible ways.

On the three-week boat trip down the rivers bordering Ethiopia and Sudan, we spent one night in a small village where the Baro and Gilo Rivers join. We showed the Jesus Film to the villagers there, and many believed in Jesus. The next morning, a man came to us as we were breaking camp and preparing to continue down the Gilo River and then on to the Akobo River to the village of Akobo. He asked us to provide medical care to a girl who was inflicted with cholera and was very near death. Many were dying of this disease at the time throughout the area we had been traveling. No doctors or health clinics were available within days of river travel from this village. There had been a medical team that had come down the river some weeks earlier and had left IV packs there for the villagers to use for anyone who came down with cholera. Getting sufficient fluids administered by IV was essential for any hope of recovery from cholera. Either the villagers forgot how to administer these IV packs, or this medical team had failed to train them in this life-saving procedure.

I told the man that we had no training in putting an IV into someone’s arm, but he begged us to do it anyway. He seemed to think that my white skin somehow prepared me for this. Eventually, I told the man I could not start the IV but knew how to pray. I accompanied the man into the village and Rebecca’s simple, thatched-roof home. She was twelve years old at the time. I found her deathly still body lying on the floor and her

mother and father sitting there crying. She was already near death's door. It was apparent to me that Rebecca would not live unless God healed her. I prayed a simple prayer. "Lord, I cannot give her the fluids her body so desperately needs, but you can. Heal her in Jesus' name. Amen." We continued down the river. About a week or so later, we were coming back up the river on our way home. We pulled over to the shore in Rebecca's village to ask how she was doing. Celebration broke out in our boat when the report came that Rebecca was healed entirely and walking around the village.

We saw Jesus do many healings and miracles in Ethiopia. Our church leaders reported signs and wonders regularly. Leaders from one church reported that their pastor had prayed for a Muslim man who had never walked since birth. In response to that prayer, the person with paralysis got up and walked out of the service. After the man stood up and began walking (and dancing in celebration), forty Muslims standing in the back of this outdoor service told the pastor they needed Jesus. One church reported how God completely healed a woman who was dying of HIV/AIDS. Sometimes, mosques would be given over to the church after the imam, and all of the mosque attendees would become followers of Jesus. At other times, whole villages would turn to Jesus. Reports like these were coming to me every week. A similar movement occurred in Southern Sudan, especially in the Nuer tribe. The CAC was seeing an underground church multiplying each year. We have witnessed miracles all over the Horn of Africa, but the flood of persons coming to Christ was the greatest miracle. When my denomination assigned me the leadership of the Horn of Africa, we had approximately 200 persons attending our churches in the Horn. Not many years later, that number grew to 200,000. I found myself living in the Book of Acts. God was writing the 29th chapter before my very eyes. Over and over again, God has shown His hand in my life in dramatic and life-changing ways.

Angels Unaware

One weekend, while living in Puerto Rico, my family and I flew to St. Thomas. After arriving in St. Thomas on a small 6-passenger commuter aircraft, we took a bus into Charlotte Amalie, the capital city. Someone on the bus told us of a guest house where we might be able to secure lodging for the weekend. After getting directions, we began the climb up the mountain on a winding, deserted street. Locals told us that there was a cult in the city that majored in rape and murder. That made us nervous as we unthinkingly searched for the guest house, burdened with our heavy suitcases. After climbing quite a distance, I noticed the panoramic view back down the hill. I could see cruise ships anchored in the bay. The deep blue waters gleamed in the sunshine. It was a beautiful sight.

I had climbed up on a wall along the street to get the best view of the sights below. At that time, Bev spoke to me about an elderly lady waving for us to come to her. She was obviously a native of the island. Thinking that the lady might be angry about me standing on the wall, Bev insisted that I get down and meet her, where she was standing in the middle of the street. I acquiesced. As I approached her, she had a look of concern on her face. She said, "This is a dangerous place. Just yesterday, a family was mugged right here where you are standing. You are a real target, carrying those

suitcases and aimlessly wandering like you are.” I told her we were looking for a guest house where we planned to stay for the night. She pointed to the building we were in front of and said, “That’s it.” I was grateful for her warning and her assistance in finding the guesthouse for us. When I said thank you to the lady, she responded: “Jesus always sends someone to help his people.” Wanting to tell Bev what this lady had just said, I turned away from the lady and looked toward Bev. I told her what the lady had said to me. I turned back to thank the lady, but she was gone. I have no idea how she could have moved out of our sight so quickly. She just disappeared. It did not occur to us then, but later, someone told us she must have been an angel. The Scriptures warn us that we might meet angels and be unaware of their true identity.¹² Just recently, I was commenting to my daughter, Stacia, about how God has rescued me from death so many times. She reminded me of this incident in St. Thomas. There are so many ways that God has communicated with me. He has answered prayers in miraculous ways. God has healed multitudes and given me and others dreams. He has spoken into my heart with clarity. He has helped me in many ways, even by sending an angel.

The Voice of God

Throughout my life, I have heard the voice of God. Sometimes, He would speak so clearly, leaving no doubt about what He was saying. Other times, it was less clear, but instead, just gentle nudging, “This is the way. Walk in it.” Sometimes, I did not recognize it was God speaking until later, like when my grandmother repeatedly told me that I would be a pastor and when that unrecognized presence of God encircled me as I sat under the tree early in the morning at church camp.

When I met my wife, I had no idea God was drawing Bev and me together. Neither of us was a follower of Jesus when we met one night at a bar. After speaking for a moment, I excused myself and prepared to leave. When she said, “Do you have to leave?” I said, “No, I guess not.” That was the beginning of a relationship lasting a lifetime. We have been married now for 56 years. I believe God was active that night in that bar. Even in places you would not expect to find God, He’s there. Neither of us was pursuing God’s will for us that night. We were both very far from Him. Even though I was not a follower, God was leading me, preparing me for a future of following Jesus and a lifetime of ministry. Bev has been the love of my life. No one could be a better lifetime partner. No one could be a better partner in ministry. Bev has been a wonderful wife, mother, grandmother, pastor’s wife, missionary, and friend to many. I am confident God brought us together, although it is only in hindsight that I see how God led us both even before we knew Him.

Jennifer was born one year after we were married. Jen would wake us on Sunday mornings, asking us to attend church. We would occasionally go at her pleadings. She was only 2 or 3 at the time. Bev and I were still without a personal knowledge of Jesus, and Jesus was still speaking to us, now through our young child. We still did not hear Him, but He was talking to us. After Bev and I gave our hearts to Jesus, we were amazed at how God worked in this little girl’s life. Soon after we became Christians, we

¹² Hebrews 13:2, New International Version.

sat in the back row of our new church on a Sunday night. People were giving testimonies. Testimony time was new to us, so you can imagine our surprise when Jen stood up and announced to the church that she could never make it through a day in kindergarten without the Holy Spirit's help. Jen will never know how much she has impacted our spiritual growth in the early years of our walk with Jesus.

I went back to college after Bev and I were married. Bev was a teacher who supported our family as I studied engineering at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Gary and Sandy, our friends from Syracuse, visited us one weekend. During that visit, Sandy shared her testimony with me. She shared that she had a personal relationship with Jesus and that the Bible was the very Word of God. I argued against these two beliefs. I explained to Sandy that having a personal relationship with God was a crazy idea. I told her that the Bible was an excellent book after which to pattern your life, but being inspired by God and His voice speaking to us was stretching it. Although Sandy failed to convince me that night, she did not give up on me. The week after they returned to Syracuse, I found a package from Sandy in the mail. It was a Bible written in contemporary language. I expressed my surprise to Bev that Sandy had sent me this book and tossed it on a table, thinking it would be the last time I would pick it up. However, a few days later, I felt something leading me to pick it up. The Bible drew me in ways that I could not explain. I began to read. I could not stop. I was nearing graduation, yet I read the Bible more than my textbooks. During the evenings, when I walked our dog on campus, I read the Bible under the security lights lining the sidewalks. Lying in bed, I would read late into the night every night. I could not put the Bible down.

The question in my mind was always, "Could this really be the Word of God?" One night, after several months of reading and rereading the entire Bible, God spoke to me. It was unmistakably His voice. It was like a light came on in my inner consciousness, and a voice that was not audible but crystal-clear spoke into my mind. I heard God say, "This is my Word!" I have never doubted the divine inspiration of the Bible since that time. In seminary, I studied the evidence of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. I looked at the external and internal evidence that the Bible was the authentic Word of God. An internet article edited by the Institute for Creation Research states that "the Bible has proven to be more historically and archaeologically accurate than any other ancient book."¹³ In addition to the historical and archaeological evidence for the authenticity of the Bible, hundreds of prophecies recorded in the Scriptures have been fulfilled. Jonathan Berns, in his internet article for the Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries, states:

The Bible is full of Messianic prophecies. Mathematician Peter Stoner counted the probability of one person fulfilling even a small number of them. And he concluded, the chance of a single man fulfilling "just 48 of the prophecies found in the...Old Testament would be one in (10 followed by 157 zeros)!"¹⁴

¹³ Institute for Creation Research. "Historical Accuracy." ICR. 2022.
<https://www.icr.org/biblical-record/>

¹⁴ Berns, Jonathan. "How Many Prophecies Did Jesus Fulfill?" Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries. January 31.

Berns then points to the number of prophecies fulfilled by Jesus alone and states that Jesus has fulfilled “more than 324 prophecies related to the Messiah!”¹⁵ He concludes that “...the probability of one man fulfilling 324 prophecies must be a number beyond comprehension for anyone!”¹⁶

It was helpful to study the comprehensive evidence for the authenticity of the Bible in seminary. Still, none of that surpasses my confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, like that which came through my encounter with God that night. Hearing His voice say so clearly, “This is my Word!” gave me confidence in the Bible that is unshakeable. That night after midnight, God showed up at my bedside and spoke to me. God spoke, and I heard. This time, His voice was clearer than ever before. The devil himself could never talk me out of my confidence in the Bible as God’s Divinely Inspired Word.



From top to bottom: Dr. Shute, Stacia, Bev, and Jen.

A few weeks before God spoke into my heart and mind in this clear and convincing way, I was reading the Gospel of John when I came across these words: “You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”¹⁷ I had read that Scripture several times before, but this time something clicked. I went to Bev and showed it to her. I then reminded her that we had been trying unsuccessfully to have a second child for over three years. Neither of us had committed to Christ then, but I boldly challenged her, “Let’s put it to the test. Let’s ask in Jesus’ name for another baby.” Bev and I knelt at the side of our bed. Jen knelt with us. We prayed simply, “Jesus, in your name, we ask for another child.” Before we could say, “Amen,” Jen added, “And, Jesus, make it a sister.” Ten months later, Jen got her sister. Stacia came into our family. She was an answer to prayer. Bev and I were still in the seeking mode, but even so, God spoke again.

My faith in the Word of God was approaching the crescendo that came when God spoke that clear word to me, “This is my Word!”

Meeting God & Life After Christ

With my faith firmly planted in the Scriptures, I began to see that I was a sinner who desperately needed God’s forgiveness. I noticed that Jesus took my sins upon Himself on the cross, where He died in my place. I made the leap of faith and trusted Him for my salvation. At this time, I graduated from RIT and accepted a position as a manufacturing

2015. <https://firmisrael.org/learn/how-many-prophecies-did-jesus-fulfill/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John 14:14, New International Version.

engineer with Transmation, Inc. After six months, my boss promoted me to the company's Production Control Manager, and I began my twelve-year career in manufacturing. At the same time that I began employment with this company, we moved out of married student housing and into a home in the northern part of the city. Before our move, I told Bev that we needed to find a church on our first Sunday in our new home. Although I was a believer then, Bev had not yet taken that step of faith.

On our first Sunday, we left our home with our target church in mind. There was a prominent Methodist Church close to our house where we planned to go. However, we found no one when we arrived at the church in time for the 11 AM worship hour. The church was empty, and there were no signs or anything else indicating why a service had not been planned for that Sunday. Later, we discovered that the church had met for worship at nearby Lake Ontario that Sunday. However, that morning, we continued our search for a church. When we arrived at Trinity Church of the Nazarene, we noticed worship began at 10:45 AM on their sign. We were a half hour late by then, so we decided not to go in. When we left for home, I told Bev that I had never heard of the Church of the Nazarene. Fearing that this church might not suit us, we decided not to return there next Sunday. We would find another church instead. I am unsure why, but when Sunday came around again, we got in the car and drove back to Trinity. I was overwhelmed with the presence of God that Sunday. After the morning worship service, I came out of the church and told Bev that this was our church for life. Bev and I have been members of this denomination ever since. It has been 50 years since that first Sunday, and we have found that God has used this denomination to help us grow in our relationship with Jesus and has given us many opportunities to serve Him in the USA and abroad.

Not many weeks after our move to our new home and our involvement in our new church, we were lying in bed, listening to Pat Robertson on the radio. He was sharing the Gospel with his radio audience. He asked those who prayed with him to receive Jesus to call into his program and report their commitment to follow Jesus. Bev spoke up and said, "Howie, should I call in? I just asked Jesus to come into my heart." We have followed Jesus together ever since that night. God has called us into many areas of ministry. We agreed to follow His call each time God called us to move into a different assignment.

I had been working at Transmation for five years and had a promising future with this company when Charlotte, one of my crucial production planners, came into the office and announced that she had seen my new job in the newspaper. She said that I was the perfect candidate for the position in manufacturing planning for Pall Trinity Micro Corp in Cortland, New York. As a matter of curiosity, I read the want-ad that she had cut out of the paper. I had not planned on leaving my current company, but I sent off a resume to test the waters. That led to an interview and a job offer. This new assignment came with great potential. After several rapid promotions, I began as a production planner and became the Manufacturing Manager for all filter housings made by this high-tech, ultrafine-filtration manufacturer. I was responsible for all manufacturing areas, including planning, purchasing, warehousing, production control, production, and shipping. Only engineering and sales were outside my purview. I was responsible for the bottom line:

profit and loss for any corporation. I gained significant experience building teams and equipping these teams to meet corporate goals. My financial future was promising, and I loved my job. The company's president informed me that a promotion to Vice President of Manufacturing was imminent. In retrospect, I came to realize that it was the Lord that prompted Charlotte to cut out that want-ad. There was no explanation for her actions, leading me to leave my job in Rochester and go to another job in Cortland. I know now it was God speaking to me through Charlotte. He led me to this new assignment to further prepare for the mission ahead. In Cortland, I gained valuable experience in building, equipping, and mobilizing teams to accomplish the objectives of an organization.

I also gained my first cross-cultural experience during my years at Pall Trinity. Our company owned a subsidiary company that manufactured filters in Puerto Rico. Our plant there had long-term problems delivering quality products on time. I was assigned the responsibility to resolve the issues occurring at this plant. This assignment sent me on frequent trips to Puerto Rico. Eventually, we had to terminate the president of this company. It became my responsibility to hire a new president and to run this subsidiary in the interim. Eventually, I moved to Puerto Rico with my family to fulfill these responsibilities. Although living there for only a few months was necessary, Bev and I had our first cross-cultural experience.

God's Calling to Preach the Gospel

After Pall Trinity's President had told me that he was promoting me to Vice President of Manufacturing, the voice of God began to break through once again. Amid a successful career in manufacturing management, I heard the still, small voice speaking to me about giving my life to full-time ministry. The thought that I would be a pastor was in my mind continuously. Over and over again, the word, pastor, filled my consciousness. I told Bev that I thought that God was calling me to be a pastor. She was doubtful and thought I was having a midlife crisis. She told me that she had just read a book about the mid-life crisis for men when they reached 40. I was 39 at the time.

Nevertheless, the voice was always there. I had not heard a complete sentence, nor even a phrase. It was just the word, pastor, staying with me at every turn. At first, I would tell Bev I was 30% sure that God was calling me to pastor. After a week or two, it was 40%, then 50%. Eventually, I announced to Bev that I was 90% sure that I was hearing the voice of God calling me to leave my manufacturing career and give the rest of my life to preaching the Gospel. She persisted in her belief that this was a mid-life crisis that I was going through. She was not being disobedient to the call; she truly believed that I was going through this crisis that so many men experienced at my age.

Our church had a week of revival services planned at that time. Bev and I attended, and on the first night, I went to the altar after the message. While at the altar, Jesus confirmed the call. I returned to my seat and told Bev, "I am 100% sure that God is calling me to preach." Bev responded, "He has not said anything to me yet." The next night, we were back in the revival services again. That night, my Aunt Jane attended with us. She was a very vibrant Christian in another denomination but had accepted our invitation to attend with us. Bev was working in the nursery that night. At the close of the

service, my aunt turned to me and said she had something to tell me. Although over 37 years have passed, I still remember her words distinctly. She shared with me that night:

Howie, it was after we were at your home recently that I could not sleep. For some reason, you were on my mind. I was worried about you and did not know why. Then I heard God say to me so clearly, "Do not worry about Howie. He is going to be a pastor." I said, "What, Lord? And He repeated it, "Do not worry about Howie. He is going to be a pastor." I did not know what to do. How could I tell you that God was telling me that you were going to be a pastor? But tonight, I just feel that I need to ask you. Do you have a call?

As I stood there with tears running down my face, I saw Bev. She had finished her nursery duties and was coming into the sanctuary. I said to my aunt, "Tell Bev." She repeated the story to Bev. As she turned toward me, Bev said, "Let's pack our bags. We are going to seminary." By that summer, at 40 years of age, we were in Kansas City, and I had begun my theological preparation for ministry. I later realized that God had been preparing me for ministry since my grandmother announced that I would be a pastor.

God was using everything up to that time to prepare me for His calling on my life. My career in manufacturing taught me that a profitable bottom line is the goal. In the corporate world, the bottom line is profit. The bottom line for Kingdom business was "souls" and making disciples for Jesus. As a new pastor and later as a missionary, I used the bottom-line strategy in organizing my ministry action plans. Everything was about the bottom line. How can we see God's Kingdom grow by making more disciples and multiplying vibrant churches for Jesus?

A Somali friend has told me more than once that my military service and combat duty in Vietnam was one of God's ways to prepare me for ministry in CACs. He tells me frequently that it has made me a courageous man, ready to face the dangers and risks of a chaotic country. I had never really thought about God using my experiences in Vietnam to prepare me for ministry, but in hindsight, I have repeatedly seen that God does not waste anything. When I think that I have finally reached a place of ministry for which God has prepared me, then I find that this place of ministry is actually preparation for my next assignment. My business experience and military service were preparing me to be a pastor. Later, I saw that pastoring was a preparation for being an effective missionary.

When Bev had so enthusiastically announced that we were off to seminary, I was unsure. By then, my heart was burning with a desire to begin my pastoral ministry. I was ready to take a church of any size, no matter how small. I did not want to study for three years before I began pastoral ministry. Instead, I could prepare for ministry through the course of study offered by my denomination while pastoring a church at the same time. When I sent off an application to the seminary, I applied for the Course of Study Program at the same time. I waited for the textbooks to arrive from our district for the longest time. Finally, at a district assembly, I saw the pastor responsible for sending out the materials for this course of study and enrolling me in the program. He apologized for

forgetting about me and said he would send the materials next week. They never came. No matter how hard I pushed, nothing for this course of study showed up. I began to see that the Lord was speaking to me once again. It became evident that He was closing a door that He did not want me to walk through. We moved to Kansas City, where I began to study in the Masters of Divinity Degree Program at our denominational Seminary. Within a few short weeks at seminary, the Lord had confirmed in my heart that I was right in the center of His will.

While in seminary, I took every personal evangelism course offered. I had said yes to God's call to ministry with one caveat. I had told the Lord if I was going to be a pastor, I had to be able to share my faith effectively with others and to be able to train the people I pastored to do the same. I was always frustrated in my twelve years as a layman in the church. I had been a board member, Sunday school teacher, and whatever else I needed to do. I had served in so many offices of the church. I had even been the Director of Outreach and Evangelism in one church. Yet I had hardly ever shared with others how I had met Jesus and how they could become followers of Jesus. So, I told Jesus, "I will give my life to preach the Gospel, but you have to help me share my faith with others on a personal level and help me to train those that I pastor to share their faith." I could not bear being a pastor of a church full of laity that had this same frustration that I had carried for those twelve years before my call.

I was partly through my first personal evangelism course in seminary when a team of personal evangelism trainers invited me to go with them to Arkansas, where we would be training the pastor and the people in his church on how to share their faith in Christ with others. Some classroom training takes place, but much of the training occurs in people's homes, where we put classroom instruction into practice and share our faith with people who need Jesus. I remember my anxiety when Beverly Burgess, the team leader, assigned me to train the pastor. I was the least experienced person on the team and had not yet finished my first personal evangelism course at the seminary. In hindsight, I saw the Lord's wisdom in throwing me into the place where I needed Him to carry out this ministry assignment.

Ministry has always been more about Him than me, anyway. I have learned not to say my ministry. Instead, it is all about His ministry. I realized again that I could do nothing without God working through me. I have discovered that dependency on the Lord is the key to successful ministry for Him. I finished the assignment and was thrilled to see God use me this way. I remember one girl, one of my trainees, said to me after we left the home where we shared the Gospel, "Howie, I gave my heart to Jesus while you were sharing Jesus with these people. I realized for the first time that I had been trusting in my good works and not in Jesus alone. I now only trust what Jesus did for me on the cross." That was exciting to hear and a valuable lesson for me. Many who are in the church think that they are Christians, and yet they have not ever come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. This experience was an essential lesson for anyone preparing to lead churches. God is always speaking. I have learned that I need to be constantly listening.

The three years in seminary were good years for me. Most of my classmates were younger than me. They worked full-time jobs to help support their families and then used the left-over time for their studies. I focused on study. Bev taught in a Christian school in Kansas City to support our family, and Gary and Sandy (who helped point me to the Lord) paid my tuition each year. I loved the disciplines of biblical studies and theology. I not only learned the necessary academic disciplines in seminary, but I also grew in my relationship with Jesus during those years. Jen lived at home with us during my first year at seminary. After that, she was off to college. Only Stacia (our miracle girl) was with us through the three years we spent in Kansas City.

God's Calling to Our First Church

Having lived most of our lives in the northeast, Bev and I hoped to get our first church somewhere south of Washington, DC. We had enough of the snowy, long winters of Central New York. Syracuse is known as the snowiest city in the country. Having lived there most of my life, I was ready for sunny Florida or somewhere else with a mild climate. So, when I received a phone call during my last semester of seminary from our denominational superintendent in the Upstate New York District, asking me if I would consider being the Lead Pastor in Lowville, New York, I was far from enthusiastic to give thought to this assignment. Lowville, just off Tug Hill, was one of the snowiest places in North America. I told him I would pray and call him back within a week. In my mind, I would probably decline the invitation at the end of the week. Bev was not very enthusiastic about living in this renowned winter wonderland either. After the week had passed, I reluctantly called the district superintendent and told him that I was at least willing to interview with the church.

The church was in a rural part of the state in a dying county. More people were leaving the county than were moving in each year. The demographics were not very promising, but after my interview, I knew that God was calling us there to be their pastor. I called Bev immediately after the interview and told her that these were our people. After I got home that evening, Bev told me she knew that was where God was calling us as soon as she heard the town's name. Bev has always had the gift of discernment. She is God's gift to me in so many ways. One of those ways is that I often lack the gift of discernment, while she adds this gift to our partnership.

After my return to Kansas City, I had my first serious auto accident. It happened the next afternoon after my return from Lowville. I had finished my classes for the day and was driving across town to pick Bev up from the school where she taught. A vehicle moving at high speeds broadsided my car. The lady driver was attempting to escape from two other accidents that she had caused just before hitting me. I never saw her coming. The impact sent me through the driver-side window into the side view mirror. My head smashed the mirror into a shriveled-up ball of metal, with some of the mirror glass driven inside my forehead. Besides some broken ribs, my face was a mess. I was scheduled for plastic surgery the following day. That morning, I heard that the Lowville church had unanimously voted to invite us to be their pastor, but I still had not told the district superintendent I would accept the offer.

As the orderly wheeled me into the operating room, I told Bev to call the DS and tell him I would accept the call to pastor this church. She tried to convince me that I could call myself after the operation, but I insisted that she make the call immediately. I knew this was where God was calling us, and I felt a sense of urgency to get that word back to the DS and the church. It was at this church where God healed both of Gretchen's kidneys and raised the brain-dead young man back to life. So many healings took place there. It was there that I trained lay people in how to share their faith. Many came to Christ through this evangelism ministry. It was God who was at work through it all. He was putting me to use in that ministry and simultaneously, continuing my preparation for the ministry that was yet to come.

A Missionary Call with a Three-Year Detour

Not only did we evangelize in the Lowville area, but I took some of our evangelism teams to Syracuse to train the laity in a local church there. That led to taking some of our lay persons to Puerto Rico and training local churches throughout the island. Then, we traveled to Kenya and trained churches to share their faith. As we began this personal evangelism training ministry in global mission areas, I began to feel like God was calling me to be a missionary. As Bev and I prayed about this possible calling, the Lord filled our hearts with a passion to serve as missionaries. We felt especially drawn to Africa. We trusted that God would make a way for this passion to become a reality.

While expecting God to fulfill our desire to be missionaries in Africa, God moved in a completely different direction. I heard that unmistakable voice again. This time, the word was not "Pastor," nor was it "Missionary," as I might have expected at that time. Over and over again, days in and days out, I heard, "Denver." When I told Bev that God was speaking to me about Denver, she was far from enthusiastic. She said, "We are not moving there. We are from the east coast. Our family is here. Let it be somewhere between here and Florida if we are moving." Jen was living with us at the time. When I told her what I thought God was saying to me, she told me that if we moved there, we would go alone. She did not want to leave New York.

God was relentless. The voice did not stop speaking. "Denver...Denver...Denver." That's all I heard, but I was just as confused as Bev. Denver was to our west. We thought that we were going east to Africa.

Then I had a dream. Seldom had God spoken to me in dreams, especially up to this time, but this dream was so clear and memorable.

I was at the airport. I showed my boarding pass to the agent standing at the door, then proceeded down the jetway. I came to an intersection where I had to go either left or right. Not knowing which direction to take, I yelled back to the agent, "Which way should I go, left or right?" She responded, "Go left for Miami or go right for Los Angeles."

I awoke in confusion. I blurted out to the Lord, “Oh, please, not Miami. Not Los Angeles. I do not want to live in either of those places.” I shared the dream with Bev, but neither of us thought much more of the dream after that.

*One day, I got a phone call. It was from a pastor in Colorado. He said that his church in Westminster, Colorado, wanted me to come and interview for an Associate Pastor position with the responsibilities of lay development, evangelism, and missions. He said the church was growing quickly but needed help in these areas. My interest was piqued when I asked him where Westminster was located in Colorado, and he replied that Westminster was a suburb in the Metropolitan **Denver** area. At the time, I had no interest in serving as an associate pastor. I loved being a lead pastor and felt the call to be a missionary, but there was that word – Denver. I told him that I would give him a call within a week. I knew that was where God was calling us, but I needed to discuss this with Bev first. That evening, I told Bev about the call from Denver. I was surprised when she responded that she thought that sounded like a nice place to live. What? Had she not told me earlier that she would never live there.*

That night, we sat with Jen and shared the call from Denver with her. Again, the response was, “That sounds like a nice place to live.” It is amazing how God can change our hearts to conform with His will. I called the pastor and said we would be glad to interview.

The church sent us two airline tickets to fly from Syracuse to Denver. The first flight was to Chicago O'Hare. When arriving in Chicago, Bev went to the gate while I found the men's room. Bev was sitting at the gate when I finally reached there. Then, the whole airport became silent (in my mind, anyway). I saw a sign flashing over Bev's head, indicating the destination of our next flight. It was flashing, “Los Angeles.” There, amid total silence and no one moving, I heard the voice of God so clearly, not audibly, but so distinct that I would never forget it, “This is what I was trying to tell you in that dream. Get on the plane to Los Angeles because it will stop in Denver”. The dream flooded back into my mind. God was confirming his call upon our lives even before we arrived in Denver, even before the start of the interview process. Denver was where He wanted us. We wanted Africa. He wanted Denver. We have discovered that His will is always the best.

We interviewed with the church board on Saturday, and I preached during the Sunday night service. The board would meet after the Sunday night service to vote on whether they would call us to their church. However, on Saturday (the day before), Bev and I went out with a realtor to look at housing possibilities. Although we intended to find an apartment, we actually bought a house. The pastor was shocked when I told him we had purchased a home. He said, “Howie, the church board has not voted on this yet.” I am sure he thought I had poor judgment and maybe I was not the right candidate for the job. Here I go again, diving into the deep end before I knew how to swim. However, I was never surer of anything than I was that God was calling us here to this church for this time. The pastor was quite relieved when the church board voted unanimously to extend the call to us.

We spent three years in Denver. The church in Westminster was good for us, and I believe we were good for them. We saw the laity become better equipped and mobilized for ministry. We called weekly in the homes of new attendees, both with visitation and evangelism teams. We saw many give their lives to Jesus during those three years. Again, we took evangelism teams from this church to various global mission areas, especially in the Caribbean and African countries of Kenya and Tanzania. The more I traveled on these short-term mission trips, the more I felt called to the mission field and the more that Africa beckoned. I became frustrated with this passion during our second year at this church. I had to be a missionary, yet I was still in the USA. One of the issues that further frustrated me was that my denomination had an age limit, where you had to be through training, language school, and on the mission field before age 35. I was now 50. I had spoken to one of our general superintendents at the time, who had himself served as a missionary in our church. I told him of my frustration. His advice was to fill out a missionary application, despite the age limit, and see what might happen.

One day, I called the church office and told them I would not be in today. As I hung up the phone, I sat at the edge of my bed and told the Lord I would not move from this spot until He told me what His desire was for my life. I wanted to know if Bev and I were to serve as missionaries. I told Him I could not go on until I knew His will. At that moment, I saw a magazine lying on the floor. It was the monthly mission publication of our denomination. As I picked it up, I noticed its publication date was several years earlier. I did not know how it had gotten there. We had been in Denver for nearly three years, and I do not remember seeing it before. I scanned the table of contents and discovered an article by John Seaman, a missionary in Africa at the time. I could not believe the title of the article. I remember little of the article's content, but the title has always stuck with me: "The Pastor Who Thought He Was Too Old for the Mission Field." The voice returned, "I am calling you to the mission field."

The Horn of Africa & a Movement of God



Dr. Howie F. Shute preaching to members of the Sidama people of Ethiopia.

I took the advice of the general superintendent, who told me to fill out an application. A few months later, we landed in Nairobi, Kenya, for a month of orientation. On Christmas Day in 1997, we arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where we would live for eleven years. At first, I served as the Mission Coordinator for the Horn of Africa, which included the six countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea. I coordinated church development

and compassionate ministries in these counties. I reported to the Africa East Field Director in Nairobi, Kenya. My mission area was a part of the East Field. After the church multiplication movement began, the Horn of Africa (HOA) became its own field, and I became the HOA Field Director (later renamed Field Strategy Coordinator). The eleven years in the Horn were astonishing. It was indeed a Book of Acts Movement that we experienced: miracles, healings, thousands coming to the Lord every year, and an

explosive multiplication of churches.¹⁸ Bev and I have often said that these were some of the best years of our lives.

In Ethiopia, I became interested, even passionate, in Islamic ministry. This passion for Muslims was in stark contrast to my attitude about Islam before coming to the Horn of Africa and is a credit to God's incredible work in my life. When I filled out the application to become a missionary for our denomination, a question asked, "Where would you not be willing to serve as a missionary?" My response was, "Anywhere where there were Muslims." I answered in this way because I thought that Muslims seldom converted to Christ. I had heard horror stories from missionaries who had served their whole lives among Muslims and were still praying for their first conversion. I wanted to see people get saved and become dynamic followers of Jesus. Although I had heard how difficult it was to convert a Muslim, I found in the Horn of Africa a constant flow of Muslims coming to Jesus as their Savior.

While living in Denver, I began studying in a Doctor of Ministry Degree Program. That was interrupted by our move to Africa. However, during my first years of ministry in Ethiopia, I took a Doctor of Ministry¹⁹ course in the Quran. I became fascinated with the Quran. Albeit not inspired by God, there was enough in this book to lead someone to Jesus, although not enough to make them a genuine disciple.

God is up to Something in a CAC



Dr. Howie and Bev Shute in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

God was moving throughout Ethiopia and South Sudan. The exponential growth of Jesus' followers occurred, and many from an Islamic background became genuine disciples of Christ. When a Somali leader (who has become a close friend over the years) came to me and asked if we could expand the ministry of our church into a specific CAC, I was primed and ready for such an expansion. This leader planted our denomination's first underground church in that CAC in that first year. He planted this church with the right DNA for our church's multiplication strategy. The following year, we had three such churches. The next nine. The following eighteen. Then twenty-five. Even

¹⁸ I have written three books on this Movement of God in the Horn of Africa. You will find in the pages of these books a more complete account of many of the stories mentioned herein. The titles of these books are: "Revival Fires: The Horn of Africa Story," "Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa," and "Mursi: Reaching the Unreached of Ethiopia." See the bibliography for publication details.

¹⁹ I did not complete my study in the Doctor of Ministry Program because of the demanding responsibilities in leading the work of our denomination in the six countries of the Horn of Africa. However, I was honored by Africa Nazarene University with an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree for my service to the Church in Africa.

today, the Church in this CAC continues to expand rapidly.

An estimated 500 underground house churches, fellowships, and Bible study groups exist. However, these underground gatherings have not been confirmed to our satisfaction. Currently, only 150 of them have been verified. Because of the lack of security in this CAC, verifying all reported house churches is impossible. I have been amazed as I have watched with interest what God is doing in this CAC. To have had the opportunity to be personally involved in the expansion and development of this CAC Church has been one of the greatest privileges that God has granted me.

Although the Church's explosive growth in Sudan and Ethiopia was much more tremendous in raw numbers, This CAC has always been one of my favorite ministries. The CAC's believers have a level of commitment that I have rarely seen elsewhere, especially in countries where people are free to practice their commitment to Christ publicly without fear of reprisal. Believers from this CAC experience significant persecution for their faith in Christ. They frequently lose their families, their livelihoods, and sometimes even their lives. Radicals have beheaded many believers from this CAC for their refusal to denounce Jesus Christ as their Savior. My CAC brothers and sisters deeply challenge me. God has used them to speak into my life and impact me in challenging ways. Who I am today is in an excessive part due to their example of their self-sacrificing, dead-to-self commitment to Christ and His Church.

Leaving the Horn for an Africa Region Assignment



Dr. Howie F. Shute losing a jumping competition to a Maasai warrior in Kenya.

After eleven years of providing leadership in the Horn of Africa, my leadership assigned me a new role as Assistant to the Africa Regional Director. This latest assignment necessitated a move to Johannesburg, South Africa. Bev and I left Ethiopia and the Horn in December 2008. Laying down our responsibilities was one of the hardest things we have ever done. I had so enjoyed my responsibilities in church multiplication and development. Leading a team of missionary leaders, district superintendents, and pastors

was what God had prepared me for.

Bev was our field finance coordinator, training and auditing the many districts in the six Horn of Africa countries, and overseeing field finance in multiple currencies. Additionally, Bev oversaw the daily administrative operations of the field office. My church planting and development responsibilities required a great deal of travel, so Bev assisted me in my administrative duties in the field office. She was also our most effective Bible teacher in the Bible college we established in the Horn. Additionally, Bev kept in constant communication with donors and the sending church. Her impact on the Church in the Horn of Africa was significant. But now, all of that was behind us. Our new assignments would occupy our time and energy for the next three years.

In Johannesburg, Bev became the Personnel Coordinator for all of Africa. She worked with the Regional Director on personnel issues for all our missionaries across the continent. My assignment was to assist the Regional Director in training and mobilizing the African Church in church multiplication and development. Once again, I was on the road (or in the air), meeting with missionaries, district superintendents, and pastors. I was traveling throughout the continent. What a privilege God had given me to experience the rich diversity of the African people and the dynamic churches of that beloved continent.



Dr. Howie F. Shute meeting with Bume people in South Omo Region of Ethiopia.

Applying the church multiplication principles that had worked in the Horn of Africa in other African countries resulted in explosive growth around the continent. This growth was especially true in West Africa. After a field training conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, we began to experience incredible growth in several West African countries, especially in Benin. Although I enjoyed my responsibilities in this

assignment, I missed working with a team consistently. In the Horn of Africa, I met regularly with missionaries and district superintendents, training, encouraging, and mobilizing them for the mission. In this new assignment, I was with a group of leaders for one week and, the following week, with another group. My impact on a particular ministry team was brief and intermittent. I missed working with my team in the Horn of Africa and the movement of God that had taken place there.

Return to the USA & Lead Pastor Responsibilities

Bev and I began to feel that our time as global missionaries was ending. The Lord began to impress us that it was time for us to return to the USA. We felt we needed to spend time with family and prioritize prayer in our lives. God had given us an opportunity to purchase a house in Arizona at a great price the year before we left Africa. So, when the time came, we moved to Surprise, Arizona, in September 2011. However, we were still under a Global Mission contract for an additional year with the assignment to travel across the USA and Canada, telling the story about the Book of Acts Movement that had taken place in the Horn of Africa.

We retired from Global Missions in September 2012. Even after retirement, I traveled, speaking at missionary conventions, revivals, and prayer conferences. These travels lasted three years. Then God called Bev and me back to the pastoral ministry. For five and a half years, I was the Lead Pastor at the Victory Hills Church, where God moved in the miraculous ways I previously mentioned. Although Bev and I look back to our days as missionaries as some of the best days of our lives, we also speak of our days at Victory Hills similarly.

Ministry Continues into Retirement

In April 2020, after five and a half years in Kansas City, we returned to Surprise, Arizona. We sold our first home there and purchased a large home with an attached efficiency apartment. Our daughter, Stacia, and her family live in the big house. Bev and I live in the attached apartment. We also have a shared kitchen and other areas in this home. This works perfectly for us since we spend four months each year in our lake cabin in Northern New York. Spending time with my daughter and her family has been a great privilege, including living in the same house as our youngest grandson. He is currently nine years old and an absolute joy to be around. We believe this opportunity is God's gift to us, making up for lost time with family over the years of our active ministry as missionaries and pastors.

After we left Ethiopia in 2008, the Church endured extended years of struggle. Some leadership issues led to conflict and division in the Church. Although reconciliation occurred several years ago between the senior leaders in conflict, hurt still needs healing throughout the Church. Over these last three years, I have had the privilege to travel back to Ethiopia to encourage and pray with our pastors and other leaders. The people of our churches in the Horn of Africa see me as the "Father of the Horn of Africa Church." This title is very humbling and also challenges me to fulfill my responsibilities as a father.

Just over a year ago, I returned from my last trip to Ethiopia. I had spent one month of ministry to the people in the Church in Ethiopia, South Sudan, and a CAC. It was the National Board of the Church in Ethiopia that had extended the invitation to me. They wanted the father of the earlier church planting movement to return to Ethiopia to inspire and encourage them to see the earlier movement of God revived. It makes me very nervous when someone speaks to me like I am someone special. Recently, a visiting pastor in our church said he knows me because of my reputation. He said, "You are famous." It is a real challenge to remain humble when God moves through your ministry in extraordinary ways. The movement of God in the Horn of Africa was all God. He privileged me to be a small part of it. And anything I might have done to inspire such a movement was God working through me. It was a Movement of God, nothing more and nothing less.

While in Ethiopia on this last visit, I had an opportunity to spend time with some Somali leaders from several denominations. They had begun a non-denominational, non-sectarian, and not-for-profit Christian organization to further promote the mission to the Somali people. This organization is known as the Somali Bible Society (SBS). The SBS is a member of the United Bible Societies and works in cooperation with Bible Societies worldwide.

Unlike the mission strategy of most Christian ministries working in Somalia, SBS operates with an open platform. The Somali Bible Society has been registered in Somalia, which is a miracle of its own, and is involved in a host of ministries, including the translation of the Bible into the contemporary native tongue of the Somali people and the distribution of the Bible in a safe and secure manner to the masses. The SBS is

also involved in widows and orphans ministry, a mission to the nomadic people of Somalia, literacy training, education for children, trauma healing for persecuted Christians, resourcing local churches of all denominations, training pastors, and various other ministries.

I spent time with some of our CAC leaders. It is impressive to hear that the movement of God, albeit underground, is continuing there. Churches are still multiplying each year. The leaders envision the day that the Church in this CACA comes above ground. A Bible Society has been established and registered in this CAC, a miracle of its own.

Two years before this last visit to Ethiopia, the Executive Board of the Somali Bible Society extended an invitation to me to take on the role of Founder and Executive Director of a 501c3 organization to be registered in the USA with the charter to raise funds for the SBS and their ministries. After praying about this request, I did not feel the Lord's release to accept. I told them they should ask someone else to fulfill this responsibility. Subsequently, I forgot about the Somali Bible Society's desire to start a 501c3 organization in the USA. Then, during this latest visit to the Horn, I asked the General Secretary of the SBS who they had asked to establish and direct this non-profit organization. He responded, "No one. We have not even asked anyone else to consider it.

The SBS Board said they are not clear on having anyone else take on this responsibility except for you." These words stuck in my mind over the next few days. Two years had lapsed, and they had not even considered another to take on this responsibility. They were waiting for me. Again, I prayed. After about a week, the Lord gave me that release I had been looking for two years earlier. I informed the Somali Bible Society's Executive Board that I would take on this responsibility with God's help.

In the closing week of my visit to Ethiopia, I had the opportunity to be a speaker at a Trauma Healing Conference with persecuted Christians from various denominations. There were 15 believers present, all of whom had gone through great persecution as believers in Somalia. Trauma is a common experience for followers of Christ in this very Gospel-resistant nation.

One of those present in this trauma healing conference had nearly lost his head for Christ. His persecutors had him pinned down while they took a knife to his neck. They began cutting. Somehow, he was able to break free and run from his persecutors. They pursued him and stabbed him in the back as he was fleeing. He did escape, but the mental anguish of this experience caused long-standing trauma. He gave his testimony at the conference. What surprised me is that he never mentioned his near-death experience. Instead, he spoke of the terrible trauma that he experienced when his family deserted him when he became a Christian. He told how he had nowhere to turn for support. He could not turn to his family, or his friends, or the police, or the courts. He was all alone.²⁰ For him, someone taking a knife to his neck and stabbing him in the back was less traumatic than having nowhere to turn for help. We talk about religious

²⁰ At the time, this young man had no contact with other believers.

persecution in our country, but we have no idea what others are going through when they give their lives to Jesus. I certainly know nothing of persecution like this. I have never experienced trauma like almost every one of my Somali brothers and sisters have. To be able to make even a small contribution to the mission to Somalis is the least that I can do.

God helped me to register a 501c3 organization called My Father's Work, DBA Somali Bible Society Network. This has allowed the SBS to raise funds in the USA from tax-deductible gifts from interested donors. After that, the Somali Bible Society Executive Board asked me to serve as the Director of Development for their organization. My responsibilities include the development of both financial and human resources. I do not feel especially gifted for this responsibility. I believe any positive outcomes will be attributed to God's work rather than mine. I understand that God has not called me to fully retire; instead, I am being led to continue preaching the Gospel in my later years.

My Greatest Desire

I am absolutely amazed that God desires to partner with me to accomplish His Kingdom's goals. He does not need me, but He desires to partner with me in His work (as He does for all that follow Jesus). I am so privileged that He has used me over the years and that even now in my retirement years, I can still be used by the Lord. As much as I want to serve Him, my greatest desire is to know Him. While serving as the Lead Pastor in Kansas City at the Victory Hills Church, God began a more profound work in me. I developed a greater desire to just be with Him. I still wanted to serve Him, but my primary goal was to know Him more intimately. I began seeking after God in His manifest presence with greater intention. My early morning time with the Lord became essential and a more incredible blessing than ever. I began to desire God more than I desired His blessings. I have always been thrilled to see Jesus perform miracles, but now I desire the Miracle Worker Himself more than the miracles He performs. I can genuinely say that at this stage in my life, I desire greater intimacy with God more than anything else. It is good to be used by the Lord, but knowing Him more deeply is the greatest.²¹ The Apostle Paul said it best:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him....I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of His resurrection and participation in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death..."²²

It is not that I have reached some superior level of spirituality. Paul's words still challenge me and, to be honest, make me a little nervous. Wanting to share in the sufferings of Christ is a bit scary. And yet, the Apostle has captured my great desire to

²¹ I also believe that the more you know God, the more that you can be used by Him. Our service to God truly flows out of our personal relationship with Him.

²² Philippians 3:7-10, New International Version.

know Jesus more intimately in his words. More than anything, I desire to know Christ and see my children, grandchildren, family, and friends (and those to whom God calls me) experience intimacy with Jesus.

Conclusion

I am 78 at the writing of my story, and God is not done with me yet. I am pursuing God as my highest goal. My first priority is knowing Him and becoming more like Him. And out of greater intimacy with Him, I will give myself to serve Him as the Spirit leads me. The Lord calls me to another assignment whenever I think retirement is at hand. He keeps impressing me that it is not my capability that He is looking for, but my availability. Until my last breath, I will seek God and make myself available for Him. I am so blessed to have a life partner that feels the same way. Bev is always with me. As long as God speaks to us, we will follow! We have been on a remarkable journey filled with both joy and challenge. Throughout it all, we have experienced God's faithfulness and provision in countless ways. We've seen lives transformed, hearts healed, and miracles unfold right before our eyes. Our trust in Him has only deepened as we've witnessed His power and love in action. As we look ahead, we are excited about what God has in store for us. We are open to wherever He leads us, ready to embrace new adventures and opportunities to be a light in this world.

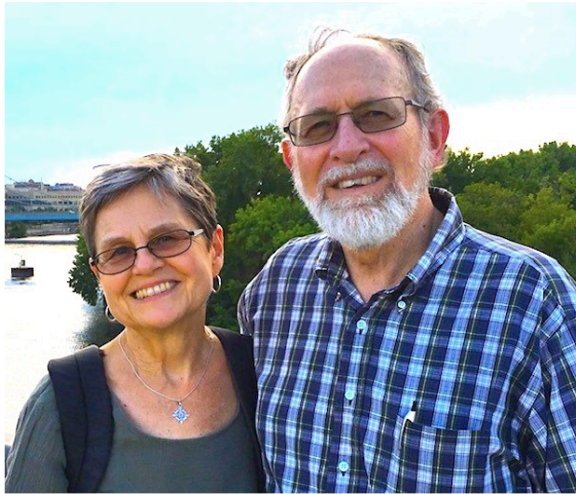
Our hearts overflow with gratitude for the incredible journey we've been on, and we eagerly anticipate the chapters yet to be written. In every season, we will continue to seek God with all our hearts, knowing that He is the source of our strength and the guide for our path. We stand firm in our commitment to serve Him wholeheartedly, trusting that His plans for us are good and that He will bring them to fruition in His perfect timing. We are so grateful for the unwavering support and encouragement of our friends and family, who have walked alongside us through the highs and lows of this journey. Their love has been a constant source of strength and comfort, and we are deeply thankful for each and every one of them. As we press onward, we do so confidently, knowing that God's promises are true and He will never leave nor forsake us. With hearts full of hope and anticipation, we eagerly await the next chapter of our lives, ready to faithfully follow wherever He may lead us.

About the Author

Dr. Howie Shute has an engineering background, working as a manufacturing executive for twelve years before God's calling to full-time ministry. In addition to his undergraduate degrees, he holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary and an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Africa Nazarene University. After his call to ministry and theological training, he served with his wife, Bev, as pastor for fourteen years and as a global missionary for fifteen years. Howie served as field director and field strategy coordinator for his denomination and was responsible for the Horn of Africa. Currently, Howie serves as the Director of Development for the Somali Bible Society (SBS) and is responsible for developing financial and human resources for the organization. He has been involved in several movements of God that have given rise to explosive church growth. He has authored three books on mission,

magazine articles, and journal papers. He and his wife, Bev, live in Surprise, Arizona. They have two grown daughters and three grandchildren. Dr. Howie can be reached at howie@somalibiblesociety.org.

CHAPTER 2: MARK & AUDREY HINTON



A recent photo of Mark and Audrey.

We intend to combine our testimonies to communicate the challenging dynamics that led us to become missionaries. Therefore, we will share how God worked in our lives and struggles as we made that move.

How We Were Saved

Audrey

I grew up in a large Catholic family on a farm where we all learned to work. We went to Mass every Sunday and prayed the rosary together most evenings as a family, on our knees! My dad believed in working hard, but he would never work on a Sunday. Even if

the crop was ready to harvest and rain predicted for Monday, he would trust God to get the harvest in rather than working on Sunday. So, in some ways, I had an excellent demonstration of faith and a holy fear of God, but on the other hand, our moral character and productivity seemed to determine the hope of going to heaven someday. In my understanding, whether I merited going to heaven was based on whether my good works would outweigh my sins and if I was good enough.

I remember an incident from my teen years when I was struggling. It was a soul-searching time, and I tried to read the Bible then, but I did not get far.

When I went to college, I met Mark, also a Catholic who grew up with the work ethic I had. We married and got our security and happiness from working and being good. The problem was, sometimes, I did not measure up even to my own standard of what good was.

Mark and I got along reasonably well, although the Vietnam War separated us for a year while he was in SE Asia with the Marine Corps.

After returning to the States and the birth of our first child, I found myself resenting Mark because I felt he was not doing his fair share as a parent. He was studying to be eligible for veterinary school at the time. I wanted equal rights and opportunities, and while my culture might justify that desire on my part, it was not an attitude that helped our relationship. I wanted equal rights, a successful marriage, and to be a good mom. I was not sure how to do all those things at the same time. Ms. magazine was not helping me sort that out, nor was Psychology Today, and these secular magazines were what I was reading in those days!

About that time, my older sister, who had committed her life to Christ through the influence of her charismatic Catholic priest, invited me to a seminar based on the Bible. We had heard a cycle of readings from the Bible every Sunday at Mass, and I had tried to read through the Bible again as a newlywed but quickly decided that it was fruitless

when I got stuck in the Book of Numbers. However, this seminar was different. Scripture was suddenly applicable to life issues, especially the ones I struggled with at the time, like my relationship with my husband. God convicted me about my attitude. Later in the seminar, the opportunity to commit my life to Christ arose. I did not understand the Gospel at all at that point, but I knew that there was wisdom in God's Word, and so I unwittingly raised my hand to acknowledge the prayer of commitment as my own, with no clue as to how my life was about to change.

At the seminar, I learned that God's Word was like bread and necessary for daily spiritual sustenance, so the Monday after the seminar, I went to my local variety store to buy a Living Bible.

That afternoon, during the baby's nap, I opened the book of John and read, "Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God." The footnote in the Living Bible made it clear that Jesus was the Living Word, and the Bible was also the Living Word, and God's whole purpose in sending Jesus and giving us the Bible was to communicate with us! I had never really understood before why we had a Bible! I knew he died for us, but I still thought we somehow had to be good enough. Well, I read the book of John voraciously, and lights and bells were going off constantly in my mind, and it dawned on me for the first time that I could not be saved by my own good works or being productive or good, but it is by believing in Jesus and his righteousness that we are saved. As I read on, I realized that what He offers us is a gift, "the gift of God is eternal life." We do not pay for or earn gifts. Wow! That was revolutionary.

The most significant change in my life was that suddenly, I had a relationship with this God who wanted to communicate with us. He was no longer a distant unknown being but someone who knew and loved me and had a purpose for my existence. I found that when I prayed, God answered me through his Word. Reading the Bible was no longer a futile experience for me, but it brought guidance, encouragement, and sometimes chastisement. It was an excellent beginning for the rest of my life; in some ways, it was the beginning of my life, which has proven to be a great adventure!

Mark

I was born and raised on a farm, the eldest of eleven children in a strong Catholic family. Faith, family, school, and farm chores absorbed my life. We did farm chores in the dark morning hours before school and again after school. On top of all that, there was homework. I also participated in wrestling and football during high school.

Following graduation from secondary school, I entered Catholic Seminary to become a priest. That summer, I worked with inner city kids on Chicago's West Side and got involved in the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King. I soon realized I needed more knowledge of the world than what I had gotten on the farm. After my first year at seminary, I looked at the cross above my dormitory and asked God to call me back to the priesthood with a clear voice if he wanted me back. Not hearing his unmistakable voice, I went to a secular college where I studied Mathematics and Spanish and was

active in the Catholic Student Association. When I graduated, I entered the Peace Corps immediately, and they assigned me to an agricultural program in Colombia, South America. There, I felt a disconnect in my faith as I witnessed the local priest who seemed more concerned with collecting funds to replace the church roof than the souls of the poor peasants who struggled to make ends meet.



Mark and Audrey. Shortly after their marriage in 1970, Mark receives wings as a Naval Flight Officer in the Marine Corps in preparation for service during the Vietnam War era.

Upon returning to my home country, I received notification that the military had drafted me. At that time, the Vietnam War was in full swing. After thinking through my options, I did a lot of soul-searching and finally decided to enlist in the Marine Corps aviation program. I had a free semester before I needed to check in, so I went back to college to take a few courses and met Audrey, my future wife, during this time. I went off to my basic training, and one year later, we were married while I was still in aviation training. About one year after we were married, I completed my aviation training, and my orders stationed me in Japan. Audrey and I were separated for our second year of marriage. Although we married in the Catholic Church, we drifted away from our Catholic roots and began exploring new-age spiritual options.

Audrey

Mark's aviation training took us to California for a year, where I got a secretarial job. At that company, my closest workmate had a policy of saying two positive things about anyone criticized in office gossip. I found this very admirable. She began to share with me some of her beliefs, which were new age ideas (actually old occult ideas) and particularly books by a psychic medium. I read some books, and she invited me to a meeting I later recognized as a séance. All the guests were seated around a living room, and the primary teacher asked everyone to put a personal item on a tray she passed. I trustingly put my wedding ring on the tray. The teacher then picked each item up and gave a reading. When she took my ring, she said she saw me looking over the Grand Canyon. I had already planned with my sister and sister-in-law to visit the Grand Canyon as we drove back to Minnesota after Mark left for Japan. She also envisioned much travel in my life, beginning with a flight over our west coast as I headed out over the Pacific. That, too, was in the plan because the government would pay for my visit during our year of separation. It certainly gave me pause to consider these powers on display. But what was their source? I did not know.

But then, I had another experience. It was a very stressful time to move out of our house on the military base because there were white glove inspections of things like the

kitchen stove. It was a very demanding inspection to pass, but we managed and then were able to stay with my aunt and uncle the last few days before Mark's departure. I did not know if Mark would return from SE Asia alive because it was a time when many pilots were losing their lives in the Vietnam War. On the day I took Mark to the airport, I felt very sick. I remember going to the public bathroom and crying a simple "God, help me!" The most remarkable thing happened! When I walked out of that bathroom, I felt as though I was walking on a cloud of air; my fear and anxiety were gone, and I was able to very lightheartedly say "farewell" to my husband of one year, although I would not see him for months, or maybe ever again. Mark was baffled as he struggled with tears and wondered what had happened to me, that I could be so cheerful. At the time, I had not committed to Jesus, nor did I understand what had happened, but years later, God reminded me of that simple prayer I had cried out in my need.

Another thing is that separation from his wife at this point in life created a considerable temptation for Mark, especially since many of his fellow officers were unfaithful to their wives during this time overseas. Prostitutes were plentiful and readily available to the troops, especially when they went on leave. Also very available was cheap heroin, which many troops sadly became addicted to. God blessed Mark by providing a wonderful friend, a fellow officer committed to being faithful to God and his family. Unfortunately, we lost this dear brother in the first tower of the World Trade Center on 9/11, along with our best man from our wedding, who also happened to be there on that fateful day.

Mark

Although several of my buddies lost their lives while flying, I, by God's grace, survived and returned to my home country and my wife, who was then about to start her student teaching to graduate from college. God also honored my desire for a non-combat assignment that year; I worked for the commanding general of Marine Aviation in the Western Pacific on a drug treatment/prevention program.

Following four years in the Marine Corps, I entered the School of Veterinary Medicine in my home state of Minnesota. By the time I entered the college of vet med, my wife had given birth to our first son, who soon challenged our ability to discipline him, so we joined a continuing parent group that read many authors on this subject. The problem was that they all had different ideas, and we became perplexed. It was at this juncture that my wife had become a committed Christian. For me, the demands of school, a job, and family kept me focused outside of Audrey's growing commitments to Jesus and prayer. However, when Audrey invited me to the church she was attending for a family seminar on raising children, I decided to go, rationalizing that I had heard what everyone else had to say about it, so why not listen to what the Christians had to say? After hearing a scriptural approach to raising kids, I realized that accepting the whole of Scripture was a straightforward step. After the first evening and on the way home, I asked Audrey to put a sign up in our home, citing Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The Sweeping Change

After accepting Christ, I wanted to quit Vet Med studies, attend seminary, and head out for missions. But I reasoned that the Lord had me in Vet Med for a purpose, and I needed to complete what I had started. Some Christian classmates and I started a “Christian Fellowship” among the students, which was well received and continues to this day. For the first six months after coming to the Lord, I could not get enough of the Scriptures, and consequently, I went from being in the top three of my class to the bottom third! However, I did graduate and immediately applied to Christian Veterinary Mission, a subsidiary of World Concern out of Seattle. Leadership advised that I should get some practical experience first, so I got a job working for another Christian veterinarian in a small rural community. I practiced for one year before deciding to begin preparing for missions as a veterinarian.

A Year of Testing

Audrey

By the time Mark finished his studies in Veterinary Medicine, God had blessed us with a beautiful daughter as well. During this time, I put my teaching career on hold while raising my children as a full-time mom and housekeeper. I also cared for two other young children to help with living costs during this time. The two boys also made good playmates for our son, Nate.

After Mark graduated, he worked as a veterinarian in a small rural community. We found a simple but adequate duplex that was relatively affordable to move into. Meanwhile, Mark’s boss owned a beautiful rental home on a wooded site and offered to rent it to us at the same price. I was elated and wanted to live in the big, beautiful home, but Mark reasoned that he did not want to be indebted to his boss in this way because the rent would have been double what his boss was asking us to pay. I struggled in my flesh and began to resent Mark for his decision, but I knew I needed to honor him and trust God. So we stayed in the little duplex. Shortly after, the boss rented the house to a new family in town. The boss’s wife, Barb, who had become my friend, invited the young woman in their rental house to a Christian Women’s Club meeting where she committed her life to Christ. I quickly realized that if I had insisted on the big house for myself, Katie, the new resident, would not have met Barb, been invited to the meeting, or given her life to Christ. God blessed me for submitting to Mark’s leadership; I felt joy!

I had looked forward to a time when Mark would have a better job and no more school expenses, but we were surprised to find out that the beginning salary was hardly enough to cover the costs of renting a home, food, and other living expenses.

Besides that, because he earned a flat salary but was on call every night except Tuesday and Wednesday and only had a free weekend every third week, he spent many hours going out for an evening and even in the middle of the night emergency calls. Mark had very little time for family, and there was no extra pay for these hours. Mark had even less time with us now than when he was a full-time student, working a

part-time job! When we found a new church home and got involved, Mark decided to teach a scouting-like boys' church program on Wednesday evenings, and it required preparation time on Tuesday evenings. So that meant going three weeks before he had free time, a Saturday afternoon and a Sunday.

During that time, I had to calculate the cost of every item I put in my grocery cart to ensure I had enough money to pay for it, so it was a very stressful time. One day, I invested in a recorded Bible, thinking that the children and I would benefit from hearing God's word as I worked or the children went to sleep. But that evening, I learned I had made an error in the checkbook and had about two days' wages less than I thought. We had committed to making a trip to a family gathering that weekend and would need that amount of money. I pondered whether I should return the recorded Bible to the store for a refund. I thought, "I have never had to return anything before in my life because I did not have enough money to get by! How can I bring God's Word back for a refund? It cannot be! I will just have to trust God in this." Somehow, God saw us through, and I did not return His Word!

I also had to deal with the children's adjustments to the move. My four-year-old son began to be more difficult with misbehavior, testing to see where the boundaries were. I remember crying out to God for wisdom. God clearly showed me that because I had made allowances and let him watch TV programs that I had not in the past (in the past, I told him it was because I loved and cared about him). Now I was letting him, thinking it would make the move easier for him; he could only conclude that maybe I did not love him so much in this new place! That taught me a good lesson on why being consistent with children was important. However, single parenting was another weight on me.

I believe it was because of all the stress I was experiencing that I began to have physical symptoms of nausea and diarrhea, which made it difficult to care for the children and do the cooking. I would stop eating and go on a clear liquid diet for a couple of days until the diarrhea would stop, and then begin eating bland foods again. After eating a good meal again, it would start all over. I quickly lost weight doing this and was down to about 85 lbs. before I went to the doctor, alarmed that perhaps I had cancer. He ruled that out but did not give me any help or find the cause of the problem. So that is how I spent most of that year, and it carried over into the years to come at various times of stress.

On top of that, I caught a nasty cold early in the winter and suffered from it for months in my sinuses. I continued with church activities, women's Bible study, and getting to know my neighbors and witnessing to them. It was an intense time of learning to trust God even when I did not feel well. I wrote this in my diary at one of those lowest of times:

"The Spirit showed me today while I visualized my resurrected King enthroned high above all creation, "The King of the Jews" nailed to his cross in all humility, the lowest death he could die—that it was there that he won the victory, the victory of heaven, all victory. It is also in our lowest moments that we can win victories. When we are most tempted to be anxious and fear for our lives and our needs, when we are most tempted to demand our desires and wishes—if we will die to all these and trust our Father.

Remind me, Lord, in those moments, just to praise you, to bring my need to you and trust you with it. Thank you, Lord, for this lesson."

Mark had a grueling winter. It was freezing, and so much snow fell. On one occasion, a farmer called him to deliver a calf at a farm where the barn had little shelter. The temperature was -40F wind chill that night, and he had to do a C-section in this dirty place, trying to keep the cow warm by piling soiled straw on its body. To prevent his own hands from freezing, he had to keep them inside the incision in the cow's abdomen, even as he worked as quickly as he could. Of course, he had not done this many times before, so there was much to learn. Unfortunately, it was too late for the calf, which was already dead, and the cow, too. He came home in his blood-stained clothes, feeling somewhat overwhelmed and defeated that night.

The small church we attended was a bright spot of that year. The pastor and his wife, Bruce and Sherry, This pastor's heart is so soft that then and today, when he talks about Jesus, he usually cries. He and his sweet wife encouraged us greatly as we sought to surrender our lives daily. God also blessed Mark with another special friend, another young veterinarian, who felt called to ministry as well; he was working towards leaving the veterinary practice to attend seminary and prepare for the pastorate. They are still special friends to us as well. There were others in the church to encourage us, and there was a constant flow of visiting missionaries who challenged us in our vision.

Another Year of Testing, but God is Working

In the spring, one year after working in this rural area, Mark reasoned that that was enough practical experience. It was time to get some religious training, so he took a day to go into the city to enroll at North Central Bible School to prepare for missions. Mark also looked for a part-time veterinary job and found only one possibility in the entire city. He applied and got the job. He returned to our little town and told our landlord we would move out in one month. I was astounded! I thought, "We are barely making ends meet with Mark working full time. Now we are going to move to the city, which is more expensive, only we do not even have a place to move to in one month! And there will be expensive tuition to pay, not to mention books. And Mark has a part-time job to cover this. What will we do?"

I knew I had to trust God, which did not mean I did not fret at times. But I kept my peace, and this is what God did. We had some friends from our earlier city church days who managed an apartment complex, and it happened to be very close to the clinic where Mark would be working part-time. They had mostly market-value apartments in the complex, but they did have a few apartments the government would subsidize for low-income folks, who would pay on a sliding scale according to their income. When we contacted our friends, they told us they had a waiting list of about 100 names before us, but they would put our names on the bottom for a subsidized apartment. About three weeks later, they called us and said that one of their families had moved out of their apartment, but they did not give them any notice. So, they began to call the names on the list to tell them that they had an available apartment. According to their story, every person they called said, "We have to give our landlord one month's notice before we

can move. We cannot take the apartment now.” They came to the bottom of the list and called us. Mark had already given our landlord notice three weeks ago; we could move in in a week and pay according to our income!

The apartment complex had a senior building and family units, and it was quite large, so our friends who managed it, John and Linda, worked full-time in the office. They had a daughter who was Nate’s age, about five years old then. Linda did not want to work full-time but wanted to be more available to her daughter, so she offered to split her job with me, and she proposed that if I cared for her daughter while she worked, she would be willing to care for my children while I worked. Since our children enjoyed playing together, it was a done deal, and I could now contribute to buying the groceries. I was astounded then at God’s response to our trust in Him!

But on Mother’s Day of that year, which was also my birthday, I sat in church, sulking. There had been no greetings from my husband or my children that morning, just the usual grind of providing breakfast for all and helping the children get dressed and ready for church. I was very disappointed at not being honored that day as a mom, not to mention my forgotten birthday. And then I heard a still, small voice say, “I was not honored either.” It was the voice of the Lord of all Creation! I thought of the One who was in the beginning with God and was God, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not! He came unto his own, and his own received him not! Indeed, this one deserved to be honored as God’s own son, but he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men to serve us and to serve me!

After church, I quietly reminded Mark that it was my birthday, and we enjoyed a peaceful day. It gave me joy to fellowship with Jesus as I served my family that day.

Mark’s studies began that summer, and he had plenty of work hours at the small animal clinic, so he was swamped, as usual. And then the cold weather of winter began to set in. His boss markedly reduced Mark’s hours because he had spent every possible opportunity at his lake cabin during the summer but did not need so much extra help during the winter months. And then he began subtracting from Mark’s meager pay the unpaid bills of clients that Mark had seen! Mark had to look for other employment. He found a job in a psych unit in a hospital unit near his school, working as a nurse’s aide. This new job ended up being a good move for Mark because it afforded him some experience in counseling patients struggling with psychiatric issues and complimented his counseling course at school.

As that school year concluded, Mark received a phone call on a sunny spring Sunday from the founder of Christian Veterinary Mission, a subsidiary of World Concern out of Seattle. He encouraged Mark to apply for ministry in Southern Sudan. Mark inquired as to what the next steps might be.

I had been anticipating that we might be going to South America for missions since Mark spoke Spanish from his Peace Corps days, and I, too, had tried to learn some Spanish. I was shocked and asked, “Where is Southern Sudan?!” Back in those days

before the internet, I had to go to the library and do some research on Sudan. From all descriptions, it seemed like it would be at the ends of the earth from where I was! I began to wonder how I could take my two small children to such a place where there was so much disease and poverty. How would we educate them?

And the biggest question was my health because I still experienced nausea and diarrhea when anything stressful came up. When we were invited to dinner by mission representatives who came to town to interview us, I ordered my dinner but could not eat it. I was struggling to understand what was going on with me. Sometimes, I would feel attacked with waves of irrational fear. I cried out to God for understanding, and God, in his provision, provided a seminar for me to attend that dealt with spiritual warfare. I finally began to understand that our enemy goes about seeking to steal, kill, and destroy by shooting fiery, poisonous darts into our souls. In my case, they were arrows of fear. But the good news was that we can quench those darts if we are prepared with God's armor of truth, righteousness, preparedness with the Gospel, the shield of faith, salvation, and the sword of God's Spirit, which is the Word of God. As the attacks came, I learned that if I focused on "whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, of virtue and praise," I could overcome the irrational fears. I found it to be an antidote to the mind poison. It was truly a battle and took much mental energy, but I was determined not to be undone by the enemy. I had a lonely battle while trying to carry on with life, unable to share it with anyone.

Mark was trying to be sensitive to my desires in this call to missions and told me we would not go if I did not want to go. I prayed and told God that if he kept this door open (and really, I doubted that we could go because of the school debt that Mark owed), I determined that I would go through that door. Mark had his heart set on missions for these two past years, and I did not want to be the one to prevent that dream from materializing, even though I felt there was plenty of opportunity for ministry where we were.

Launching



The Hintons' 1st Christmas in Africa, 1980.

And then, in mid-August of 1980, I got on an airplane with my children in tow, headed for Nairobi, Kenya. They were six and four years old and excited for the adventure. God had indeed kept the door open. Our parents and some siblings accompanied us to the airport and saw us off. We would not see them for three years, perhaps. We did not have email, FaceTime, or even an affordable phone connection then. I think now that our parents paid a more significant price than we did, as we took their grandchildren away. My mouth was so dry during that trip that I felt it was full of cotton balls. I could not eat, but I sucked on ice chips. I was determined to write to our parents weekly and include photos when I could. My parents did not understand why we were going. They

were anxious for our safety and well-being. I think they were very disappointed in our

going because they were close by during our year in the rural community and had been hopeful that the closeness would continue. Additionally, my dad had discovered colon cancer that year, so we did not know if we would see him again. Mark's sister wrote later that she arrived late at the airport to see our plane disappear on the runway and to see our parents in tears. It was difficult, too, to say goodbye to my sisters.

We were traveling with another young veterinarian couple, Ray and Vicki, who had also been recruited for East Africa, and their infant daughter. Ray suffered severe air sickness during that trip. Leadership assigned Ray to Maasai land, and sadly, a matatu (public transport van) struck him dead about three years later as he traveled to a Maasai village when he was mastering the language and making great strides in relationships with his people. Authorities asked Mark to identify his friend's body at the city morgue in Nairobi, which was not an easy task. We struggled to know how to help our widow friend through this time, who now had three small children to parent on her own. It was a great loss!

But let me back up. Ray's friend, an Ethiopian named Tekle, met us at the airport. Tekle had studied in the U.S., where he met Ray. Within our first week, Tekle invited us all to his home for an introduction to Ethiopian food and hospitality. Tekle was the second Ethiopian I ever met, and I shared with Tekle about the other Ethiopian I knew. My parents hosted an Ethiopian high school student named Befakadu for a school year when I was a freshman in college. I was no longer living at home, but I saw him when I visited home. He had brought some spices and an archaic recipe for doro wat with him and asked me to make the dish for him. It was a disaster. But now, Tekle and his wife opened our eyes to this wonderful cuisine. Another amazing thing I learned is that Tekle had gone to school with Befakadu and knew him.

A representative of Daystar University also met us at the airport and brought us to the Daystar campus, where we would participate in their Basic Communications Course in preparation for cross-cultural ministry. They provided an apartment for us in the student dorm, which gave us a view of the busy city. Bob and Donna, on staff at Daystar, were our first contacts, and they invited us to their home for tea our first evening there. It was a good place for me to start, and I could begin to explore the neighborhood on foot, collect groceries on my own, and care for the children. I opted to audit the course to have the time to help the children settle in, but within the month, we had an assignment to spend a weekend in a local home. Bob and Donna offered to care for our children in our absence. We traveled out to Maasailand by public transport, where we stayed in a thornbush-fenced Maasai compound for two nights with the mama of the house and her children. We were given sour milk from the gourd to drink as we sat in the smoky little house and chai, which was new to us.

We slept on a bed of sticks built into the mud/manure walls during the night and lay on a stiff cow skin. We had brought sleeping bags to keep warm, but we lay awake most of the first night, listening to the calves and baby goats who were kept in a small enclosure, separated from us only by a stick wall, as they chewed their cud and regurgitate their food all night. Keeping small animals nearby was common because lions and other predators were roaming the area. The mama was also up occasionally,

comforting babies and feeding the cook-fire. We had just met our hostess, and of course, we only knew a few greetings in her language. I was nervous about whether I would need to get up in the middle of the night to relieve myself. There were big cows outside the house, and I had not made friends with them yet, either. And it was so dark in the hut we did not know what tiny creatures we were sharing our bed with. I did find a strange comfort in thinking about that One who came to us and was born in a barn, perhaps not so different from this place, and what it must have been like for those parents away from home, giving birth in such circumstances. I could only lay back and say, "My trust is in the Lord God, who made heaven and earth! I am dependent upon Him for my existence in this strange place." As for the savannah and the peaceful sounds of cowbells ringing in the distance, the sound of children playing in the morning, the beautiful vista and amazing sky, it soothed our souls, and we began to love Africa, its people and its ways.

Living at Daystar with students from all over the continent was instructional. I wrote about Assafa from Ethiopia in my diary: "Assafa, away from his home, his wife, his six children, for two years studying here because it is not safe for Christians in his home. His wife asked him to leave for his safety. He said, "Sometimes I would rather die in my land with my brothers—the thought pleases me. In Kenya, grace is so cheap." I tucked that in my heart.

In October, I wrote in my diary: "I feel so grateful for the prayers of the earnest which availeth much with God. I read somewhere before coming here that missionary work is not for the fainthearted. I wilted inside when I read that because I knew how well it described me. But a friend wrote last week and reminded me that 'His strength is made perfect in our weakness,' and it helps me to accept myself for what I am and still feel confident and challenged and able to trust that God can use even me. The miracle is that I have not felt like a coward lately. I know people are praying, and God's Spirit has lifted me up."

By November, we had finished the cross-cultural course, and Mark's next task was to make a survey trip into Southern Sudan to visit sites where veterinary service was needed, as well as the Gospel. I stayed behind at Daystar with the children while he left for the next month. Mark traveled by mission plane, road, and into very remote places, connecting with community leaders, agricultural researchers, pastors, and missionaries working among pastoral people. He sent me a letter from Pibor Post, where mission work was going on. The dedication of the missionaries there inspired him. Mark challenged me by saying that if we were to go to such a place with our family, God would need to call me to it and burden my heart to do so successfully. He said he would not take me there without that. For my part, I did not know how I was going to manufacture such a thing. I was willing to go, and that was all I could see to do.

Unfortunately, Sudan was not a very stable place even then, and constantly, one tribal group raided herds of cattle from another. It simply was not a suitable situation for caring for cattle herd health. And the fuel cost to get around in that terrain with veterinary equipment and an appropriate vehicle was beyond the budget. Also, the drumbeats of war were beginning to sound again as it was towards the end of the 1972

Addis Ababa Peace Agreement. God put Sudan in Mark's heart on that trip, but after returning to Nairobi and writing up a report and budget to submit to his organization, they advised him against moving to Sudan. In retrospect, it was another 25 years before God summoned us back to Sudan, but that is for another volume. I felt relief at not having to come up with a burden on my heart; I think God knew I was not ready for a commitment to Sudan yet.

But what were we to do now? We connected with another veterinarian we met in Minnesota just before he and his family left for Nairobi a couple of years earlier, who had three ministries going. He had started the groundwork for the veterinary work amongst the Maasai; he had begun the foundation of a department in community development at Daystar (which was then just a small institute with perhaps about 20 students), and he had started working with Literacy and Evangelism as well. But he was about to return to his veterinary practice in Minnesota, where he had taken a leave of absence. Ray was slated for the Maasai work, and it was easy enough for Mark to assume responsibilities for building the community development department at Daystar, having worked in this area in Peace Corps days. World Concern, our sending agency, also asked him to help administer World Concern's humanitarian operations in East Africa. These responsibilities took Mark to Uganda, the far reaches of Kenya, and eventually to Somalia as World Concern opened a work there in 1981.

There is so much more to our story, but this is the beginning of our journey with God to East Africa. He has incredibly blessed us, led us faithfully, and enriched our lives beyond our dreams through our African brothers and sisters.

About the Authors

Audrey Hinton is a retired art teacher. She has taught at Rosslyn Academy (Nairobi, Kenya), Nile Valley Academy in Khartoum, Hope Academy in Minneapolis, MN, and North Central University as an adjunct professor and as a substitute teacher for 20 years at St. Paul Public Schools. Having recently completed four years of caring for newborn twin grandchildren, she seeks guidance for the next assignment. She has a BS degree in Art/English Education from Minnesota State University.

Dr. Mark Hinton was raised on a farm in Southern Minnesota. Before pursuing missions in East Africa in 1980, he served in Peace Corps Colombia as an agricultural extensionist, was assigned to SE Asia with the First Marine Air Wing, and briefly worked as a veterinarian in a rural Minnesota community. From 1980 to his retirement, some 30 years later, He spent 18 years in and out of East Africa, taking on various roles relating to education, community development, and relief operations in Kenya, Sudan & Somalia. Stateside, besides his work at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Lab, he and a Somali friend co-founded an NGO to serve Somali refugees and immigrants in the Minneapolis area. This work continues today under several initiatives. Currently, Mark is refocusing on the ministry of reconciliation and prayer in the lives of individuals and communities. He has a BA in Math, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM), and an MA in Islamic Studies. The authors can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.

CHAPTER 3: SAM OMAR

The other day, I was mowing a lawn for a Somali family in Auckland, New Zealand, and a policeman holding a gun at the ready walked by. I thought, "This is just like Africa." Later, more police arrived, and a police helicopter circled overhead. I decided not to mow any more lawns in that area then. I grew up in Africa and spent much of my working life there.

Missionary Background

I was a third-generation missionary. My grandparents were missionaries with CIM (China Inland Mission) in China for some 33 years from 1912 to 1945.²³ They had three sons who made it to adulthood. At 16 years old, my father and his 15-year-old brother were left in Napier, New Zealand, to fend for themselves. My grandparents returned to China. It was years before they met again. My father wanted to be an engineer, but it was the mid-1930s, and there was an economic depression, and he had no money to go to university. He got a job in an engineering workshop and was there for at least four years. He felt called to be a missionary during that time, so he went to NZ Bible Training Institute (NZBTI).²⁴ He was there for two years, and the Second World War started. After NZBTI, he joined the medical corps in the army and was primarily based in the Pacific. In 1946, he was released from the military, and in 1948 he went to Egypt as a missionary.

My mum was born in Christchurch in the South Island, New Zealand. When she was young, the family moved to Napier on the North Island. Her dad was a retailer. Her first day at high school was upset by the Napier earthquake in 1931 where quite a few students died.²⁵ The family attended Napier Baptist Church, and as she grew up, she felt called to be a missionary nurse. After nurse training, she went to NZBTI during the war years. In 1945, on Victory in Europe Day (VE Day), she was on a ship with a fellow NZBTI graduate heading to Egypt. My parents knew each other from Napier, but only in Egypt did my father pluck up the courage to ask my mother to marry him! They were married on June 1, 1951. They were members of the Egypt General Mission.²⁶

In Egypt, they primarily served at a mission hospital in Shebin El Kom in the eastern delta area north of Cairo. My oldest brother was born in 1952 and my second brother was born in New Zealand while they were on home assignment in 1954. I was born in 1956 in Egypt. At this time, the missionaries were in the process of being expelled from

²³ My grandparents were descended from English parents. My grandfather was born in New Zealand and my grandmother in England but she had moved to New Zealand before becoming a missionary.

²⁴ Now known as Laidlaw College.

²⁵ On the tragic day of February 3, 1931, New Zealand was rocked by its deadliest earthquake, which wreaked havoc on the cities of Napier and Hastings in Hawke's Bay. The powerful magnitude 7.8 earthquake resulted in the heartbreaking loss of at least 256 lives, with 161 perishing in Napier, 93 in Hastings, and two in Wairoa. The devastation also left many thousands in need of urgent medical care.

²⁶ This mission later became the Middle East General Mission and then Middle East Christian Outreach and lately has merged with SIM.

Egypt because of what is known as the Suez Crisis.²⁷ About two weeks after I was born, my parents had to leave Egypt. They went to England, where for about three months, they stayed with my uncle and auntie (after WWII, my uncle had married an English girl). They were hoping the situation would change and they could return to Egypt. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and they had to return to New Zealand. The mission was hardline then and unsupportive; they felt they had returned too early! My parents found refuge with a poultry farmer in Upper Hutt, Wellington. There, they stayed for more than a year. My father did some work as a journalist. (He had learned journalism in the army). He also had the opportunity to take a course on language analysis and Bible translation in Australia.

Eritrea—Where I Received Jesus

In 1958, they moved to Eritrea, where, for the first five years, they lived in the lovely town of Keren, some 90 kilometers from Asmara. My younger brother was born in Asmara in 1959. “Having a baby is not an illness,” my mother was told by her Italian doctor! The birth of my brother is my earliest memory. I also remember falling off a wall and breaking an elbow at four. Also, one year, we had something like a plague of chameleons (the Eritreans were superstitious about them). When I was about six, a relative in New Zealand sent me a picture of a man standing at a door knocking. My mother explained that it was Jesus, and he wanted me to invite him into my heart so that he could take away my sins. I did this.

After five years in Eritrea, we spent a year in Auckland, New Zealand. In Auckland, we mostly stayed with my father’s mum—my grandma. Grandpa had passed on. After being in China, my grandparents, with my father’s help, built a house on the North Shore in Auckland. They later started a Sunday school, which became the Northcote Baptist Church.

Back in Africa, we spent a year in a remote village near the border with Sudan. As my father had practical skills learned in an engineering workshop, the mission asked him to supervise a building project. Here, he supervised the construction of a school and a granary and improved the mission home. Unfortunately, soon after my father finished the construction work, the mission station in that location was closed because of rebel (ELF) activity.

The ELF was actively opposing the government. At eight years old, I remember meeting the ELF. One afternoon, my brother (5 years old) and I took the donkeys to the water hole to get water for our household (we had no running water). At the watering hole, about two kilometers from our home, men in khaki uniforms invited us for a cup of tea and asked us if the government troops were in the village! We turned down the tea! Several times, my father was held captive by the ELF while they demanded money. After living in this remote station, they moved to a small town called Barentu, where they lived on the chief’s compound of the Nara Muslim tribe. The Nara was a tribe my parents were seeking to reach. They did regular clinics in some villages, and my father

²⁷ Suez Crisis, Middle East [1956] <https://www.britannica.com/event/Suez-Crisis> (accessed 10 December 2022).

worked on analyzing the language and developing a reader. Unfortunately, the ELF killed their two primary contacts in this tribe.²⁸

After less than a year of living in a remote station, my two older brothers and I went to boarding school in Asmara. My younger brother joined us after one or two terms. The mission recruited a married couple to open the school so parents could stay on the field and not have to return home. I was at boarding school for about four years. While I was there, the roll grew to around 40 (some were day students). In the school, I was a gang leader as I was older than many of the students, and at least on one report, teachers called me a bully! My brother (who is two years older than me) and I mostly shared a dormitory, and at one time, we shared our room with a big Bulgarian boy, the son of a doctor. He tended to lead us into some trouble. At 11 and 12, I attended Friday night film nights at the SIM related Emmanuel church.²⁹ The preacher challenged the young people to respond to the gospel by walking forward. I never did this and developed a lack of assurance.

Assurance of Salvation

We used to travel to and from Africa by passenger liner (ship). It was cheaper for a family our size. I turned 13 on the way back to New Zealand in 1969. My older brother had already returned to New Zealand after completing his O levels. My parents decide to stay in New Zealand to help us get our education. They would not make us endure a separation like my father had in Napier. We settled in Wellington. After about a year, using inheritance money, my parents were able to purchase a house in one of the poorer suburbs. It was a suburb with a large Polynesian population. We attended a college in a neighboring middle-class suburb, which required a bus and train ride twice a day. At school, I was good at math and science. I used to attend the Christian club once a week but still lacked assurance of salvation. After I turned 15, I went to a Christian agricultural camp during the summer holidays. At this camp, we studied the book of Romans, and I came to a deeper understanding of the gospel and peace with God. A few months later, the pastor of the local Baptist church we attended baptized me.

Spiritual Training & Calling to Somalis

After this camp, I became interested in agriculture. In the sixth form year (my second last year at high school), I heard about the famine in Ethiopia, and SIM was raising money to help. I wanted to give all the USD 200 I saved from holiday jobs! Ultimately, I gave less but felt that I wanted to use agricultural skills to help people who did not have enough to eat. Also, during my last year at school, my parents had a visit from Dr. Lionel Gurney, founder of the Red Sea Mission Team.³⁰ Lionel talked about Southern

²⁸ In 1993, my wife and I returned to this area, and I believe one of the men we met was the grandson of one of dad's contacts.

²⁹ SIM is a major Christian mission organization established in 1893 by Walter Gowans, Rowland Bingham, and Thomas Kent. The SIM acronym first meant Sudan Interior Mission, but it is now known simply as SIM. Visit SIM.org for more information.

³⁰ <https://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=31961> (accessed 19 December 2022).

Yemen, a communist country then, but it was formerly the British Protectorate of Aden. He mentioned that young Somali men were questioning Islam and the existence of God, and he felt there was an opportunity for the gospel.

After high school, I attended Massey University, 120 kilometers north of Wellington. Since it was so far from my family's home, I had to stay in a hall of residence or dormitory at least during the week. I met a Christian group called the Navigators. At first, the Bible studies I was doing with them attracted me. Later, I had to move out of the residence hall and moved into a flat (apartment) with the Navigator leader for Massey University. I became excited about evangelizing and discipling on a one-to-one basis. Several of my contacts became Christians, and in the last year, I lived with two of them in a discipling relationship. After four years of study, I graduated from Massey University in early 1979 with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science.

At this time, the Navigators encouraged me to move to Christchurch, where there was an American missionary who trained some of the Navigator staff throughout the country. The idea was that I would get more training and experience in their type of ministry. Unfortunately, I could not obtain a professional job that would use my degree in Christchurch. My degree was more suited to working in a rural location. So, after a year, I moved further south to Dunedin, where I got a job helping farmers design and implement an irrigation scheme subsidized by the New Zealand government. During my first year in Dunedin, my younger brother was killed in a tragic running accident at the age of twenty-one.

I lived in Dunedin for three years and was still heavily involved with the Navigators. I led a living situation of four men about my age. We actively reached out to our work colleagues and others we met through playing sports or evangelizing at the nearby university. I led several Bible studies and was involved in the campus leaders' study. During this time, I was studying the life of Abraham, and I felt God telling me that now was the time for me to investigate mission organizations and see where God might lead me. After some time doing this, I took half a day off to pray about where I might work. During my prayer time, while it was not especially connected to the book of Jeremiah, which I was reading, God brought the Somali people to my mind, and I felt called to them.

I already knew which organizations to write to, and when I wrote to SIM, I was sent a profile of an agricultural missionary working in northeastern Kenya. The profile matched several things I was interested in, especially the one-to-one ministry, which is more appropriate in a closed Muslim society than overt preaching. So, I applied to SIM, and they accepted me in late 1982. One of the mission's prerequisites then was to do at least a year at Bible College. I spend a year at Bible College of New Zealand (now Laidlaw College). I did most of the first year of a Bachelor of Theology, except I studied History of Missions instead of Church History. I wrote my essay for this paper on Samuel Zwemer (known as the apostle to Islam) and his writings.

Language Learning & First Term in Kenya

After Bible College, I took a language learning course with Wycliffe and raised support. In June 1984, I flew to Africa. At the time, Phil Parshall's book on Contextualization³¹ was out, and a couple called the Brewsters with Wycliffe had written a pamphlet on a concept called "bonding."³² The idea was that when missionaries first arrive in a country, they should live with the people they are called to reach.³³ Salaad³⁴ of SIM was open to this, so during my first week in Kenya, I spent my nights in a Somali hotel in Eastleigh. One day, Salaad visited me and asked a Somali who was there what name would suit me, and the Somali said, "Omar (Cumar)." So I became Omar.

For language learning, I moved to Mombasa for over six months. There was another senior SIM missionary who could supervise my language learning, and he taught me about Islam. In Mombasa, I shared a room with Somali truck drivers and their assistants in a Somali hotel. Mostly, I used the LAMP method³⁵ with a Somali assistant. Because the Wycliffe course showed that hearing and mimicking the sounds of the new language might be difficult for me, I spent a lot of time mimicking the words and sounds. There were few Somalis in Mombasa, and they were concentrated mainly around hotels like the one I was staying in. So, I used to go around these hotels and to a suburb called Wayani to practice the few words I was learning. Often, Somalis would pay for my lunch. Several young men would come and debate religion with me. Some came to the farewell dinner the senior missionaries put on for me.

After learning the language, I moved to Wajir in Northern Kenya. I had heard that several from one tribal group were open to the gospel. I rented two rooms on a compound with a traditional Muslim leader from this tribal group and his family. I had no electricity, just a kerosene lamp, and employed a local man to cook a meal once a day over a charcoal stove. There was already a senior SIM family and agriculturalist in Wajir, so initially, I had time to sit around in teashops and practice the language. In one of the village areas, I walked around and gave out seeds so the people could grow kitchen gardens. The senior couple had established a reading room; this was quite popular. As time passed, more SIM workers came to Wajir, and the agriculturalist left, as did the senior couple. So, I became the team leader. The previous agriculturalist had established a kitchen garden based around a hand pump in the village area (bulas), and we established more of these gardens. And at the first site, we installed a wind pump. Later, some of the other sites also had wind pumps, and we trained some young men to maintain them.

As a team, we were all still working on language, so to help us practice the language we would prepare a Bible story in Somali and invite some young men to come and listen to

³¹ Parshall, P., *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*, Baker Book House, Michigan, 1980.

³² Brewster, T E and E S, *Bonding and the missionary task*, Lingua House, Pasadena, Calif., 1982.

³³ The idea is you become bonded to the local people like a baby to its mum. However, the negative side is that one can be very critical of the other missionaries, some of which I experienced.

³⁴ Where possible I will use the Somali names of colleagues.

³⁵ Brewster, T E, and E S, *Language Acquisition Made Practical*, Lingua House, Colorado Spring, 1976.

us give the stories in Somali. This practice became a kind of fellowship group, and although none publicly professed to believe it, I later heard at least one ask Jesus into his life. We also built a hut in the village where the first agricultural project was established. We would spend a night in that hut and learn some of their language, a dialect of Oromo (a language of Ethiopia). We helped some of the boys with secondary school fees in exchange. Some of our workers taught in the secondary schools and played basketball with the students. One time, when there was an agricultural show, we had a teashop and display of our agricultural work, and we also sold and gave away Christian literature. After the show, there was no evidence the recipients destroyed any of the literature. I did not find any of the literature thrown on the ground! As a single man, I would often get into religious discussions in the town or when traveling on the buses or back of trucks to Wajir.

Marriage & More Years in Kenya

In 1988, I returned to New Zealand for a home assignment, where I met Rahma.³⁶ After courting for a few months, I returned to Kenya for twenty months before returning to New Zealand and marrying at the end of 1990. We went to Kenya in mid-1991 and lived in Nairobi for about six months while Rahma did her nursing experience for her registration. I looked after the radio program CNC for a couple of months and then spent my time contacting people in the suburb of Eastleigh. In 1992, we moved to Wajir and rented a home with electricity this time. In Wajir, there were many more people at this time, many fleeing the civil war in Somalia, and people were hungry due to a drought. We feed many of them using food provided by WFP. My colleague Daud mainly ran this as we went back to a place near Nairobi to have our first child, and then after she was born, we had time in Nairobi with hepatitis!

In late 1992 and the first part of 1993, we got more resources, and we were able to help the people with windpumps and, in one place, excavating a dam. With a medical program and agricultural work, we had quite a high profile in the town. We were mostly well-liked because we lived close to the people. Our popularity resulted in the Kuwait-trained Muslims who ran orphanages for poor children trying to chase us from the town with false rumors. For a while, the situation was quite dangerous. Most of the SIMers left, and I was the only one of those with good language skills to return. Rahma and I returned for much of 1994. However, for Rahma, it was a bit isolated due to a lack of an expatriate company. During this time, SIM invited us to complete a survey to see if we could be involved in restarting SIM's work in the Somali part of Ethiopia. More people came with SIM, and they could take over the work in Wajir. Our son was born during that year. The other workers from Wajir were involved in language teaching in Nairobi, and a project SIM took over in Somalia. Unfortunately, this was closed down after a short time because of security issues.

³⁶ Somali name.

Study in the States & Work in Eastern Ethiopia

In 1995, we took a home assignment in New Zealand and the USA, where I did Bible courses. From 1996 to 1998, we divided our time between Kenya and Ethiopia. We spent some time in Kenya, where our third child (a girl) was born. Then, we were involved in some team building for the new team for Ethiopia and in a language course led by Salaad. Rahma was in the advanced class, and I taught the introductory course. We moved to Ethiopia on temporary visas in September but unfortunately could not stay. The Somali region of Ethiopia was happy to write a letter of invitation for us, but SIM was going through a re-registration process. After seven months, we returned to Kenya for six months, some of the time back in Wajir. Then, we had a home assignment in New Zealand for six months, during which I preached in a country church for several months.

From June 1998 until 2001, we were in Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, where I ran an agricultural and water project, and Rahma was home-schooling our children. Some of our teammates ran an adult education project, and one worked for the Ministry of Health. We also ran quite a big relief project in a valley near Jigjiga, where there were some 600 families who had fled drought many kilometers away in the southern part of the region. In Jigjiga, we tried to portray ourselves as an NGO, so there was no overt witness. The Somali Christian group was a bit fragmented. Often, I had individuals coming to my home for Bible study. Mostly, the government knew who we were, and they made it very clear in at least one meeting. Sometimes, we would meet believers and others who remembered SIM from previous times. One of the projects I ran was in an area south of Jigjiga where a gully was eroding towards the town. This project was mainly among lower-caste Somalis. I remember walking down the gully once with one of the leaders, and a hyena came out. It ran away. My friend said, "Hyenas are cowards."

Managing Radio Broadcasts & Disciple-Making

In 2002 and half of 2003, we had study leave in New Zealand. I did some studies in MS computing programs and a graduate diploma in religious studies and social anthropology. Rahma did a course on teaching English as a second language. Around July 2003, we returned to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Initially, we got our work permit through an English school SIM setting up where Rahma could teach. Later, I took over managing the radio program in Addis Ababa, CNC, and ran it from March 2004 until the end of 2009. One of the joyful things that happened was that a religious leader who had been contacting the staff at the radio program started visiting me. After a few months, he became a believer as did some of his relatives. A former religious leader from Wajir also turned up, so we had a discipleship group in our home for more than a year. Disciplining in a city like Addis Ababa has its advantages and disadvantages. Young believers who have left their communities of accountability can easily be led astray by the temptations around them. Expatriate workers also have to be on their guard.

Conclusion

Rahma and I have been back in New Zealand for nearly fifteen years now. I have stayed busy mowing lawns, particularly in immigrant areas, which brings me into contact with Somalis and other Muslims. I continue to share the gospel through presence evangelism. One of the beautiful aspects of my work is the opportunity to build relationships with people from diverse backgrounds and share the love of God with them.

I do not have many specific examples of God speaking to us or answering prayer. However, having personal time for Bible reading, prayer, and team prayer was always important. There never seemed to be a lack of vision or direction, and God blessed many things we did. It has been a journey filled with faith, and while I may not have experienced many grand miracles, I have certainly seen God's hand at work in the everyday moments and small and big victories. I am grateful for the opportunities to serve and share my faith meaningfully.

About the Author

Sam Omar (pseudonym) spent most of his growing-up years in East Africa until he was 13. Later, as an adult, he served with his wife as a global partner with SIM in NEP Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia, where he helped the people with water and agricultural projects. Later, they lived in Addis Ababa, where he managed the Codka Nolosha Cusub radio program, ran a discipling program, and was an elder at the International Evangelical Church. At present, they live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand, where they are active with their church and several groups reaching out to their neighbors. They have three grown-up children, two of whom are married. They have two grandchildren and a third one on the way. Sam has a Bachelor's degree in agricultural science, an MA (English Bible), and a DipGrad (religious studies and social anthropology). The author can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.

CHAPTER 4: DENNIS & SUSAN DYVIG

Salvation

I grew up in a liberal church that was a church in name only. I learned later that it was not even close to what the Bible describes as a church. It taught that because God loves everyone, everyone was a child of God and would go to heaven, no matter their beliefs. That church denied the Deity of Christ, denied the second coming of Christ, and denied that the Bible is THE written Word of God. Because they taught that all people are going to heaven, there was no need for salvation. I was a faithful church member, baptized as a 9-month-old baby, and raised by excellent, moral parents, but I had never heard of salvation.

I believe that God is in everything, and I believe God used my time in that “church” to show me that religion often is not the truth and will not connect people to God and will thus not save them from Hell. Only God’s truth will save people. Human goodness, human thinking, and human sacrifices will never save anyone. I began to learn those things by growing up in a church that was not really a church. God used that fake church to open my eyes to His truth.

God Turns Bad into Good (Romans 8:28)

I have always loved power and speed in vehicles created by man. I bought a new 1969 Pontiac GTO called The Judge. It was perhaps the fastest car in our area until my brother bought an even faster Plymouth Road Runner. Those were the days of muscle cars. While alone in my GTO, another car forced me off the road one night. He pulled in front of me, and I would crash into him or go off the narrow road to avoid a collision. I believe God was in all of this. I chose to avoid the other car and became airborne in my GTO. Time seemed to stop, and one thing was in my mind, “I am going to die, and I do not know where I am going after I die.” In God’s grace, I survived and was not even hurt!

Soon after, two true Christian friends asked me if I was saved. I did not have any idea what “saved” meant since I had grown up in a church that did not believe in the need for salvation. But now I was a seeker. God used my car crash to call me to salvation through Jesus Christ. The Bible says no one truly seeks for God (Rom 3:11).

Who Knows the Gospel?

A pastor, an evangelist, and several other Christians could not explain the Gospel in a way that made sense to me. I bought a Bible and began to study for myself. I quickly learned, with no human teachers, that the Bible separates all people into saved or unsaved. My church was wrong.

More than any other passage, God used Romans 10:13, “Whoever will call on the Name of the Lord will be saved,” to open my mind and heart. On 8 February 1971, I believed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and was born again in a bathtub. But that does not prove baptismal regeneration. Water did not save me. My church had baptized me

22 years earlier. Jesus ALONE saved me! I felt God changing me on the inside. I felt clean, forgiven, and accepted, whereas before, I had felt dirty, guilty, and rejected by God. I have learned since then that God had never really rejected me—I had denied Him. He is not into dismissing people. Religion does that. God's true nature and plan is to reach out to sinners, save and change them rather than reject them. Jehovah is a God of love and grace. That is proven 100% by the Cross!

I had many questions after being saved because I believed God's truth as written in His word. I got an appointment with Reverend Dr. Ralph of my fake church to ask him to explain the Bible to me. After all, he was my pastor. Is that not how we know God and His ways—through the pastor? No. It is NOT through any man, including me, a missionary. It is only through Jesus! But I asked the Reverend Dr. "Is Jesus really God?" He answered, "Some people believe that." Next, I asked him, "Is Jesus coming again?" Again, he said, "Some people believe that." Then, I asked, "Is the Bible indeed 100% God's Word?" The Reverend Dr.'s anger flared, and he slammed his fist on his beautiful desk and told me to leave his church. I did.

Religious Leaders Killed Jesus

Since then, I learned it was also religious leaders in Jesus' day who had the Bible but did not understand it, who, more than any other humans, were responsible for the rejection and murder of Jesus Christ the Lord. In my case, my home church failed to teach me the truth. My home church made me think I was a Christian, but I was not a Christian according to the teachings of the Bible. I was a moral, religious fake and going to Hell. When I believed the Bible instead of the pastor and the church, the senior pastor (the Reverend Dr.) angrily kicked me out of the church. My family had been members of that church for three generations.

I Got the Truth from the Bible Alone

It was almost totally the Bible alone that opened my mind to the Gospel. I now know that the Gospel can be described accurately in two words (1 Cor. 1:23): CHRIST, CRUCIFIED. CHRIST alone can save me. I cannot save myself. No one else can save me, only Jesus Christ! And Jesus being CRUCIFIED, that is, His sacrificial death on the Cross, was the only sacrifice, payment, good work, or obedience that could and would and did save me.

Call to Evangelism & Missions

I had been a farmer and loved farming more than anything until Jesus showed me His love and His Gospel. No human but personal study of the Bible brought me to salvation. My spiritual life started based on God's Written word, the Bible. So, as a new Christian, I continued to study and study His word whenever I was free from my work as a farmer (and a part-time factory worker). I loved the Bible! I studied it because I wanted to, not because I had to. Reading the Bible all the time does not mean I am good. It means God is good. Because I studied the Bible so much, people began to ask me questions

about the Bible. Before long, I taught or helped with home Bible studies almost every day of the week. More and more people were getting saved!

Another Way of Salvation?

Young people at a high school Bible study asked, "Are those who never heard of Jesus really lost?" "God must have another way for them!" they argued. I believed Acts 4:12 had the answer, so I shared that verse with them. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (NAS95). When I was home alone that night, I felt as if God was asking me (in my mind, no voices or visions), "Do you truly believe what Acts 4:12 says?" I thought for a while, then answered, "Yes!" I then felt a very heavy load on me, and I knew it was the lost people of the world who had not yet heard the Gospel.

I had no proper church background, so I had only heard of missionaries but did not know much about them. I assumed they preached the Gospel. I thought maybe God was calling me to be a missionary. It was late in the night. I was alone with God. On my knees, I prayed, "God, I am willing to be a missionary. Good night, Lord," and slept.

Missionary Aviation & Marriage

The next day, I began to ask God daily, "What do I do now?" Whenever I asked that, the word "aviation" came to my mind. That made no sense to me because I had just volunteered to be a missionary, and I had no idea missionaries used airplanes to take the Gospel to remote places. I knew of no connection between "missions" and "aviation." I continued asking the Lord's guidance for two weeks, and every time I did, one word alone would come to my mind, "aviation." I was about to give up when, one day, I picked up a Moody Monthly magazine that my mom had left in our house. As I opened the magazine, I "just happened" to see a small advertisement for Moody's Missionary Aviation program. Wow! I almost flew without an airplane. There is a connection between being a missionary and aviation. Maybe God is in this missionary call after all!

However, I still wanted to be sure. I was a farmer and loved it; if I left farming, I would never be able to return to farming again. I wanted to be as sure as possible that I knew God's will. On a Sunday afternoon, as I was home alone, I contemplated how I could be sure God was leading me into missionary aviation. As I thought, I heard a small airplane fly over our farmhouse. Without thinking, I prayed, "Lord, if it is You leading me into missionary aviation, You could confirm it to me by putting me into an airplane today." Apart from my flight in an airliner to army boot camp several years earlier, I had never been in an airplane.

Next, I reasoned that if God were to put me in an airplane today, I might drive to an airport. I drove to the newest airport in my GTO (poorly rebuilt after my crash). Just as I parked my car, maybe four meters away, directly in front of me, a moving plane unknown to me stopped! The pilot opened his door and waved for me to come over. I ran to him as the propeller almost blew me off my feet. The pilot yelled above the noise.

“Get in! Let’s go for a ride!” It was minutes between my prayer and this airplane ride. Again, I felt I could fly without this airplane; I was so excited about God’s quick answer to my prayers. But this time, I was in a real aircraft! I did not know that airplane or the pilot when he waved for me to come for a ride. I had never been to that airport in my life. But all of this is easy for an infinite and good God!

Sue & I Met & Soon Went to Bible School

I met Sue, my wife-to-be, at a church camp in our home state. She recently graduated as a registered nurse and volunteered to be the church camp nurse for the summer. She felt called to be a missionary nurse in Africa before I met her, but in her words, she was “waiting for someone to take her to Africa.” We met in 1973, married in 1974, and both started studies at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1974, only two months after marriage. I was in the Missionary Aviation program, roughly equal to a five-year program but compressed into just over four years. The two years of studying the Bible in Chicago were easy and an absolute joy! The over two years of full-time, intense aviation training at Elizabethton, Tennessee, was the most challenging thing I had done so far. A very high percentage of the students who started in that program did not graduate. I was nearly removed within the first two weeks, but God kept me in the program, and I graduated with good grades. All to God’s credit and glory.

Although I trained to become a missionary pilot at Moody, I had always felt called mainly to evangelism (remember Acts 4:12) and discipleship of believers through teaching the Bible. Through many painful experiences, I learned that I could not automatically trust religious people, even leaders. I was learning that only the True God, known only through Jesus Christ, based only on His written word, the Bible, could always be trusted.

Problems? Jesus Never Fails

God is always teaching His children this same lesson through challenging experiences. Impossible problems and dangers force us to learn that only Jesus Christ, the True God, who became flesh, can be trusted in all situations. All of us people, including true Christians, are weak, ignorant, and sinful. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15 that it is a faithful saying and all should believe that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom he, Paul, was the worst. I am willing to say the same with Paul—I am also the worst of sinners. Jesus Christ is the only Savior, the only good One, the only One Who never fails, and indeed, I am learning again and again in my life that Jesus never fails. That never-failing faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ has been the foundation and center of our lives and work for more than 40 years. Jesus never fails!

Arriving in Africa in 1980

In January 1980, we arrived in Africa for the first time. After training in Cameroon and purchasing supplies in Kenya, we arrived in Juba, Sudan (north and South Sudan were the same nation then). We had been assigned to Juba to support Bible translation and literacy, as well as other Christian ministries and many humanitarian organizations. The

Addis Ababa Accord that African leaders signed in the 1970s established some peace and limited autonomy for the southern region of Sudan.

South Sudan was almost the size of Texas, about 650,000 square km. It is the 19th largest country in Africa and the 43rd largest globally. In those days, our Cessna 206 was the only plane based in that large region. I flew for Bible translation and other mission groups, the government of southern Sudan, including the president of the HEC—High Executive Council, and the military. I flew for the UN, USAID, BBC, numerous development agencies, and many others. There were no adequate roads in those days and no other airplanes. There was one satellite-based telephone in Juba, operated by the government, and you had to reserve it months in advance. We have not used a phone in all our years in South Sudan.

Our mail and eggs came from Nairobi. That was 900 kilometers by air and 1,500 kilometers by road, but almost half the way, there was no road then—only a track. There were petrol stations in Juba, but no petrol in those early years. We had to bring all our fuel from Nairobi or Mombasa, Kenya. We usually kept at least a 6-month supply of petrol, diesel, kerosene, and avgas on our mission compound in Juba. Sue and I drove to Juba from Nairobi in early 1980. It was a four-day trip then, but it often took longer. I have driven that route four times. One of our trips on the same route took nine days due to bad weather. On our first trip to Juba, in northern Kenya, Turkana district, the “road” disappeared, having been covered by blowing sand. We had no GPS and no road maps in those days. When the road disappeared, we parked the Land Rover and vowed to each other to never get out of sight of the car. Sue began to circle in one direction, and I in the other. Finally, we found the road and continued our drive.

Juba, South Sudan

We were both swamped in Juba. I kept busy as a pilot and airplane mechanic, among many other jobs. Sue was busy as a nurse and a radio flight follower, keeping track of where to begin looking for me in case of a crash or emergency. Sue was also our housekeeper, cook, and bookkeeper for the mission, and she also managed a small “grocery store” for our missionary colleagues.

Early one morning, as I walked around our mission compound in Juba, I noticed a piece of paper wedged into the front gate. I opened it, and it said, “We are BAFTO. You must leave Sudan immediately, or we will take action.” BAFTO stood for Black African Fundamentalist Terrorist Organization. We had never heard of it before but later learned it was a small but genuine terrorist organization. Nothing became of the threat, as is the case for most threats we know of. But the government took it seriously and assigned soldiers to our compound for several days.

Sudan was an Islamic Republic, but we were ignorant and did not know what that meant in those days. We loved evangelism but did not necessarily feel called to work with Muslims. We knew nothing about Islam and wrongly assumed that all Muslims were dangerous. We now know we were so very wrong, and I still feel embarrassed that I even believed that about all Muslims for even one minute.

Khartoum

The Addis Ababa Peace Accord did not last; war broke out again in 1983. The war grew to the point that our organization chose to leave southern Sudan, and in 1989, our mission transferred us to Khartoum, outside of the southern war zone.

We heard “Allah hu akbar” from at least 13 different Mosques every morning at 4 AM in Khartoum. You could see and count all of them from our roof. We were “baptized by immersion” into Islam! We soon learned that most Muslims are humble, friendly, and kind. I remember a Muslim we met at a roadside restaurant saying, “President Bush is bad, but Americans are good, and Sudanese are good!” We felt happy and honored to get to know our Muslim neighbors. Riding through Khartoum on my Yamaha XT 550 motorcycle, I often heard people calling, “Khawaja, itfuddal!” (Foreigner, welcome to eat with us!) Sue bought IRE (Islamic Religious Education) books from Kenya to study Islam. We both learned by being inside the Islamic culture. We were there when the coup in 1989 installed Omar Hassan Al Bashir as Sudan’s president. He remained in power for decades.

We were not allowed to remain in Khartoum under Bashir’s government. The government did not directly throw us out, but after being there for four years, we were indirectly thrown out of Sudan. They delayed renewing our visa until it expired, and we had to leave Khartoum in 1993. It was Bashir’s government that refused to renew our visas. The government gave us no reason. Friends inside immigration told us we were thrown out of Sudan, but in a clever way that would protect the government from Western criticism.

Accuracy of Our Story

Some of the following details are difficult to verify. We have tried our best to establish the accuracy of what I am about to write in the remainder of this account. Everything is corroborated by more than one person or more than one confirming event. While we gain nothing by making any individual look bad, I believe there is much to be learned about our spiritual war and God’s faithfulness by trying to present the following stories as accurately as possible.

Someone told us that Abdulahi Hamoda Ahsan Yusuf was involved in President Bashir’s government’s security operations. We are confident that Bashir and Abdullahi were involved in the policies and decisions that led to our expulsion from Sudan in 1993. The importance of this information is relevant later in our story.

Back to Kenya, then to Darfur

In 1994, I resumed flying as a missionary pilot but then based in Nairobi. In September 2004, I flew as the captain of a large missionary aircraft into Darfur, Sudan. A famous Christian organization owned the plane. I was surprised I was allowed to enter Sudan as captain of that large aircraft after being expelled from Sudan in 1993. But Jesus is the King of kings (and presidents), and all good things come from Him, and He makes everything that happens turn good! I flew only five times into Darfur, and then we were

stopped from flying. Again, the government did not forcibly expel us. Still, delay after delay made it unfruitful to keep this large aircraft and crew in Sudan when the government did not allow us to operate effectively. The hindrances we experienced were the direct and deliberate decisions of those in power.

Getting permission to make any flights into Darfur took a long time. However, eventually, the government authorized a flight. I remember well the officer of the government saying to me before the first flight, “Captain, we know that you are a Christian. There are no Christians in Darfur, and no one in Darfur wants to hear the name of Jesus Christ. We, the government, will not allow you to mention the name of Jesus Christ. Under that limitation, we will allow you to make flights into Darfur.”

The government’s demands were clear and direct. I am not exaggerating. Ultimately, I made only five flights into Darfur, and the other crew also made a few. Then, we returned the aircraft to Nairobi. As the Bible says we should do, I shook the dust off my feet, bumping my shoes against the side of the large cargo door of the plane before closing it. We flew the plane back to Nairobi, where it flew into Sudan, but from Kenya, for many years.

A Spy in Our House

Soon after that, in November of 2006, a young lady, who we later learned was going by the fake name Mary Komy, came to live in our house in Nairobi. A missionary friend asked us to house her as he used his friends in the US government to enable Mary Komy to immigrate to the USA. She has been a citizen of the USA for many years now. Her father was from Darfur, reputed to be a general in the Sudan Army and a state Governor in Sudan.

First Muslim Accepts the Gospel

Abdullah Hamed Daud hitchhiked from Darfur to Nairobi, arriving in Nairobi in May 2007. The first night he visited our house, he accepted Christ. He had grown up as a Muslim, and when the Qur’an said, “Jesus, son of Mary,” he would ask his Islamic teachers, “Who was Jesus’ father?” They said, “Do not ask that question,” then beat him. In May 2007, he finally learned the answer to his question—Jesus is the Son of God and the only Savior! Abdullah lives in the USA now and still believes in Jesus Christ.

We never thought we would see a Muslim come to Christ! God made it happen in our house despite ourselves. Abdullah was from Darfur. Remember the official who said, “Do not mention the name of Jesus Christ in Darfur.”? Abdullah was the first of MANY Muslims from Darfur whom God brought into our sitting room, and nearly all of those Muslims from Darfur became Christians! The government would not allow us to mention the name of Jesus in Darfur, so God brought many from Darfur into our sitting room, and nearly all of them accepted Christ when they heard the name Jesus and His teachings. Glory to God!

Abdullah soon brought his friend, Abdu. The first day Abdu was in our house, he trusted Christ. He was also from Darfur. They brought another Abdullah and his cousin (also Abdullah). They were from Darfur, but they were from the Janjaweed, enemies of Abdullah Daud and Abdu. However, these two new believers invited their enemies to know Jesus Christ. Now, there were three Christian Abdullahs and one Abdu, all from Darfur, and all used to be Muslims!

The first Abdullah introduced us to an official of the Sudanese chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. He was from Darfur too. This man, whom we can call Din, became a Christian. He introduced me to Khalif, from Darfur. Khalif became a Christian under the wing of a missionary airplane I had flown to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.

Sue and I went to the USA for a furlough. While in the USA, I got an email that said, “My dear Dad, I read one book, then the other. How do I know which book is true?” We knew he was comparing the Qur’an and the Bible. Word was spreading to Darfur Muslims that we could explain the Gospel. So, Mohi, by email, asked us for help understanding God’s truth. Soon after returning to Nairobi, Mohi met us and accepted Christ. He also was from Darfur.

Mohi introduced us to a lady from Darfur named Amina. She accepted Christ the first time she came to our house. Her husband arrived a few weeks later for a Bible study at our home on a Sunday morning. He came with four other believers from Darfur—all had been Muslims. After the study, he said, “It was nice, but not for me. But I do not mind if my wife is a Christian.” I stepped out for a few minutes, and when I came back, the same man, Muman, said, “Dad, while you were gone, something came over me, and I want to become a Christian.” He accepted Christ. He was from Darfur. That family now lives in the USA, and we maintain contact with them.

“A Million People in Darfur....”

The first Abdullah had gotten permission from the UN to immigrate to the USA legally as a refugee. Before he left for the USA, he asked us to have a going away party in Nairobi for his friends from Darfur. About twenty from Darfur came. I shared the Gospel. After hearing the Gospel, a young man, Jaffar, whom we had never met before, came to me and said, “There are a million people in Darfur who would become Christians if they heard that message.”

We now had a significant network among Muslims, Darfur refugees, and other Sudanese Muslims. They introduced us to Abdirashid (from Sudan but not Darfur). He became a Christian in our home through the Sunday Bible studies that had grown into a house church. Abdirashid brought several people to the Bible studies. Some seemingly had come to try to get money from us, but by God’s sovereign grace, seven from one family converted from Islam. God used Abdirashid to bring many Muslims to us, and nearly all accepted Christ. None of them were from Darfur. God was broadening our connections.

Abdirashid Assassinated

We helped Abdirashid go to Bible school in Kenya and attended his graduation. He introduced us as his mom and dad to the graduation guests. After the graduation, the Sudan Embassy contacted Abdirashid and said he would be dead within two weeks. Abdirashid died mysteriously and is now with His Lord.

Before his assassination, Abdirashid introduced us to an Ethiopian lady named Nuriya Amira Mohammed. God used her to take us to Eastleigh, Nairobi, and get connected to Somali Muslims. God continued to broaden our connections.

Through the Sudanese network, we met a Boutros from Darfur. Though a Muslim, he had informed outsiders of atrocities committed by his government. As a result, he was tortured in Darfur, and after being tortured, Boutros concluded, "There is no God if this can happen to me." But Boutros converted to Christianity through our witness and the Lord's Spirit.

A college graduate from Darfur, Jamal, began to attend Bible studies in our house. He had been imprisoned and tortured several times as a political dissident. He attended Bible studies and often visited our home alone but rarely mentioned spiritual things. However, each time he got up to leave, he would say, "Dad, what does this mean . . ." and ask something about the Bible. Amnesty International had gotten him out of Sudan, and he was well known to the UN and other human rights agencies. He became a Christian in our home, partly because of a dream in which he was flying with me as his pilot. He brought his brother from Darfur, Nour, who became a Christian. The UN eventually resettled Jamal to Europe, but his brother, Nour, had to stay in Kenya. Nour mysteriously died in Kenya, and those who know him believe agents of his Sudanese government assassinated him. Before Nour's death, Jamal told me, "Dad, Khartoum knows you very well. It is dangerous for me to even communicate with you because Khartoum may find me by hacking your phone. I am a Christian. Do not worry about that. But I can never contact you again. Thank you, Dad, and goodbye!"

Adam was a former SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army) officer who came to us through our refugee network. Of course, he was also from Darfur. Adam studied the Bible with us for more than a year. He was polite but seemed not to be interested in the Gospel. However, after the Bible study one Sunday, he said, "Dad, I finally agree. Do you know what I mean?" He also became a Christian.

Muna was from Sudan but not Darfur. We met her through the Darfur refugee network. She had had to leave her Sudanese Muslim husband. In tears, in our kitchen, Muna asked Christ to save her. Her four children, with Muslim family names, all became Christians (we think). One of them, the most spiritually mature, mysteriously died at the age of 21 about two years ago. She died in the home of her Muslim father's second Muslim wife. Her mom and we think the government assassinated her daughter. Her mom asked me to present the Gospel at her daughter's memorial service despite several important people from Sudan attending.

The refugees from Darfur brought a lady named Saida, who was not from Darfur, to our Bible studies in Nairobi. It was a real spiritual battle, but in the end, Saida trusted Christ. She later told us she was a second cousin of President Bashir of Sudan. Remember the president whose administration had us removed from Khartoum? Over the next few years, Saida told us that more than 20 of her family members (relatives of the president) became Christians. According to Saida, at least two of her relatives were assassinated, and two were imprisoned. We met her mother and two sisters who escaped to safety in Kenya, who verified the story. Now, they are hiding in a different country.

After Saida and her Egyptian husband, Amir, were resettled outside of Africa, Saida told us Mary Komy contacted them and told them they would be given a lot of money if they would say publicly that Sue slept with the men in the Bible studies and that I had raped Saida. Saida and Amir refused to lie or accuse us. Amir mysteriously died within a few days, and Mary Komy's agent disappeared.

Before she left Kenya, Saida had brought Ruth and her brother, Edward, to the Bible studies in our house. Ruth had grown up as a Muslim with a Muslim name. She and her brother accepted Christ in our home. Ruth is still serving the Lord in another country. Sadly, her brother wanted to return to Khartoum and was assassinated there in 2012. Ruth believes the same man and his team from Khartoum assassinated Edward and the others.

Spying & Betrayal

Missionaries in Khartoum told us that Jesse was a persecuted Christian. We know her full Muslim name but do not share it here. Jesse destroyed the marriage of her missionary "friends" in Khartoum after we had met Jesse. In Kenya, Jesse told Muslims that she was not a Christian and never would be a Christian because Christians are dirty, but she was in Kenya to deceive and defeat Sue and me. Her father was also a general in the Sudanese Army.

Mary Komy and Jesse told us they did not know each other, but we found out later that they did know each other well. A trusted contact in "intelligence," whom we know, told us he had learned that both Mary and Jesse had been sent to us as spies to destroy our ministry and that Khartoum had ten field agents assigned to Sue and me to destroy us.

Bariah heard about us through her brother, Abdullahi, who was trying to destroy Sue and me. When Bariah became interested in Christianity, the people in her brother's home tortured her. She escaped. After a long and dangerous journey out of Sudan, Bariah came to our house and became a Christian. She is a strong believer now, and God is using her. Ruth and Bariah are relatives of Abdullahi, who was part of the Bashir government in Sudan, which kicked us out in 1993. Through Bariah, we met Elias and his father, both Muslims from Sudan; both became Christians. Although Elias was a boy when he accepted Christ, he is now a young man. He is an energetic and passionate Christian. He is confident in his faith in Christ, and those who know him call him "The Preacher," though he is only 12 years old. Through the refugee network, we met Amun,

who was also from a Muslim family in Sudan. Amun became a Christian and is growing and passionate about evangelism.

Eastleigh

Nuriya (mentioned above) invited Sue and me to visit her in Eastleigh, a section of Nairobi with a heavy concentration of Somali Muslim people. Somalis often say, "To be a Somali is to be a Muslim." There in Eastleigh, we saw Somali schoolgirls in their school uniforms. Sue and I both felt burdened to try to share the Gospel with this people group. When we got home that night, I asked Sue, "What will we do to reach them?" Sue said, "Start a Bible study like we always do." On 4 July 2013—the same year I retired from flying at age 65, we started a Bible study in the Muslim Eastleigh section of Nairobi. People who knew Eastleigh said having a Bible study there would be impossible, and ours would not last more than a week. But nothing is impossible for Jesus Christ, and ten years later, the Eastleigh Bible study is still going. Out of the Eastleigh study, the Lord has started two predominantly Somali house churches, one of roughly 10 – 20 members and the other of 12 – 27. Almost all the members of both house churches came out of Islam.

Severe Attacks Begin in 2014

One of the Sudanese Muslims who came to Christ in our home several years ago was named Amun. He had been trained as a lawyer before he came to us. One day, he told us, "Mom and Dad, they will say Mom is sleeping with a sheep, and Dad is having sex with the girls in Bible study, and they will have fake pictures. That's how they will try to destroy you." About a year later, the attacks he predicted began.

One day in 2014, two people contacted us, one a lady who had lived with us, and the other, as far as we can establish, was a high-ranking member of the security forces of the government of Sudan. We did not know until late that these two people were connected and working together to destroy (and possibly kill) Sue and me. But now we know. The lady said, "You must stop being missionaries, leave Africa, and get divorced, or else there will be bad pictures of you placed on the internet." Remember what Amun had predicted? Exactly that. The terrorist said, "You think you have power? I have power. I learned your names, your phone numbers, where you live, and what you do. I know all about you. Do you think you have power? I have power. Why did you make my sister a Christian? I will kill her, and I will kill you."

That was the beginning of a series of attacks that have gone on for almost ten years. It has included spies sent to us to learn answers to the following questions: What Muslims became Christians? Who was attending the service in our homes? How would Sue and I be vulnerable to attack? How could we be stopped from bringing Muslims to Christ?

Muslims in three governments in Africa have sought to defeat or destroy Sue and me. We are weak, but Jesus is infinitely strong! They have tried to discredit us with governments (including our own American government), with the donors who have helped support us financially, with churches and with individual Christians, with Christian

organizations working in Africa and around the world. A bank that we used received false accusations that we were supporting terrorists. The bank did an investigation and found the accusation was a lie. The US government cut off our social security payments until the congressional investigation conducted concluded we were innocent. I was accused of sexually abusing the residents in a particular safe house where I teach the Bible. Two separate, independent investigations were done, but no evidence was found to support the accusations. My passport was stolen from our house at the worst possible time, but Jesus worked things out.

Hacking

During these years and up until now, our persecutors have hacked our phones and computers many times. People have been paid to lie about us, to discredit us to the churches in the USA and Christian organizations we were previously cooperating with. They stole pictures from our phones and laptops. Two different Apple technicians in Nairobi have confirmed the hacking. Hackers shared some photos with others to compromise the security of people who work with us. Somebody stole some images and edited them to make us look evil. Someone inserted a large photo of nine Islamic sheikhs onto Sue's computer to intimidate us. Someone stole individual and church contacts from us and used them to threaten to destroy Sue and me. These enemies could even remotely turn on our Apple phones, enter the passcode, make calls, send text messages, take photos, etc. We saw it numerous times with our own eyes.

One day, Sue's phone sent messages to two people, but the phone was not even in Sue's hands or the same room. We do not doubt that someone was hacking us again and again. So, Sue laid her phone on a table near us. She began praying spiritual warfare against the hacking while God prompted me to speak the Gospel into the phone. The phone was switched on, but the screen was locked, black, and would not accept input, and no apps were open. We used to think no communications or operations could happen when the phone was locked, no apps were running, and it was not even in our hands or near us. We were wrong.

As Sue prayed, I spoke into the phone without picking it up or unlocking it. Neither of us was touching the phone. I said, "Has anyone ever seen Allah? Has anyone ever seen Him do any miracles? Are there any witnesses that your Allah is real or even exists? No! But Jesus, Who is God, took a body and made Himself visible to people. They saw Him, heard Him, touched Him. They saw him do miracles that only God could do. In the end, He said He would be crucified, but on the third day, He would become alive again." Then I said into the locked phone, "Hundreds and thousands of people witnessed this true God, so we know Jesus is the true God!" Immediately, a voice in English spoke out of the closed, locked phone, saying, "What people?" That agent had forgotten he was supposed to be spying on us and instead had listened to the reason why he should become a Christian! Again, this all happened while the phone was locked; the screen was off, and neither of us had touched the phone nor had touched it for some time.

Fleeing Africa

In 2018, someone paid a so-called pastor and self-proclaimed prophet named Mahmoud Ali nearly USD 3,000, as we found out later, to contact churches in the USA and say I was a dirty man having sex with someone. Mahmoud had deceived and ingratiate himself with a pastor in Michigan in the USA. He told this pastor I was an evil man involved in sexual immorality and that I should be forced to stop being a missionary. Remember again the threat I mentioned above from a Sudanese Muslim official, "Stop being a missionary and leave Africa."

The pastor in Michigan googled our names and found an organization we had been working with and told them I was a dirty man. That organization contacted one of our two home churches and told them I was an evil man. That home church and organization kicked us out, contacted all our supporters, and told them we were no longer with that organization.

Many churches and organizations threw us out. The same Mahmoud Ali also bribed one police officer to threaten to throw me in prison for the alleged sin. After a while, the police officer revealed that it was all a lie for money. But Mahmoud would not drop the issue. Sue and I made a hasty departure, not wanting to spend time in prison on bogus charges. As we flew over the north coast of Africa on our way to Europe and home in the USA, I whispered, "Goodbye Africa," thinking we would never set foot in Africa again. It seemed the enemy in Khartoum had finally won.

After being in the USA for a few days, Mahmoud called me on WhatsApp and asked where we were. I said, "The USA." He said, "No, you are lying. You are still in Africa." So, I went outside my mother-in-law's house and did a video call with Mahmoud, showing him where we were until he said, "OK, I see you have left Africa and are in the USA," and he closed the conversation. We have not heard from Mahmoud again for more than a year. Mahmoud was obviously employed to make us leave Africa, and he confirmed whether he was successful or not. We believe he would get part or all of his money after he had succeeded in removing us from Africa. He had. He did get his money.

How Do We Know About Our Enemies?

How do we know that Mahmoud and Mary Komy were both working with Hamoda (the enemy of the government in Khartoum)? Hamoda told us Mahmoud was his friend in a text message. Hamoda said Mahmoud was in our Bible studies as Hamoda's agent to defeat us. Later, Hamoda sent a picture of Mary Komy to one of the Muslim converts close to us. This MBB (Muslim Background Believer) did not know who Mary Komy was, so when Hamoda sent the picture to her, this friend of ours was confused and brought the picture to us. She said it was from Hamoda and asked us who this lady was. Immediately, Sue and I recognized her as Mary Komy. Hamoda likes to try to terrorize us by boasting about how many people we had been deceived into trusting were helping this enemy of the Gospel.

Back to Africa

We thought we would never be able to return to Africa. Amazingly, after being in the USA for just two months in 2018, we felt God was showing us that we could now return to Africa. Two believers who had come out of Islam who were extra close to us risked their lives to clear our names. They then encouraged us to come back to Nairobi.

Mahmoud Ali's lies had cut off many friends and much financial support, but Jesus is the Boss of everything, and He replaced all that had been taken away by and through Mahmoud. We returned to Nairobi, a bit fearful of the police officer Mahmoud had bribed, and we wondered what kind of new threats would be directed against us.

Within the first two weeks of returning to Nairobi, several Muslims came to Christ. We took that as confirmation that our Lord wanted us back at His work in Nairobi.

Mahmoud Ali Confesses His Lie

On Father's Day, a year after returning to Nairobi, some of those who attend the church in our house invited me to lunch to honor me as their spiritual father. There are about 400 African believers who call us Mom and Dad. While finishing our pizza lunch, Mahmoud Ali walked into the restaurant. My blood pressure soared. Not from fear, but anger! I ignored him, but one of the Somali believers went to him and talked with Mahmoud. They left the restaurant. Fifteen minutes later, the Somali believer, whom I trusted totally, came back inside to me and said, "Dad, come and talk with Mahmoud." I said, "No! I will never talk with him again." But the Somali believer insisted, so I went out to meet Mahmoud. Before he said a word, I stood very close and said, "I know you lied! You know you lied! The person you accused me of having sex with knows you lied." Then I told him he did a lot of damage to us, but as a Christian, I must forgive him. I also said I never wanted to see him again.

Then Mahmoud said, "Yes, I lied. I know you did not have sex with anyone. But I was broke and needed the money, and they paid me to lie about you." I told him churches and organizations had thrown us out because of his lie. Then he asked how he could correct his mistakes. He offered to write to the church and organization that led the efforts to have Sue and me discredited by all. Mahmoud said he would admit his wrongdoing to everyone, apologize, and offer to talk with anyone who wanted to hear the truth from his mouth. He then wrote his confession and included his phone number so anyone who doubted him could ask him questions and hear the truth from him. I sent Mahmoud's written confession and apology to that church that had thrown us out and led others to throw us out, but they ignored his confession. So, a few months later, Mahmoud wrote up a new version of his confession, and I sent that again to the church, which had spearheaded our rejection by many. Again, the church did not respond. I sent Mahmoud's apology a third time to the main church, which had spread the false accusations against us. That church still did nothing. Then, our Somali friend, who had witnessed and secretly recorded Mahmoud's confession on the phone, also contacted our former home church. That fourth version of the confession was also ignored.

Believing Accusations but Not Confessions?

What are we to think of churches and Christians that will believe accusations without witnesses but will not accept confessions of the truth by the person who lied and made the accusations? Added to that is the fact that this happened four times! Four times, the church received evidence that I had not done what I had been accused of. Four times, they chose not to reinstate Sue and me. I thank God for my wife, Sue, who stood with me throughout the process, never believing that accusation against me.

Learning Through Pain

Through this painful process, God taught us a lot. The main lesson was about God's unending faithfulness! Another was that sometimes Christian leaders are more interested in power than truth. That is His doing, not ours.

Accusations can be a weapon used to defeat others or a tool used to gain personal power. They are not God's way. Jesus said He did not accuse, but Moses did accuse (John 5:45). This was Jesus' response to accusations against Him also by religious leaders. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called The Accuser. The very name, Satan, appears to be derived from the Hebrew word meaning to accuse.

A Missionary Colleague in Prison

Amun was the Sudanese lawyer who had warned us of this kind of false accusation of sexual misconduct that persecutors would use against Sue and me. I met Petr Jsek of VOM through my connections as a missionary pilot. I made many flights for VOM USA and many other Christian organizations. Amun told me he would like to return to his Islamic home and set up some businesses as platforms for discreetly sharing the Gospel in his homeland. I asked Petr Jsek if VOM could financially sponsor these businesses, and he agreed. The money to start two businesses was sent by VOM to me, then by me under a different name because Amun had said his home city knows my name well. The money reached Amun, and he indeed started the two businesses.

*Petr planned to visit the city where Amun had set up his businesses, and they would try to meet at Amun's home. But Peter was arrested at the airport as he entered that country. MBBs,³⁷ who were Amun's converts, began to disappear one by one. Amun contacted me in Nairobi and said, "Dad, I fear I may be abducted and killed at any time." Amun said his name would be in Petr's phone contacts, which had been confiscated, and the government used it to find Christians in that Islamic republic. I asked Amun if I sent money would he find a way out. He said, "Yes, maybe." Again, we had to find a clandestine way to send the escape money to Amun. It worked. God made it possible for Amun to escape from his home country. I have kept the text message from Amun that says, "Dad, I am safe in Cairo. Thank you!" Amun now lives in Europe, is safe, and is getting on with his life as a Christian. You can read Petr's story in his book, *Imprisoned With Isis*.*

³⁷ MBB: Muslim background believer.

Our Spiritual Children

God did not give Sue and me any biological children. We did not think we would ever have kids, but in 1985, in Juba, a Christian fireman at Juba Airport was very friendly to me as the only pilot based there. I soon learned that “Repent” was born again as the result of the ministry of OM. He asked me to start a Bible study in Juba. I said if he found one more person, we would start. He said he already knew the other person, Peter Hakim (not the European Petr mentioned above). The relationship with Peter was one of our best in Africa. Peter was the first to call us Mom and Dad. It was a fantastic relationship. His grandfather had gone to the Islamic north of Sudan decades earlier to take the Gospel to Muslims.

Remember that when the war in southern Sudan grew, we moved to Khartoum in 1989. I temporarily stopped flying and became an administrator for Bible translation and other general missionary work. It was an overwhelming job, and Peter and another Christian from southern Sudan came to Khartoum to help Sue and me. The office was in our house to reduce the profile of our organization’s missionary work in the Islamic Republic. One day after work, Peter did not get home when he left our house. He just disappeared. The following day, Richard told us Peter had not come home the night before. I asked what happened, and Richard said, “The only animal that eats people in Sudan is the government.”

About ten days later, Peter arrived at our house. He had been abducted and beaten by his government and seemed mentally stunned and confused. He said they tortured him day after day. They asked him a lot of questions. I wondered aloud what questions they asked him; he said he did not remember. It seemed funny that he could not remember the questions they asked him.

We knew it was dangerous for Peter to remain there, so we helped him and his family resettle in Uganda. Peter’s mental state settled down, but his physical health never returned. Peter went from Kampala to be with Jesus. We met Peter’s son several years later and had a long talk. I told his son I always suspected Peter’s torturers had questioned him about Sue and me and our missionary work in Sudan, but Peter would not admit that to us. Peter’s son said his whole family agreed. Together with Peter’s mom and siblings, we agreed that Peter died from injuries caused by trying to defend Sue and me.

Another of Our Spiritual Children Dies

Saida had become a Christian in our house. She later married an Egyptian man named Amir Ramses. We enjoyed them a lot. They lived very near Sue and me in Nairobi. Saida told her relatives in Khartoum that she had become a Christian, and she said about 20 of her relatives in Khartoum also became Christians through her testimony. We met her mom and sisters after they escaped persecution in Khartoum. One of Saida’s male relatives was in particular danger. We did not know that Mary Komy was dangerous at that early time. Mary had said if we knew of any persecuted Sudanese MBBs in Khartoum, she could help them from the USA, where she then lived. Saida

reluctantly gave me the contact information of one of her brothers in Khartoum so I could give it to Mary. I passed the information to Mary in the USA. The next day, this man disappeared and was never heard from again. I still profoundly regret trusting Mary and passing her this new MBB's name and number.

Another Death, but in Europe

Eventually, Saida and Amir resettled in Europe. In 2020 Mary Komy, through a Rwandan agent on location in Saida's and Amir's country in Europe, asked Amir to publicly say that Sue had slept with men in the Bible studies and that I had tried to rape Saida. They were offered much money from Mary Komy via Rwandan agents in Europe. But Saida and Amir refused to lie about Sue and me. Within a few days, Amir mysteriously died, and the Rwandan agent of Mary Komy disappeared. Saida believes agents murdered her husband for not agreeing to destroy us. Amir was killed for disobedience and to warn Saida not to reveal the details of this plot. Years before, Amir had been a computer technician in Nairobi. He had told us earlier that Jesse had taken my laptop to him behind my back and asked him to install malware into my computer so she and her people could remotely access and control my laptop. Amir refused to comply. I still have that laptop, and Jesse must have found someone else to do her dirty work. Several years ago, I took that laptop to an Apple shop in Nairobi, and they quickly found what they said was a hazardous malware program and must be removed immediately. Apple said it was one of the most dangerous malware apps ever created. Saida's and Amir's refusal to try to destroy Sue and me eventually led to Amir's death in Europe.

Serious Hacking in 2018

In 2018, when we narrowly escaped from Africa and returned to the USA, my newer Apple laptop refused to open in the USA. It repeatedly said, "Wrong password." I knew I was entering the correct password. Through a series of difficult questions, I convinced Apple that I was the legitimate owner of the laptop, and they led me through a complicated series of maneuvers that eventually unlocked my computer. We then learned that someone else had taken over as the "Administrator" of my laptop, so I could not even open and use my own laptop. Once I did get into my computer, I found the new "Administrator" had a Chinese fortune cookie as his icon. China has been Sudan's close ally for many years.

A Young Lady Mysteriously Dies

In January 2020, one of our most intelligent and dedicated disciples, a young lady 21 years of age, was found dead. Someone made it look like a suicide, but her mom, Sue, I, and others who knew her did not believe that. We are confident it was an assassination made to look like suicide, but it was done poorly so that it never really looked to her mom like suicide.

“Intelligence” Friend

We have an American friend who we suspect has expertise in “military intelligence,” including understanding how enemies do their spying. At one point, an African so-called Christian had threatened to destroy me if we did not give her USD 600 to buy a new phone. I said we did not have that much money. Then she said, “Do you know anyone in such and such a church?” It was a small church in my home area in the USA. No one in Africa could know of that church. She had gotten this confidential information from someone who hacked my computer. Apparently, the same hacker also stole pictures from my laptop. That same lady began to circulate a supposedly half-dressed picture of me to Christians and Christian organizations. The picture reached our intelligence friend who is gifted in spy-craft. He examined the picture and quickly ascertained it was a “photoshopped” picture. Someone had edited an innocent picture to make me look half-naked, and then it was circulated to many people.

High-placed Opposition

In the past few years, Muslim individuals in three governments tried to have me expelled from Africa. We are sure that is because God brought Muslims to Christ. I have received death threats from several sources. There have been so many lies about our character spread around Christian circles that we no longer count the number of attacks and threats.

At one point, we had twenty to thirty MBBs from Sudan attending a house church in Nairobi. We believe more than one of them has been assassinated as a result of their faith and their connection with Sue and me. Several people told us the Sudan Embassy had warned the Sudanese not to attend Bible studies in our home or something terrible would be done to them by the Embassy. These days, only a few Sudanese attended.

Conclusion

We have worked in Africa for 43 years. In the last ten years, we have worked with Muslims, and we have been privileged to baptize about 50 who have come to Christ out of Islam. That is not Sue’s and my work. It is God’s work through Jesus Christ by His Spirit. All glory and credit go to Jesus Christ!

As I write this, God has raised up three or more “house churches” from the work He has given us to do. Two are almost entirely composed of MBBs, and the third one is about half made up of MBBs.

*Jesus said all authority in heaven and earth was given to Him. Therefore, go to all nations and make disciples. Jesus said **He** would build His church. Indeed, He is doing just that.*

Yes, Sue and I are two farm kids from Iowa. We are not strong, wise, good, or better than anyone else. We are sinners saved by God’s grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—Christ crucified—and nothing else. But Jesus’ death for all people is the most essential truth of all truths!

It has been a challenging and dangerous but gratifying life God has given to Sue and me. We do not regret being in His work in Africa for 43 years, and we have not quit yet. By His grace, we will continue.

We pray that you who read this story of two ordinary people, Sue and me, will be moved to trust in Christ and His death for your eternal life in heaven. Maybe God will also call you to spend your life in His work!

About the Author

Denny and Sue Dyvig grew up in Iowa on farms. Sue was saved at a young age. Denny grew up in a church that did not know the gospel, and he was saved at age 22. Within a year of being born again, he began to teach at several home Bible studies. At one of them, young people argued that God must have another way to heaven apart from faith in Christ, but Denny sought to show from the Bible there is only one way, and that is through Jesus Christ's death on the cross. That belief burdened him to quit farming and go into missionary work. In 1980, they began their missionary career in Kenya and Sudan. They served through the years with two US-based missionary organizations; their names are omitted for the security of the organizations and their workers. Denny worked mainly as a missionary pilot and Sue as a nurse, bookkeeper, housekeeper, evangelist, and more. In 2013 Denny retired from flying and since then they both have been involved in full time evangelism and discipleship, mainly through Bible studies. At least three small house-churches have grown out of those Bible studies, two composed almost entirely of MBBs. They readily give their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, all credit for anything good that has been accomplished. The author can be reached at ddyvig@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 5: SAL & SUE OWENS

I thank the editor for asking me to write my testimony of how the Lord has called my wife and me to the ministry we all share in. We must appreciate that no one can do the work alone. It is a ministry that is too big for one person or organization to handle. That is one thing that has become clear to me in my years of ministry.

God is raising servants of the gospel from all over the world to bring in the harvest. Jesus, the King of kings, wants to see representatives of all nations around his throne worshiping the Lamb who was slain. I am personally grateful that at this point, I am seeing a glimpse of how we will worship together in various tongues and through cultural expressions before the throne of God. It has been a journey of almost thirty years in which the Lord has guided me along a dusty and stony path. The stretches of the journey were also smooth and pleasant. That is the way the Lord leads us all. He promised to be our Shepherd even when we pass through the valley of the shadow of death. As much as we have set out to reach a community largely unreached with the gospel of Jesus Christ, ours was also a spiritual formation and transformation journey. The Lord has worked in my heart probably more than I can know through the ministries I have been involved in.

The Foundation of Ministry is God's Calling

Indeed, it has been a journey over many years for me. Knowing where a person comes from helps us to understand that person. For me, it all started on a farm in my small village deep in the European countryside where I grew up. My parents had four children, and I was the youngest. My upbringing was in the Lutheran church tradition, with a cultural expectation to attend church on Sunday. Whether one had a personal relationship with Christ or not, following the social norms in a rural setting was customary. As I later reflected on my childhood, after having served in the Somali community, I realized a subculture of shame and honor heavily influenced me; maybe not as strong as it would have been growing up in an African setting, but it mattered a lot to me what people would think or say if I did this or did not do that. The worldview I acquired from those circumstances was small and narrow.

From a Small Village to Becoming a Global Worker

Something unique in the small corner of the world where I grew up was that God, in his grace, caused an outpouring of his Spirit in the 1980s, and the Holy Spirit awakened young people within a large catchment area to love God and desire to serve him. I cannot overestimate the influence of certain people who were Spirit-filled and gave everything they had to the service of the Lord. Aunt Greti was one of those people. A widow from an early age, she had lost her husband during the Second World War. She loved the Lord and prayed for decades that our village would be the center of a revival in the area. God answered her prayer, and the Spirit started drawing young people to this older woman so they could listen to the Word of God. Over time, the number of young people grew so much that almost all of Aunt Greti's furniture had to be removed from her house to make space for them to gather around God's Word. Young people

filled every corner, sitting on the floor. The growing youth group later attached itself to a church and mission organization, Liebenzell Mission, founded in the early 1900s and inspired by Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission.

When missionaries on home assignment from larger towns and cities came to our village, they thought it was the end of the earth. At that time, it was very remote, with little infrastructure, and communication with the outside world was inaccessible. We had our first telephone in the house when I was probably in my early twenties and a TV just before that. Visiting missionaries occasionally opened a window into the world, giving me an idea of something bigger and more exciting outside my village. As a young child, not yet a believer, I attended missionary presentations and developed a desire to go out into the world one day. Yet I had no understanding of why people left their homes and country to live in huts and endanger themselves in the jungle of Papua New Guinea or the malaria-infested Congo. During those days, no one mentioned the Islamic world, and I did not know that Islam even existed.

Revival in the Village

My older brother was the first to be born again during the revival in the area. Others were also born again and fired up to serve the Lord in different capacities. One became a missionary in Zambia, another went to Canada to serve as a pastor, and many others went to Bible schools. My brother understood the power of prayer and soon started praying for his family members. I had no idea that he was praying for me. His prayer for me was that I would someday become a missionary. For that to happen, I needed to be born again. I was under this atmosphere of the Holy Spirit but had not yet believed in Christ for salvation.

At the age of eighteen, I was at a point where I felt a deep need for a savior. The Scripture that drew me close to Jesus was John 1:12: "But to as many as did receive and welcome him, he gave the right to become children of God." I sensed that sin was real, but I could not escape it. There I was, knowing that I was a sinner yet being invited to become a child of God. The only one I knew could save me was Jesus, and I asked him into my life. That was all during a youth camp led by the older youth from this Holy Spirit-soaked environment. I remember well that prayer of handing over the authority of my life to Jesus as my new Lord. Having people who could disciple me was a blessing. They taught me how to pray, learn, and teach the Word of God.

Why am I Here?

After coming to Christ, a big question arose within me. Why am I in this world? What is the purpose of my life? I thanked Jesus for his salvation, paving the way for me to be with him in eternity. But is that all, or is there something Jesus has to say as the one in authority over what I am required to do on earth? Immediately after salvation, I wanted others also to know the sweet gospel that had saved my life.

During a three-month Bible and discipleship school, I was able to set my priorities right. One of the teachers asked, "What reason do you have not to serve God in missions?"

Because it is the command Jesus gave in Matthew 28 so clearly, I searched my heart. I felt nothing was hindering me from obeying his command until I realized my parents hoped I would one day take over the family business, continuing what they had started. There came the moment when I had to disclose my resolve not to follow the dreams and expectations my parents had for me. I was determined to follow Jesus and his ways. And that would mean leaving father and mother, brothers and sisters, home and farm, and even country, wherever that path would take me.

On the Move

I felt the Lord had put my feet on a track where I needed to make the right choices, as the psalmist says in Psalm 143:8: "Make known your ways to me." Following Jesus is an ongoing process that requires us to consistently surrender all areas of our lives to Him.

At a young age, I trained in agriculture, and I was able to serve as a short-term missionary in Papua New Guinea. During that time, new cultures and new languages influenced me. I came from a small village and flew to the other side of the world. It was difficult, and people in the village pub back home talked about me. Yet those were steps in the right direction. I was on the move.

The image of a ship on open waters helped me during those formative years. Such a ship can be steered, unlike a vessel tied in the harbor. Similarly, I started heading out and finding God's purpose for me. I saw mission work firsthand on that short-term trip, which led me to solidify my decision that God was calling me to be a missionary in a foreign land. I could have served at home, but God clarified that it was to be overseas. The next step on the journey was to acquire an excellent, solid theological foundation. After the mission trip, I joined a Bible college, and meaningful and life-changing events happened there.

Discerning the Call of God

*I started praying for specific people groups and countries around the world. It happened in 1990 when I was using the prayer guide *Pray for the World* (now called *Operation World*) by Patrick Johnstone; I came across prayer points for Somalia. For a reason I can explain only as a movement of the Holy Spirit, I felt a burden was laid upon my heart, a burden for the Somali people, seeing that there was no church and hardly any gospel witness in their land. Somalia at that time was not known for many good elements. Images of famine earlier that year flooded TV channels. The cruel civil war was about to start. I had almost no knowledge of East Africa, let alone Somalia and the turmoil in which it would end up. As I prayed over this nation, with the urge of the Holy Spirit, I felt that God was saying he wanted me to invest my life in this nation in the Horn of Africa, that God wanted to bring salvation through the good news of Jesus to its people.*

Other exciting things happened during those three years in the early 90s. Conferences and prayer meetings were held in different parts of Europe to raise awareness and

focused prayer towards unreached people groups, especially those in the 10/40 window. Somalia made headlines, not for a good reason, but for a bloody and tragic civil war. A Swiss missionary visited our Bible college and shared about the atrocities carried out by the Somali government in Somaliland. He rallied people who were willing to serve with him in Somaliland. This rallying cry fell on fertile ground as we were praying for the nation of Somalia when a missionary sought a team willing to go. We met over several years with this talented man of God from Switzerland to learn and be inspired.

A Movement Starting in Prayer

A movement starting in prayer led to a change in direction. In a way, that prayer time in which I prayed for the nations made me an answer to that prayer by putting an urge in my heart to serve among Somalis. That particular prayer time changed the course of my life in multiple ways. Almost simultaneously, I connected to the woman who later became my wife. We were at the same Bible college, and she was the first person I saw after coming out of that prayer session. I had to share with her what I had experienced in prayer.

Part of the training in our Bible college was an introduction to missions by going to a mission field. We were not interested in going to Mongolia like the rest of the students, so we asked the administration whether we could organize our trip to Somaliland to visit our Swiss friend. They agreed, and we organized. As we headed to the airport, we heard that our friend had to flee because of unrest in Somaliland—that was in 1992. We were rerouted to Pakistan within a few days and learned important lessons there.

Two Life Stories Becoming One Story

My story became intertwined with the story of my wife. After meeting in Bible college, we married a few years later and kept praying together, looking for people the Lord had put on the same path. It took us about nine years from sensing God's calling to finding our way to Africa. On that path we found others who were involved in ministry to Somalis in various parts of the world. We met a German missionary who desired to work in Mandera, as close as possible to the Somali border. I planned a vision trip with him to the farthest corner of Kenya.

In 1996, married and having had our first child, I made a vision trip to Mandera, a small town tucked away in the corner of Kenya, as close as I could get at that time to the Somali border. In Mandera, I experienced firsthand what living in an area dominated by bandits meant. The government of Kenya had little interest in the region. No one could travel without a police escort, and there was a sense of danger. For some reason, that did not deter me from entering that area. It was one of those trips where I knew God was in it every step of the way.

God opened doors for a German organization to work in Mandera, and for a long time, they had a thriving ministry. Even today, the ministry continues under a Kenyan couple's leadership. Despite terror attacks that ravaged Mandera and the road between Wajir and Mandera, our German friends kept going in ministry. The bandits took one friend

captive for a couple of days and took him into Somalia. As far as I know, they released him without ransom by God's grace.

That visit to Manderla was influential, showing me the reality of ministry in a hostile environment. On the way back to the capital city, we spent a day or two in a dusty little town that would become a place where I would bring my family and settle for ministry. Manderla was harsh and hostile. The other small town was not that different, but I had peace, especially because of how the Lord spoke to me about that place in a gentle way. I knew it was the place God wanted our young family, yet I felt the Lord gave me a choice to take on the assignment—he would still bless me if I said no to his offer.

The Church as the Main Driver: Praying & Sending

Sharing the story of my journey close to the heartland of Somalis, our church decided to do something spectacular. They followed a model recently developed in response to the emerging need to pray for unreached people groups in the 10/40 window. A program within our church called Adopt a People came into view. Our church leadership proposed to sign an adoption agreement between the church and the Lord with a commitment to continue praying, giving, and sending until the church of Christ flourished in the Somali nation.

From that time on, my wife and I were on the move. There were few options for missionaries seeking a sending organization in the 1990s. One obvious choice was SIM, to which we became seconded. In March 1999, we were sent out by our church and sending agency to Kenya with our two small children. With little experience living in Africa, we were on our way to work with Somalis, initially in the capital city. Learning languages, getting to know people, and taking the first baby steps to understand a new culture took quite a lot of energy, but the Lord helped us throughout. We started in the well-known Eastleigh Fellowship Centre in Nairobi.

Encountering the Small but Growing Somali Church

In Eastleigh, we met Somali believers for the first time, some of whom are no longer living today, and we held Bible studies in our home. I had a chance to meet some prominent figures, like Ahmed Haile and Abdulkadir Warsame, and learned a good deal from them. We count ourselves blessed to have known them and many others. The late Abdi Welli Ahmed from Garissa soon became a good friend, and we still feel the loss when we think of him, especially when we walk the streets of his native town.

Many believers in the early 2000s relocated to various parts of the world, many to the United States. Their status as a highly mobile refugee community made church planting complicated. Somalis did not come to stay but to move to a perceived better place. We got a taste of what it means for Somalis to live as refugees, waiting for years to get notice from the International Organization for Migration for their resettlement. For some, resettlement enabled them to have better lives. For others, we have heard it was not in their long-term best interest to go to America.

We lived in Eastleigh for a relatively short time before we moved to a small town in the desert of northeastern Kenya. In this new location, one young man visited our house regularly and became friends with us. We showed him the Jesus Film, and he exclaimed while still watching the movie that he wanted to become a follower of Jesus.

Living a New Life in Desert Isolation

We started an entirely new life there when we arrived at that small town in the northeastern Kenyan desert in early 2000. Being among the Somali people, we learned what it means to be a missionary, what it means to share life truly and to be available at any time of the day, what it means to be different, and the difficulty of living a Christ-centered life when everything around us denies Christ. We likened our time there to living in a glass house where everything is exposed; nothing is hidden. The first years were challenging but also advantageous because we had to rely on God for everything. Finding friends, people we could trust, even among the Christian Kenyan population, was not easy because we were seen and also treated as aliens. At least in the beginning, that was the feeling. We were not trying to assimilate with the Christian Kenyan population but to acquire as much Somali language and culture as possible. The local Kenyans did not appreciate this. It was confusing for us why Kenyan Christians, born again, had no desire to bring the good news to their Somali neighbors. There was much distrust between the Christian Kenyans and Somali Muslims.

I Want to Know Jesus

I was in church one Sunday, and a young Somali boy was seated outside the gate, trying to catch what was happening inside. I greeted him, not suspecting anything. He was there again Sunday after Sunday. A friend asked me to question him as to why he was sitting there every Sunday. The Kenyans did not have a way of communicating with him. So, I went out and introduced myself and inquired who he was and what he wanted. He was about thirteen years old and from Ethiopia, and he explained how he had run away from his family. He openly shared he wanted three things in life—to know Jesus, to learn English, and to go to school. I told him to come to my house the next day and pointed it out. He came the next day, and having served him tea, we showed him the Jesus Film. After the film, he wanted to give his life to Jesus and follow him.

The family he was staying with noticed a difference in him not long after. They also discovered he loved to hang out with us, and soon after, the family did something unusual. They officially handed him over to us, with three signatures from clan leaders, so that we could educate and care for him in every way, without any restrictions. I still have the paper. He then started living with us like our son, and we took him to school. He became an attraction in town because he lived with the white missionary family as a Somali boy.

The stories about this boy are many. Once, an uncle who was unhappy that he stayed with “infidels” confronted him. The uncle pressured him, requiring the boy to meet with him, saying he would take him back to Ethiopia, where he would be straightened out. Knowing that he was still a minor, we prayed for God to intervene in the situation. The

meeting with the uncle was to take place the following day, and the boy returned home in the afternoon from school, saying he had met the uncle. We discovered what had happened as we were praying. The uncle narrated to the boy a dream he had the previous night. An angel appeared to him carrying an AK47 and spoke sternly to the uncle, telling him to be careful and not touch the boy. The uncle was so scared by that dream that he had no further inclination to take the young man anywhere. From that moment, he could be with us without interference.

Praying for the Sick

A distant neighbor would come to watch giraffes behind our house in the cool of the evening. We talked about life and God and death and sickness. He revealed to me that he had been sick and doctors had given up on him. Now in his early twenties, he was essentially waiting to die. A couple of us missionaries decided this was a golden opportunity to speak life into this young man, so we visited him and prayed over him for his healing. God healed him almost instantly, and he soon decided to give his life to Christ. I was careful to point out that he had to count the cost. We gave him about two weeks to consider whether he was willing to bear the shame of the cross. Was he willing to lose family and friends for the sake of Christ? That healed young man was ready to do that and gave his life to Christ. A curious thing began to happen. People asked us Christian missionaries to come over and pray for them and their sick because we would not charge any money. We were probably walking a dangerous path at that point, which we discovered later.

Being Watched

The ministry of SIM in this well-known Somali town centered around providing health care, strengthening agriculture, and establishing wells. For my wife and me, the ministry there involved learning a new way of life in almost all aspects. We learned that we could pray for the sick. Young people showed up at our door. Others had dreams or visions and wanted to share them with us. There was a time of divine intervention and preparation. It was a unique time when people were ready to receive Jesus. It was almost too good to be true, but it was happening.

Then, we started receiving subtle remarks from our landlord. At some point, someone lit small fires around our fences, and the atmosphere in the town grew less and less friendly. In a small village, activity does not go unnoticed. Everyone watched us, especially when we took new Somali believers to a neighboring town at the Ethiopian border for a baptism. We thought it would be a safe place, but we did not reckon with the intelligence in place. On the way back from a magnificent time at the baptism, it felt like spiritual worlds were clashing above our heads. As we were traveling the few hundred kilometers from the baptism back to our homes, the newly baptized men, filled with the Holy Spirit, were composing songs out of the fullness of their hearts. The Spirit was flowing with joy and gratitude. As we approached the town, I stopped the vehicle and pled with them to lower their voices, but they could not care less at that point. They were ready to die for Christ.

Spiritual Warfare is Real

The spiritual forces of darkness seemed to hover over our home, and our village no longer tolerated us as foreign workers. The day after we returned from the baptism, one of the baptized men came to our place and asked for advice. He knew life would get tough since his half-brother was a sheikh in one of the reputable schools. He was trembling with fear and asked whether he could stay home from school that day. We said no, as he was in Form 3 (Grade 11).

He went to school and found hundreds of other pupils surrounding him upon his arrival. They challenged him on whether he was now a Muslim or a Christian. He thought for only a moment and admitted that he was a Christian. The pupils, already armed with stones, started throwing the stones at him, and he started running. At the school gate, they cornered him, and he was already bleeding. One of them wanted to cut his throat. Others said, "No, he is already dead. Let us burn down the teacher's house who helped him." Off they went, leaving him for dead, to storm the teacher's house. As the crowd was busy finding the teacher, the young man dragged himself to the nearby hospital. On begging for help, he was denied first-aid by a Somali doctor because he would not treat "dogs." He had to wait until a good Samaritan from among the Kenyan nurses would attend to him.

The teacher and his wife feared for their lives as the angry mob tried to break into their house. The teacher prayed briefly, then came out of his house to die as a man protecting his wife. It seemed that the angel armies of God were also actively engaging in warfare. Miraculously, the couple was saved by the police rushing to the scene and firing into the air.

Simultaneously to this incident, some men who said they were from the local administration picked me up. They put me in their car and drove away. My wife, who heard the gunshots minutes earlier, had no idea what would happen to me. They took me to the district commissioner's office, where sheikhs were already present. I was unfortunate to be alone in front of them. I was interrogated and harassed. But after a while, they let me go.

We agreed to bring the other missionaries in the district into the commissioner's board room for a tribunal with sheikhs and imams. They accused us of stealing children and taking them to Ethiopia and America. They claimed we took more than thirty children, but not one mother in the community said her child was missing. They accused us of preaching a God of love and giving food to people to make them Christian. They said we were a threat to the peace in the land and had to leave with ten days' notice. Initially, it was to be four days, but the district commissioner intervened on our behalf, and the tribunal settled on ten days. They threatened that something would happen if we were not out of town by day ten. As we were going through this tumultuous time, with police posted around our house during the night, we had our employees and friends trying to speak on our behalf but to no avail. During the ten days of waiting and hoping for negotiations with the sheikhs, we received an invitation from a well-known health

institution to help with the influx of Somali patients in their hospital. That surprised us, and the person writing to us did not have the faintest idea of what was happening then.

Persecution & Expulsion

The ultimatum was about to expire, and we had no choice but to leave the town on the ninth day after it became clear there was no room for further negotiations. The hatred from the religious leaders was substantial. I have never before and never after experienced that kind of hatred coming out of the eyes of accusers. We were no longer welcome in the town and had to stall all our activities. The Kenyan pastors who associated with us were given strict orders to perform their religious duties to their people only and leave Somalis alone or else. Having been chased away from a Somali town, we had to rethink what to do, how to handle the situation, and even our calling. Was ministry over? Or was this circumstance a stepping stone to something else?

Ready to Move Wherever the Lord Calls

As we returned to the capital city, trying to make sense of what had just happened to us, and more so to the new believers in that desert town, we had to regroup and re-strategize. There was both sadness and joy because we suffered for the name of Jesus. We praised God together for his mercies and his love and continued praying for those who did this out of ignorance. By God's grace, we were soon resettled in Kenya in a beautiful place where our children could attend school after years of homeschooling. The hospital that invited us to contact Somali patients was just a few meters from where we lived. It became a time of healing for our family and also for the Somali boys we took in as part of our family.

Ministries Can Change

Our journey continued in that part of the country, outside of the Somali area. We undertook weekly trips into the capital city with its bustling Mogadishu ndogo (little Mogadishu in Swahili) suburb. That helped me stay connected to the highly mobile Somali community and the church slowly taking shape. During the years of ministry in that health institution, we were able to pray for patients daily in the name of Jesus. Rarely were we refused to pray. It was a remarkable time of ministry for us.

Patients were flown in from the theatre of war in Somalia with the most horrific stories of suffering. Relating those stories could quickly fill a book. I had to keep praying that I would not grow used to the horrors of war but have a heart that was soft, feeling for people in their suffering.

One beautiful example is of a man living in southern Somalia. He was brought to the hospital with a gunshot wound in his lower abdomen. The injury was so severe that his treatment took many months to complete. His surgeon was from Madagascar and always greeted his patients with "Jesus loves you" and a big smile on his face. The patient did not know English but could easily repeat the doctor's nickname, "Jesus Loves You was just here." We talked and shared about the love of Christ until the patient asked me whether the one in me could also become part of his life. I said

yes—he only needed to open his heart and invite Jesus into his heart as he prayed. Shortly before his discharge from the hospital, he knelt and offered his life to Christ. The joy in his eyes was a testimony in itself. He soon left for Mogadishu, and we never heard from him again.

As I reached out to patients, we also tried bringing as many Christians as possible into the ministry. One young Kenyan pastor tried to offer prayer to a patient from Somalia but was rudely rejected. He was offended. The next day, the same person who rejected the pastor called him with a plea to pray for him because he was suffering excruciating pain. So, the Kenyan blessed him and told him that Jesus truly loved and cared about him. From that moment on, the Kenyan man identified with us at a much deeper level. He said, “These people are now no longer just ‘your people,’ but they are now ‘our people’”. It was like a conversion experience for him, and he repented for withholding the gospel from Somalis and only giving the good news to other tribes.

Opening Doors into a New Area

My wife and I felt compelled to return to the Somali area when my children were finishing high school. With the excellent connection to the health institution we had worked with for almost ten years, we could now engage a new community in the country’s east. That is a story for another time, a story that keeps taking shape.

I continue to learn in many areas of ministry. For example, I am learning about culture and contextualization of the gospel. An Indonesian worker once said, “When you share the gospel, do not serve it from your own teacup. Use the local cup”. That is happening as leadership is carried out by those from the local culture who speak the language as their heart language. As foreign workers, our task is much more that of a coach or encouragement. If I may use the image of a football game, the players are the Somalis and people from other African nations are joining the harvesting workforce. We, foreigners, will come more and more along the sidelines, cheering the players on, praying for them, and taking them into the locker room for rest so that after a break, they can come out again on the field and score more goals for the King of kings, bringing more souls into the Kingdom of God. I believe that has been the role for my wife and me as we have grown older and have come back to the field. By God’s grace, many young African missionaries are joining the field and are zealous to share their faith even under challenging circumstances.

And So, the Journey Continues

I have appreciated the partnership between missionaries and Somali believers. To the best of my knowledge, searching my heart, I desire to be a friend and a partner in ministry. Unfortunately, sometimes, the relationship of friend and partner has not been without friction due to cultural differences or simply perceptions of each other. In recent years, I have witnessed with great appreciation that Somali leadership is filled with responsibility and authority within the growing Somali church. Despite persecution and hardship, a movement has begun that cannot be stopped. The Lord himself has started the movement, and it is growing. It is wise to find our roles as missionaries in these

changing circumstances. Not long ago, my wife and I sat with a group of leaders from the Somali church and asked to come under their authority and leadership. One of them seemed shocked and said this had never happened before. I do not know how true that is, but it impacted his life and ministry. It impacted me because I also knew it was the right move. We need to align ourselves with what the Lord is doing, and he is using living stones to build his church. Good communication needs constant work, but God is interested in our unity as workers in his Kingdom.

Conclusion

I want to express that it has been a joy and an honor to serve the Somali people, and I hope I have contributed in some way to the growth of the Somali church. My journey is not over, and I want to explore more opportunities for service in this large community that spans across the globe. I pray that the Lord will continue to send workers willing to serve even when little fruit is seen. Sometimes it might seem that the Somali church is still small and weak after many years, but we know that God is building his church against all odds. Sometimes, I ask myself why unreached people groups are still unreached, and then I look around and see where they live. They often live in desolate places, deserts, and challenging areas that many foreigners do not want to visit, and they live in hostile regions where entry is sometimes impossible. May the Lord help us to be creative, bold, and, at the same time, wise. May he raise an army of people from all corners of the world who are willing to be a testimony of God's love for everyone, regardless of how they, as messengers, are received and treated.

About the Author

Sal Owens (pseudonym) grew up in central Europe and moved to Africa when he was about 30. Since childhood, he was fascinated by missionary stories and always felt that one day he would move and work somewhere in Africa. This year marks 25 years since he and his family moved to East Africa. During their time in East Africa, Sal and his family have been to different locations, from remote semi-arid regions to bustling urban areas where nomadic refugees from the Horn of Africa gather, hoping to eventually relocate to the green pastures of America and Europe. This has been a perfect opportunity for Sal to share hope in desperate situations.

They have worked in big cities and also in places where they have provided hope to victims of war through medical care in hospitals, as well as community outreaches in refugee camps and urban centers. Currently, Sal and his wife are living and working in a closed country, sharing the love of Christ. They have two children who completed high school in Kenya and pursued their studies in their parents' home country. Both of them work in the medical field, and one is married. Sal holds a Master of Arts in spiritual leadership and is currently working on his Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree.

CHAPTER 6: FUZZY & FIONA

Where do I begin? First, I would like to thank the editor for this opportunity to benefit the Kingdom of God in this way. I am honored to share my story.

Childhood & Family

My story does not start like the old American song by Tennessee Earnie Ford, 16 Tons. I was not born on a morning drizzling rain. However, like the song, labor, poverty, and trouble are all part of my story.

Sometimes, I see similarities between my childhood and the concept of being raised by a “momma lion.” The following is a short version of my life before and after coming to Christ. I will focus primarily on turning points and significant moments that drew me to Christ.

My family is very mixed regarding having a relationship with the Lord. Some family members have a very dedicated relationship, some have a very unhealthy relationship with the Lord, and some have no relationship. For the most part, my family lived like the world. Similarly, my family’s financial demographics also have a drastic range, spanning from poor to the middle class and even wealthy. I was in the middle to the poor range, depending on the year. My earliest memories are from the low-income apartments in America. I was often in trouble for fighting or pulling inappropriate pranks, making many consider me a mischievous child. My father had a small business in yard maintenance, and my mother had a broken back. Her medications made her relatively unstable for much of my first seven years.

My family had a poor theological understanding. They taught me everything in life was God’s will for your life, including sin; if you neglected to say your prayers at night, did not repent of your day’s sin, and died in your sleep, you went to hell. This understanding is not a Biblical view of repentance or anything else, but it was what my family taught me. I spent most of my school days in trouble, usually for fighting. Once, in the third grade, when I was eight years old, I was caught charging students for protection. I was not the school bully, but I could fight better than him, and I liked money, so I offered to protect victims of the bully for a price. I almost got expelled from school for it. How I got caught is too long for this chapter.

My mom, at this point, was a two-time violent offense felon. She taught me to defend myself at a young age. The school system blamed her for my behavior even though it was all my idea to take the skills she taught me and profit from them. My parents both developed careers in truck driving, which helped us financially. Little did I know they were subsidizing honest income with illegal income. Sometimes it was my dad. Sometimes, it was my mom. I have come to realize that unlawful income was almost always there. After the threat of expulsion, my mom changed. She taught me to make prison knives (shanks) and make my bed military-style (same as a prisoner). When I was older, I asked her why she taught me those things at such a young age; my mom said it was evident that I would end up in the military or prison, and because she loved

me, she wanted to prepare me for both. Around this time, I started to think that God must hate me, with my parents always fighting and I always getting into trouble. It was also around eight years old that I started abusing chemicals.

Teen Years

Over the years, my substance abuse grew. By the age of 12, my drug of choice was pills. At age 15, it was alcohol. At age 16, weed and any other drug or substance I could find. I was living intending to die, but I kept waking up in the morning.

My parents tried to keep me in private Christian Schools or homeschool me with Christian material through most of my middle school years (grades 6-9), even after they divorced. I completed the last few years of high school in public school. In my experience, the best education I received in those years was through the home school material. My parents believed that the students would behave better and, therefore, better influence my life. The teachers would be more educated at a private school. However, I found them to be equal.

When I was 14 years old, my mom and I were homeless. We had hit many hard times, including stumbling into some criminal activity that was quite heinous. My mom reported that heinous criminal activity to the FBI but was not listened to because of her medication to treat attention deficit disorder. I was there and could not change what I saw and experienced. I know the system failed us and caused our family to fail. I spent a few nights in a children's home before my dad came to get me, despite also being an addict. Once, he left my friends and me at the fishing pond with no food or water to drink for over 12 hours in the summer because he forgot about us while he was high. Soon, I ended up living at my grandma's, but she wanted me to lie about what I saw. She was responsible for my being sent to the children's home. After all, she was the one who reported my mom to the police and had her put in a mental ward. Grandma did not want to face the real problem or the continued hassle of reporting the crime we had witnessed.

The wealthier side of my family is predominantly Native American. They had their issues, too. Wealth does not stop sin or addiction. My grandma from that side of the family came to us and told us she had old family property in the southern part of the USA; my mom and I could move there and start over. So, we tried to do just that.

I became obsessed with the demonic and tried to worship Satan. At around 15, I finally decided that if God hated me so much and I was going to hell anyway, I should get acquainted with the devil, with whom I would spend eternity. Around 16, my mom got into a relationship with a friend I drank with who was five years older than me. This relationship gave me a constant supply of alcohol, typically Gem Clear 190 proof. I would extort alcohol and pills from who would soon become my stepdad and then go to my friend's house. I essentially moved in with my friends, who most people considered wild. As my substance abuse grew, my memory diminished. A friend I was homeless with once said, "When you tell me everything you remember from the ages of 15-19, it might make up a whole school year of memories". I remember practically living at my

friend's house as the closest measure to an average family I experienced in my childhood; they were not a bad influence.

When I was 17, my mom gave birth to my little brother, whom I had not seen since he was a baby. My mom had lost custody of my little brother partly because of my stepdad. I failed to enlist in the military because of my legal record, which started when I was 17. I got a job after graduation at a local factory, stayed high, and was involved in other illegal activities until I was 19. By this time, I did not have the best reputation locally. I was an addict. I had added the habit of using synthetic heroin (Methadone) simultaneously as forcing myself to overdose on certain medicines to hallucinate for roughly 12 hours at a time, in addition to any other substance that came along in that time frame. This cocktail of drugs was my preferred breakfast for a season.

When I lost my job, I could not afford a place of my own, so I moved back in with my mom and slept on her couch for a few months until she kicked me out because I was rarely sober. After a while, I moved onto a friend's couch; he had a good job, and I was strung out. We would get high together between his jobs when he got off work. It is during this time that I hit my lowest low. I had developed a severe hatred for God. One night, I decided I would vandalize His house since I could not strike God. I spray-painted demonic symbolism on the side of a local church building.

Soon after that, an addict's worst nightmare happened: I could not find drugs. The stores had been lifted clean (not just by me), and the street drugs ran dry. I was sober and miserably detoxing. I had feelings for someone with little to no interest in me, which is good because I was not a good option for her. I was attracted to the high moral foundation and love for the Lord she had, though I would be a liar if I pretended her figure was not equally attractive. In my mind, I would have gone to rehab if that's what she had asked of me, and she was all I needed for a normal life, which I desperately wanted. One night at my friend's house, being miserably sober, I had what seemed to be a brilliant idea. I would sell my soul for a "normal life." In my logic, to worship someone was not to be owned. I prayed two prayers, one to God and one to Satan, asking whoever would give me a normal life, that is, whom I would serve. That night, I experienced things that left me with questions for many weeks, but the main thing was the most peaceful, logical voice I had ever heard asked one question, "Are you really going to make a deal with the Father of Lies?" I had never thought of Satan in that way, but I knew there was absolute Truth in those words. For quite some time afterward, I still used drugs. My usage decreased as I started reading my friend's Bible. I had to know if I was insane or if my experience was real, and I knew the Bible would give me that answer. Eventually, I came to grips with my experience, but I still thought I could serve myself.

My mom had started following Jesus in her hardship with the local government as she battled for custody of my little brother. Members from the church she began attending sometimes went to court with my mom. Most of the people at this little charismatic church had a colorful past, including the pastor. My mom bribed me with USD 25 to go with her to church. I told her I wanted to buy a CD case but used the money for drugs.

At the church service, I felt the presence of God but did all I could to resist it. Around this same time, local law enforcement was trying to build a case over the vandalism of the church and made deals with a few of my “friends” to turn me in for it. My mom wanted to believe I was innocent and not involved in the vandalism. Following the church service, as we were walking home, The Holy Spirit brought conviction to the lie I had told, so I told my mom the truth. Later, she invited me to go to church again. I went to make her happy, but the Holy Spirit showed me that the people at church had true joy and love for one another. That true joy and love is what drew me in and broke me. I accepted Jesus. I later discovered that this was the only church that would let me through the doors at this time in my life due to my reputation.

Following Jesus: Part One

I still did drugs for the first six months of following Jesus. People said I should not do drugs because it was a sign that I was not saved; I saw it as their opinion and informed them I would quit doing drugs when I saw it in scripture. Eventually, I found the scripture saying to be sober-minded. I asked the Lord to take away the enjoyment of being high. At the time, being high was the closest thing I knew to happiness. One evening after work, I left the van I was sleeping in to get high with some friends. I hated being high for the first time in my life, so I quit. It was the thing I needed to stop: a supernatural intervention. I went back to my van that night. I quit doing drugs, and then a friend found me and offered me a whole bottle of methadone for free. He did not want it. I did not accept. I knew this had to be Satan tempting me. I eventually stopped hanging out with those friends. I did not like being high anymore, and that’s all they wanted to do.

The first person who ever tried to discipline me became part of my life. He used to call me “Padawan,” and I used to call him “Master.” Sometimes, I still do it for old-time sake. He had his hands full with me. He poured hours and days into me. Often, it was all I could do to comprehend simple things in the Bible. Some weeks later, I understood more as my relationship with the Lord grew. I had started doing Bible studies with others. At one point, I had a suicidal moment where I told the Lord that if He used me to bring one person to Him, I would suffer through living a whole life. The next day, I led a girl to the Lord, and the Lord blessed me by allowing me to be a part of hundreds more being saved. Though I will say scripture says to make disciples, it does not say to make converts, so I value those disciplined considerably more.

It was around that time the most challenging year of my life started. A friend I used to get high with allegedly, though probable, was accused of killing one of my employers. Another friend committed suicide. A few more passed away of various causes. My mom killed herself. My uncle, one of the more fatherly figures in my life, died the day we were supposed to spread my mom’s ashes. My great-grandfather was ill, and I caught a bus to say goodbye to him, but he passed away before I arrived. Eight people close to me passed away one after the other in roughly one year. Before my mom passed, I decided that this prosperity taught to me in the church was a lie, and in a sense, God was lying to me. I could not deny Jesus as the Truth, but I did not want to follow him. I still did not know that there was no third option. It is either Jesus or Satan. There is no serving “me.” It was hard.

Running From Jesus

Around the time my mom killed herself, I found myself running from Jesus. I was 21, I worked many jobs, the economy was not doing great, and I had just lost a trade school opportunity because of legal issues. My poor choices were getting the best of me. Some jobs were in the service industry, and I made interesting friends there. One friend, Ty, allowed me to watch his house while he and his wife traveled. They had some not-so-great neighbors, and I worked with his wife at a local small business, where I learned good and bad things regarding how to engage in a community and run a business. I tried to go back to my old life. I soon realized that sin and the Holy Spirit do not mix. The Holy Spirit becomes like a concerned, nagging wife.

I tried using drugs to drown Him out. I started staying with a girl who had some less-than-godly business endeavors after her day job. Later, I discovered she used my old reputation to help collect her money. Before this season, I was somewhat evangelistic, as was the church I attended. One evangelism tactic I often used was handing out Christian Heavy Metal CDs. Many nights, I would be partying, and suddenly, I would hear the Christian music from the CDs I had handed out. The music often led to a conversation about Jesus, and people would ask what had happened to me. I would tell them I was being a fool, but they needed to follow Jesus. Eventually, it became too much for me. I was alone in a house with a Bible. The Bible beckoned to me, and I broke down and opened it. I do not remember what I read, but it was enough to convict me and bring me to a place of total repentance, and I have never looked back.

Following Jesus: Part Two

For the most part, I was living out of my car, and I parted ways with the girl I was staying with. I started to develop problems with the small business I worked at; some days, they did not like my faith, and others encouraged it. I had felt the Lord wanted me to use a specific sphere of influence to do church planting. I thought if I made enough money, I could hire a Pastor and not have to do ministry myself. I never considered Bible studies a ministry and knew I did not want to be a “preacher.” I would find the contacts for what I needed and ask the Lord to make it happen if that’s where He wanted me.

I was helping a friend come out of drug addiction and briefly dated a waitress who happened to be married, but her husband was in prison at the time. I was caught not paying fines and was sent to jail myself. While in jail, the waitress and the friend I was helping got involved. I kicked my friend out of my house. I did not appreciate being stabbed in the back by someone I was trying to help. I lived far from where I was working, often spent nights in my car close to work, and only went home on my days off. When I was working, someone broke into my house, and it was apparent who broke in because the stolen things would have only been found by someone who lived there. I was angry, especially toward this person, and I did not yet understand what scripture says about forgiveness. I thought that seeking revenge was my right and God could forgive them if he pleased.

Around this same time, I moved in with Ty. I knew Ty because I once worked with his wife, who had recently died of cancer. Though not close in age, Ty and I had much in common regarding life experiences, and we were discovering what it meant to “start over.” Ty invited me to stay with him at his house because he was having trouble with thieves breaking in. I agreed, and we became close friends. Ty helped me find a better job, and in my free time, I was trying to figure out how to build a building and hire a pastor. I carried a shotgun in my car when I went into town, for security, but also on my heart, hoping I would get a clean shot at my “friend” who broke into my house. I once used the shotgun when someone tried to break into Ty’s home one night; after chasing the thief through a field and into the woods, I fired a shot that grazed his leg. Around this time, I started a dialogue with the Lord about forgiveness. He was teaching me that I could not continue to live this way, with hate, anger, and revenge in my heart, and follow Him. He put four specific people in my heart that I needed to forgive. I wrestled with the Lord, trying to understand forgiveness and seeking justice. One day, Ty gave away my shotgun because he did not want me to use it and get sent to prison. He had never done anything to take such a hard stance against me and my wishes before, but his action is what caused me to start re-evaluating some of my moral stances with the Lord.

Starting with the four people the Lord put on my heart, I began forgiving people who had wronged me. I went door to door, forgiving people. My actions created quite a stir around town; some people even thought I would do something to hurt myself because I forgave others. People knew that this was not my character.

Youth with a Mission (YWAM)

As I continued to grow with the Lord, my pastor’s wife asked me if I had ever heard of YWAM. She explained it was a six-month commitment focused on discipleship and a short-term mission trip. She said, “Think of it as tithing your life.” (Apparently, she was not expecting me to live very long if six months is a tithe!) I told her I would do it when I did not have something promising to achieve my goals.

Soon after, I came to a place with no promising contacts, so I asked the Lord what to do. I wish I had requested that sooner. He said, “You should honor your commitment.” So, I asked the pastor’s wife for more details about YWAM. I needed a passport and a lot of money to join, two things people do not understand where I live in America. Most people never leave town, let alone the country. The Lord provided the passport in quite a miraculous way. When YWAM vetted me before accepting me into the entry phase, they asked about my criminal record. After discussing the topic, they told me I could attend the school because I was no longer actively involved in or pursuing illegal activities. When trying to come up with the money, the friend I stayed with got approached by someone offering a job that was not strictly legal but with a high payout. My friend told me he wanted to help fund my way to YWAM and had this opportunity to easily take care of the finances. I told him I would consider it. That night, I came under a spiritual attack, but it was affecting me physically to the point that I could barely say the name of Jesus. I had experienced spiritual attacks of this nature before, so I fought back by praying earnestly in the name of Jesus. I then remember hearing the Lord say that I do not need to be involved in it if He cannot be glorified. In the morning, my friend

asked, "What was going on last night?" He could feel it from upstairs. I explained what had happened. Then I told him I could not accept his offer and why. He smiled and said, "Good, I have been using you as a spiritual compass lately, and now I know my answer too." He bought my car, and I went to YWAM.

YWAM turned my life upside down between being taught how to keep scripture in context (inductive bible study) and learning about missions and unreached people groups (UPGs). It was an eye-opening time for me. I learned many things and grew with the Lord a lot. One of the most significant moments in my entry phase was at a conference. We noticed a stock tank for cattle when we walked into the large church that hosted the meeting. It was the church baptismal. Of course, I made jokes about who will end up there. Dan Bauman was speaking about his imprisonment in Iran in the 1990s. He asked the whole room to engage in the Lord, seek Him freely, and obediently worship, no rules, just Jesus.

Then I heard the Lord say, "Are you all in?" I said, "Yes, Lord." He said then I want you to do something with me. So, I said OK. He said I want you to play in the water like a child. So, I asked what water? He said the tank of water was in the front. I said Um, no, Lord, I will get in trouble. Then the Lord said When you worshiped Satan and did illegal things, did you care about being in trouble? I said No. I even looked at being arrested almost pridefully. Then He said, how much more should you not care if you get in trouble for obedience to me? I need you to be all in to do what I have for you. It is either all in or all out. Which is it?

I said, "But I am in full clothes, and there is sound equipment. I will be uncomfortable all day, and I may accidentally mess up the electronics." He said, "You do not worry. I will take care of everything. Just go play in the water." So, I said, "OK, Lord." I nervously walked up in front of hundreds of people and climbed into the tank I had earlier made jokes about. I was pretty embarrassed. I got into the tank. I looked around, and I remember the Lord saying my uncle's words when he taught me to swim: "You are not playing in the water until you have put your head under the water." So, I dunked my head under the water. When I brought my head up, I felt the Holy Spirit in a way I have never felt before or since. I was shaky and could hardly breathe; the air was so thick that it felt like breathing a slice of butter. My senses were almost euphoric. As I looked to my left, there were towels on a cinder block behind the tank near the stage. People surrounded me and were happy. They did not know what had happened but were glad it did. The Lord took care of everything and, in the process, changed my heart. For the first time in as long as I could remember, I felt happy- not hope or joy but genuine happiness. I first heard the Lord tell me about Somalis during this conference time.

In YWAM, the first three months are classroom learning about discipleship, followed by a few months of a short-term mission trip or outreach. My outreach was in predominantly Islamic culture. We saw many people make decisions for the Lord. Local pastors presumably followed up with these converts. My favorite experience was when our team prayed for a Muslim man, and the Lord took the pain from his back. The man went into the mosque during the call to prayer and told the visiting imam that Jesus had

healed him. Yes, they ran us out of the village, but it was worth it, and many people met us on the outskirts of the village so they could also encounter Jesus.

Somalis

As time passed, I joined a team headed for the Somali region. During prayer time, I got three distinct words from the Lord that I had to google, and they turned out to be names of cities all within the Somali region. I left that team and went on my own to the first location. I shared the gospel many times and had many threats or, as I say, offers to kill me. As the Lord gave insight, I developed the means to be there using all my resources over many trips and years and saw some small fruit. I turned down roughly USD 1,000,000 to change my vision and not work with Somalis. I chose to obey what the Lord instructed me to do and continued ministry in the Horn of Africa.

I eventually met a girl we now call Fiona, my wife, for whom I am so thankful. Our first conversation went along the lines of..." what will you do if you are told to deny your faith to keep me alive?" She said, "I would plan your funeral." I knew then that she might be the one. So, two weeks after we started dating, I bought her a ring just in case the relationship went somewhere as I returned to Africa. I went back to the Somali region and hosted a European couple as I worked to set up a small manufacturing project to sustain myself while I lived in the area. The Somali regional government, with its dysfunction, made the Europeans a little uncomfortable. Soon, the local government removed me. I sought refuge outside the Somali region and got engaged to Fiona. Fiona is beautiful and talented. I sometimes get offers of camels valuing roughly USD 50,000 for her hand in marriage.

Within a few months of being kicked out, I hosted Dan and two of his friends, one of whom was Mark Baxter, who eventually officiated our wedding. Mark is the only person I know who tried to send an invitation to a terrorist cell inviting them for tea so he could try to share the gospel; they never responded to his invitation. He has also been a good friend to me over the years and has helped encourage me to pursue the things the Lord has called me to, no matter what it may cost me. I nervously took them for a short stay in the area I was kicked out of. I found it a privilege to bring people to ensure the Somali region gets blessed with the gospel, even though I did not know what would happen to me. The trip was not as smooth as hoped, but it was successful. The three men decided the Somali region was like Afghanistan in the 90s. In their opinion, that means that while challenging, it is doable. They also agreed to do what they could to increase the mobilization of the Somalis.

Since Marriage

After the trip, I married Fiona. We then moved back to the Horn of Africa and eventually the Somali region. Our long-term goal is to move to the second city the Lord gave me and then to the third. If it is the Lord's will for us to see discipleship movements in the cities the Lord gave me almost a decade ago, we hope to see them. We know there are risks, but we will continue to move forward, sharing the gospel and discipling Somalis to the best of our ability.

Conclusion

Looking back, I am so thankful that the Lord did not give me the “normal life” I wanted at 19. There is a saying: why settle for being a king when you can become a missionary? The question is not about luxuries, wealth, or comfort but about the richness of life that comes from living and dying in a lifestyle that requires God’s presence to sustain your existence. That does not mean a life of poverty, but it does require us not to love money over the things that truly matter. I am thankful beyond measure for the extravagant life the Lord has given me and my wife, Fiona. She is the only woman I know who could live this life with me, and she is probably the most talented and beautiful woman I have ever met. Our journey has been filled with challenges, but together, we have experienced the joy and fulfillment that comes from following the path that God has laid out for us. The turning point came when I realized that true fulfillment and purpose come from living a life devoted to serving God and others. It is not about pursuing personal ambitions or material success but about embracing a life of faith, love, and selfless devotion. Each day is an opportunity to bring light, hope, and love into the lives of those around us, and I am grateful for the chance to be a vessel for God’s work in this world. I am sorry for the lack of detail. Details would give away too many clues about my identity. If I live long enough to see all the Lord has told me to pursue in this context, I hope to write the whole story someday, but this will have to do for now. Thank you for reading about the turning point moments of my life. I hope they bring you closer to Jesus.

About the Author

Fuzzy Bear (pseudonym) grew up in North America (the greatest country ever!). In his 20s, Fuzzy Joined YWAM FM as a single man and moved to the Horn of Africa to work among Somalis. Fuzzy and his wife Fiona have implemented various projects to engage the region, but not without their fair share of hardships. They both still live in the Horn of Africa. Since moving to the Horn of Africa, Fuzzy and Fiona have dedicated their lives to helping the local community. They have been involved in various initiatives to improve education, provide healthcare, and support local businesses. Despite facing challenges, they remain committed to making a positive impact in the region.

Fuzzy’s passion for the Horn of Africa is evident in his tireless efforts to create sustainable change. He has worked with local leaders and international organizations to implement long-term solutions for the betterment of the community. Fuzzy and Fiona’s unwavering determination and resilience have earned them the respect and admiration of those they work with. Living in the Horn of Africa has given Fuzzy and Fiona a unique life perspective and a deep appreciation for the local culture. They have embraced the challenges and joys of living in a vibrant and diverse community, and their experiences have enriched their lives in countless ways. Fuzzy and Fiona’s journey in the Horn of Africa continues to inspire others to get involved in humanitarian work and make a difference in the world. Their story serves as a powerful example of dedication, compassion, and the transformative power of helping others. The author can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.

CHAPTER 7: ERMIAS MEKURIA & MULU MESERET

Introduction



Rev. Ermias and Rev. Mulu share the Word of God.

I (Ermias) was born in Ethiopia early Monday, November 13, 1961. My father was a farmer and a lay minister. My mother was a housewife. My wife, Mulu Meseret, was born in Ethiopia on Tuesday, October 15, 1968, in the evening. Mulu is the daughter of a minister of the gospel, and her mother was a housewife. Both our parents and grandparents were among the first evangelical Christian converts from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and animistic religion. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) missionaries supported the local Christians, but the Fascist Italian army expelled the missionaries from Ethiopia. The Italian occupation was short-lived, and the new

evangelical believers requested that Emperor Haile Selassie allow the local Christians to practice their new brand of Christianity freely.

Our parents and grandparents responded to God's call on their lives to be ministers of the gospel. However, they were severely persecuted by the local animistic tribal chiefs and their followers, as well as some members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which considered evangelicalism as heresy. Despite the persecution, our families remained steadfast in their faith and continued to spread the message of evangelical Christianity. Their unwavering commitment to their beliefs and their courage in the face of adversity have been a source of inspiration for us. Today, Mulu and I continue to uphold the values and traditions passed down to us by our forefathers. We are proud to carry on the legacy of our families and remain dedicated to serving our community and spreading the message of love, faith, hope, and holiness.

Salvation & Family Background

Our great-grandparents practiced the local traditional religion. Pagan worship was centered around venerating idols, crocodiles, big snakes, forests, bodies of water, and animals like hyenas, elephants, and giraffes. Pagan worship also required regular animal sacrifices. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity was also nominally practiced in our villages. The SIM missionaries introduced the evangelical witness to our villages. They came to the southern Ethiopian villages and towns, preaching the gospel. The missionaries led our grandparents to the Lord, and their conversion was facilitated by multiple miracles. Our parents grew up as evangelical Christians and were very active in their local churches. Because of severe persecution, the tiny evangelical Christian community scattered to different villages.

Our parents' spiritual lifeline was compromised when the Italian occupiers expelled the Western missionaries from Ethiopia. Despite these challenges, the evangelical Christian community grew exponentially.

Mulu and I were educated in mission schools operated by the missionaries. Many students, including us, responded to God's call and openly shared our faith. Our fathers met their wives around the missionary school campus. Our upbringing in the evangelical Christian community instilled in us a deep sense of faith and a strong belief in the power of prayer. We learned from our parents and church leaders about the importance of serving others and spreading love and compassion. Our families' journey from traditional pagan worship to Ethiopian Orthodox and finally to evangelical Christianity has been marked by spiritual growth, perseverance, and a strong sense of community.

The influence of the missionary schools and the teachings of the SIM missionaries played a significant role in shaping our worldview and understanding of faith. The education we received in these schools focused on academic learning and emphasized the values of humility, empathy, and the pursuit of justice. The missionary schools provided a nurturing environment to explore our spiritual beliefs and develop a deeper understanding of the scriptures. As we reflect on our families' background and the journey of faith that has been passed down through the generations, we are reminded of the resilience and determination of our ancestors in the face of adversity. The story of our families' spiritual transformation is a source of inspiration and a testament to the enduring power of faith. We are grateful for the legacy of faith entrusted to us and remain committed to upholding the values and teachings that have shaped our identity.

I (Mulu) completed high school and then went on to attend a teachers' training college. After graduating, I became a teacher at the village's local primary school. Ermias and I found our calling as full-time gospel ministers after becoming disciples of Christ as young people. We experienced the violent change in the Ethiopian government when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) inspired soldiers overthrew the monarchy in 1974, leading to the immediate establishment of a communist government.

This new government banned most evangelical Christian activities, including Bible distribution, Bible reading, preaching, and church gatherings. Emperor Haile Selassie was ousted from power and subsequently killed, and many leaders were either executed or detained. Ethiopia went through a prolonged civil war, eventually toppling the communist government in 1991. During this challenging period, my family and I, like many other evangelical Christians, turned to underground house churches to continue worshiping without government interference.

We faced imprisonment and torture by the communist government, and it was during this time that Ermias and I took on leadership roles in the underground house churches, engaging in preaching, discipleship, baptism, and leading Bible study groups. After finishing high school, we both joined a teachers' training program and became schoolteachers.

Underground Ministry & Marriage

I met Mulu when I was 27, and she was 21. As we spent more time together as friends, we both realized that we had strong feelings for each other. However, navigating our relationship was not without its challenges. Our cultural norms and the opposition from the church against dating made it difficult for us to openly express our feelings. Despite these obstacles, we found ways to communicate within the boundaries set by our community and our faith. After much contemplation, I expressed my desire for Mulu to be my wife. It took about a year for Mulu to respond, as she was always shy and reserved. Finally, she sent a message through a friend, expressing her willingness to discuss the marriage proposal. We were both hopeful and agreed to pray for divine guidance as we embarked on this new life chapter.

Once Mulu agreed to marry me, we knew the next step was to seek support and guidance from our community. We confided in our underground church pastor, who gave us wisdom and encouragement. With his blessing, we then approached our parents, who surprisingly supported the idea of us getting married. This overwhelming support from our loved ones filled us with gratitude and strengthened our resolve to move forward with our plans. At the time, Ethiopia was undergoing significant political changes. The communist government had been overthrown in 1991, and a new pseudo-democratic government had granted Ethiopians the freedom of worship.

This newfound freedom meant that all the closed churches in Ethiopia were reopened, and the persecution against Christians came to an end. This pivotal moment allowed us to embrace our faith openly and without fear. In 1993, Mulu and I exchanged our vows in a beautiful ceremony in the newly reopened local church. Many people from our community attended the wedding, and the joyous occasion was filled with love and support. There was no longer any fear of persecution, and we could freely sing hymns, listen to sermons, and worship with immense joy. Looking back on that day, we are grateful for the support and freedom that allowed us to openly celebrate our marriage without fear. It was a time of immense joy and a new beginning for both of us as we embarked on our journey together as husband and wife.

Persecution

When my (Ermias') father, Mekuria, was a young boy, his parents were jailed for their faith and ministry. As a boy, my dad was also arrested for the same reason his parents were arrested. I used to walk a whole day carrying some food for my dad. The local chiefs and traditional priests accused him of rejecting the local traditional religion and cultural practices, which were not compatible with the gospel. This led to severe persecution for our parents and grandparents due to their faith. The community ostracized our family, and we faced many challenges. However, despite the hardships, our family remained steadfast in our beliefs and continued to practice our faith in secret, risking our safety for what we believed in. This period of persecution left a lasting impact on our family and shaped our understanding of religious freedom and the importance of standing up for one's beliefs, even in the face of adversity. It is a part of our family history that we will always remember and carry with us as a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of faith.

My (Mulu's) dad, Meseret, was chained and tortured by the communist cadres because of his Christian witness. They did this inside our home while all the kids watched in horror. I was a little girl at the time. The communist squad then took my dad to prison. He was never charged with any crime. Many Christians in Ethiopia suffered during the communist rule in Ethiopia from 1974-1991. Many Christians were murdered or disappeared, while others languished in torturous prison cells without any charges. It was a horrible time.

The clan chiefs, traditional priests, and pagan diviners accused our parents of rejecting local practices such as drinking alcohol, refusing to partake in immoral traditional dances, and not engaging in polygamous marriages. Our parents endured a lot of pain and suffering because they chose to be holy and reject these practices. As Christians, we never ceased worshiping during this difficult time. We gathered in underground house churches, mentored new believers, trained leaders, and shared our knowledge. However, the communist persecution and harassment persisted until their overthrow.

In the face of such opposition and adversity, our families showed immense courage and faith in their beliefs. They remained steadfast in their commitment to their Christian faith despite the challenges they faced. Their conviction and perseverance continue to inspire us to this day.

The perseverance of our parents and the community of believers during this challenging period is a testament to the strength of their faith and the power of believing community support. Through their unwavering dedication to their beliefs and willingness to support one another, they were able to withstand the difficult circumstances they faced.

The eventual overthrow of the communist regime brought relief and freedom to our community. It marked the end of a period of intense persecution and harassment and allowed us to openly practice our faith without fear. The resilience and faithfulness of our parents and the entire community during this time serve as a powerful example of the enduring strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

Nazarene Mission Involvement



Rev. Ermias and Rev. Mulu preaching the Word of God.

Mulu and I both have a teaching background. We were employed by the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia. I taught physics at a secondary school, while Mulu taught at a primary school in Addis Ababa. In 1995, we both became members of the Church of the Nazarene. We obtained our university teaching diplomas from Addis Ababa University and eventually became ministers with the Church of the Nazarene.

Following a call to pastoral leadership, I (Ermias) enrolled in classes at the Africa School of Extension in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Later, I continued my studies at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya, to further prepare for ministry. I dedicated myself to my studies and was proud to earn a Bachelor of Theology degree in May 2004. This was a significant milestone in my journey towards serving the community and leading others in their faith. After my ordination in October 2004, I was honored to become one of Ethiopia's first national District Superintendents. This role allowed me to make a meaningful impact in the lives of many individuals and further my dedication to serving others.

In October 2006, I was assigned to serve as a missionary in Ethiopia and became a Field Director, coordinating the ministry of our denomination in the Horn of Africa. This was a challenging yet immensely rewarding experience that helped me grow both personally and professionally. In addition to my practical experience, I also pursued further academic qualifications. I am proud to have earned a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from Azusa Pacific University in California, USA, in September 2009. This opportunity broadened my understanding of leadership principles and gave me valuable insights into leading and managing teams effectively. Furthermore, I continued to pursue knowledge through doctoral studies at ANU, my alma mater. This commitment to ongoing learning reflects my dedication to personal and professional growth as I strive to be a more effective and compassionate leader in the service of others.

Under our leadership, numerous positive developments occurred in the Horn of Africa, including establishing hundreds of local churches within a short period. We focused on disciplining believers and training leaders, as well as a church planting movement, thanks to the vision of American missionary Dr. Howie F. Shute, which spread throughout the Horn of Africa countries, including two gospel-resistant nations. Our efforts were focused on building sustainable and indigenous leadership within the local communities, fostering a spirit of collaboration and unity among believers and church leaders.



Rev. Ermias Mekuria preaching in a local church.

We also implemented various community development projects to address the social and economic needs of the region, aiming to create a holistic impact. The commitment to education and empowerment was evident in the establishment of vocational training programs and schools, providing opportunities for individuals to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Additionally, initiatives to promote healthcare and general well-being were prioritized, resulting in improved access to medical services and resources for the people in the Horn of Africa. The significant progress achieved during this period served as a testament to the dedication

and collaborative efforts of various local and international stakeholders in bringing about positive change and sustainable development in the region.

Mulu and I are passionate about our work as global missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene. We are dedicated to serving gospel-resistant communities in East Africa. Our base is located in the bustling city of Nairobi, Kenya, where we work tirelessly to spread the message of hope and redemption.

The Church of the Nazarene holds a special place in our hearts, as it is the largest evangelical denomination in the Wesleyan holiness tradition. One of the central tenets that sets the Church of the Nazarene apart from other denominations is the doctrine of Entire Sanctification.³⁸ This doctrine emphasizes the transformative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives and service of Christians.

Nazarenes firmly believe that God calls Christians to a life of uncompromising holiness, characterized by a profound inward and outward transformation. This includes God's act of cleansing the heart from original sin and filling the individual with an overwhelming love for God and His creation. Entire Sanctification is the heartbeat of our faith and serves as a powerful antidote to lukewarm Christianity.

We feel incredibly blessed to be a part of this profound mission and are committed to sharing the transformative message of Entire Sanctification with communities across East Africa. We believe that embodying this doctrine can bring about lasting change and renewal, helping individuals experience the fullness of God's love and grace. Our work is driven by a deep sense of purpose and guided by the enduring principles of our faith, and we are honored to be able to share this journey with others.

Conclusion

I am (Mulu) incredibly proud to have graduated from Nazarene Bible College in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2020. This achievement has equipped me with invaluable knowledge and insights that I am eager to share and apply in serving our communities. The experience of studying at Nazarene Bible College has not only broadened my understanding of theological concepts but has also deepened my faith and commitment to serving others. The academic rigor and the supportive learning environment at the college have truly shaped me into the person I am today.

Furthermore, it was a tremendous honor to be ordained as an elder in the Church of the Nazarene in March 2022, marking a significant milestone in my personal and spiritual journey. This ordination represents the culmination of years of dedication to my faith and ministry. It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly, and I am fully committed to serving and guiding the members of our congregation with wisdom, compassion, and grace.

³⁸ Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness, and true holiness attainable by every believer through deliverance from sin and wholehearted love for God and others.

Our adult children, Nathanael (Naty), Estifanos (Estifo), and Absalom (Abies), and our cherished daughter-in-law, Emilia, are all deeply devoted to serving the Lord. Each of them brings their unique strengths and unwavering faith to support our shared mission, adding immeasurable value to our collective efforts.

Naty graduated from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya, with a Business and Information Technology degree. Estifo graduated from Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, CA, USA, with a degree in Engineering Physics. Abies graduated from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, OK, USA, with a BA and MBA degrees in Business Administration.

We are blessed to have a family that shares our passion for serving others and spreading the message of love and hope. Together, we strive to be a source of kindness and support for those in need within our community and beyond.

We humbly ask for your prayers as we embark on this impactful journey. Your support is invaluable to us, and we are grateful for the love and encouragement we receive from our global community. As we continue to grow in our faith and service, we are inspired by the kindness and generosity of those around us and seek to emulate these qualities in all that we do. Thank you for taking the time to join us in this divine endeavor.

About the Authors

Rev. Ermias Mekuria spent his early years in Ethiopia around various lakes, gaining experience in different cultures and languages. He got married in Addis Ababa and served as a schoolteacher and lay minister in the evangelical church movement during the communist regime in Ethiopia. Mulu Meseret was raised in Ethiopia by parents in ministry and has been serving the Lord since her teenage years. She and her husband, Ermias, are global missionaries for the Church of the Nazarene, serving in the East Africa field. Ermias and Mulu graduated from Addis Ababa Teachers College with a teaching diploma. They were called to ministry during their work and service in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Subsequently, they resigned from their teaching jobs and embarked on a full-time ministry. They served the Lord and His people in the Horn of Africa. Ermias, with his MA degree in Organizational Leadership, and Mulu, with her Diploma in Theology from East Africa Nazarene Bible College, bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their roles as Refugee Ministry Coordinators in Nairobi, Kenya. Their educational background instills confidence in their leadership and service to the Lord. The authors can be reached at ermiasmekuria2016@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 8: TONNY ASHUBWE

Introduction

My testimony aims to communicate the mystery and joy of God's perfect will in my life. Initially, it was unknown, but it was beautifully revealed over time. Even when I lost track and walked in disobedience, He guided me back to the path of life with His loving but firm hand.

My journey in missions started a long time before I was even born. I do not know much about my grandparents, especially on my paternal side. I will, therefore, narrate what I know. My maternal grandfather was an agricultural officer in the early 1940s. The nature of his work took him to different places around the country for agricultural extension services. He worked diligently and was away from home most of the year. By the time my mother was born and was ready for secondary school, my grandfather had been posted to Garissa, which was then called the Northern Frontier District.

He took my mother with him to Garissa, and she attended a girls' secondary school in the 1970s named North Eastern Province Girls' Secondary School. Back then, the Somali Muslim population overwhelmingly dominated the northeastern part of Kenya, especially in the schools. In this particular school, there were few non-Somali Christians who were the children and relatives of government-posted officers. She says that there were less than ten non-Somalis in the entire school. They all had to wear Muslim attire and observe Islamic ceremonies like Ramadan fasting. She tells me that they were alienated as Christians and had to unite to survive the mistreatment from their Muslim peers. They were constantly mocked and called all manner of foul words, the most common being "kaffir". She did not even complete her O-level exams in Garissa because in her fourth year, in 1980, the Garissa massacre occurred.³⁹ There was immediate and intense animosity against non-Somalis/Christians, whom they believed to be the perpetrators of the carnage. The level of danger was so fierce that the police evacuated all the non-Somali students from the school to Nairobi at night. My mother left most of her belongings at school and never returned to Garissa. All this happened during her O Level examination sitting. She was so traumatized by that event and was unable to complete her O Levels. This came to haunt her later; despite her being an exceptional student, she did not qualify for university because of her incomplete academic results. There must be a reason why this happened to her because, 31 years later, it would be the basis of the worst fight my mother and I ever had. Her objection was the first obstacle I had to overcome as I joined this unique ministry to the lost tribe of Abraham.

³⁹ Mohammed Adow, "Revisiting Kenya's Forgotten Pogroms." 15 Dec 2013. <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/al-jazeera-correspondent/2013/12/15/revisiting-kenyas-forgotten-pogroms> (Accessed on 08 August 2024).

Early Beginnings

I had a normal Christian upbringing and went through school as a typical Nairobi pupil, which included early mornings, long commutes, and lots of play. Since my mother was a teacher, she ensured that I got the best education they could afford. I also went to Sunday school religiously. No known excuse could keep my siblings and me from attending Sunday school between 8:00 and 9:00 AM. each Sunday. Our teachers would report our attendance and progress to our parents when they later came for their “grown-up” service, and therefore, there was solid accountability for church attendance.

My mother greatly influenced me since she made every effort to nurture me spiritually, academically, and morally. She taught me grit, assertion, and resilience. On the other hand, my father modeled wit, sound etiquette, and principles. He, however, was not around long enough for me to figure him out. He passed away when I was a teenager, shortly after I had started secondary school. His death caused me to go into survival mode, and I found myself needing to put on a brave face in the years that followed. I learned to trust in God’s lead, comfort, and provision from that time onward. He was all I had. For those who would lose a parent at a young age, I would encourage you to take refuge in God the Father. It may take a while, but you can overcome the grief through God. It took me 15 years, and the breakthrough came through fasting and prayer at a prayer mountain. God lifted the burden that had been too heavy for me to bear. I thank Him for what He did for me.

There was not much happening during my primary school years. I would attend school, play, eat, sleep, and play some more. In those days, children were kidnapped and used for evil rituals. Our parents, therefore, made us stay in the house most of the time when they were away. This dynamic shaped my personality later on, making me prefer spending more time indoors than outdoors despite my love for adventure.

Being Born Again

In secondary school, I had an encounter during a youth camp at Word of Life camp in Nairobi. My mother had sponsored me and my siblings to go to that camp. The preaching and the Holy Spirit convicted me to be born again. I prayed for and decided to become a believer. When I returned to my local church, I found no emphasis on discipleship or spiritual growth. I confessed Christ as LORD, but there was no significant change in my lifestyle. I knew the commandments but had no inner conviction to obey them or pursue God more deeply. I blended well in church circles because I was not unruly or controversial. I continued with the religious activities but had no significant heart transformation.

When I reflect on my journey in faith, I appreciate the place of intentional discipleship and mentorship as a crucial part of the growth and fruitfulness of a believer. It took me ten years from the time I was born again to the time I was first intentionally discipled and mentored. During that period, I relied solely on grace and did not actively seek spiritual nourishment from the Word, which hindered my spiritual development and resulted in little to show for my faith. In the Somali church, I frequently witness a common

occurrence: individuals who have been believers for many years, having experienced spiritual rebirth yet lacking proper guidance and mentorship. They continue to rely on the fundamental teachings of the faith, resulting in limited spiritual development and minimal tangible evidence of growth. It pains me because I see my former self and can tell the spiritual trajectory of such a soul, one plagued with much remorse and fruitlessness, unless the Lord intervenes, as He did for me.

At the time of my conversion at Form 1 (Grade 9), I had an encounter with a Muslim in Vihiga High School. He was a staunch Muslim youth named Yusuf who was part of the hockey team. He was very zealous in his faith and was the only Muslim in the school who refused to attend Christian Union. He fasted during Ramadan and openly declared his faith. Since he was a sidelined minority in a strict Christian school, he did not have much influence over matters of religion. He, however, made his faith an open book through words, deeds, and attitude. You could quickly discern that he was different. However, I never gave him much attention to associate or even reach out to him. I thought he was a lost cause. I had no idea about Muslim Evangelism or why it was necessary at that point in my life.

Campus Life

After finishing high school, I stayed home for about two years, awaiting university admission. I could not take the courses I desired – Piloting or Software Engineering – because we could not afford them. I received 2 separate offers of a diploma in medical imaging and another in tourism and hospitality. I did not pursue them due to their lower status as diploma courses. At that time, a degree course was always preferable to a diploma course. By God's grace, Egerton University invited me to take a course in natural resource management, a subject I had never heard of before. I was unaware that this was the place God prepared for me to have a meaningful interaction with Muslims and the ministry to Muslims.

My class had two Muslim students: one female and one male. The female student, Halima, was from the coastal region of Kenya and held the position of the class representative. The male student, Hulei, was a convert to Islam from Central Kenya. They are now married. The female student was assertive, bubbly, stunning, and intelligent. She socialized freely and was admired by everyone, especially the men. Despite the fact that she could easily relate, she had clear boundaries. She would not allow men into her room and took her religious rituals seriously. She was a model of morality in a population where many professing Christian girls were seen as promiscuous.

I remember one of my classmates, a stoic Christian believer, who tried hard for four years to convince Halima to follow Jesus so that he could marry her, but his efforts came to naught. Hulei, the man, on the other hand, was a quiet and private individual. I did not know or care to know much about him as our interests never converged.

Other than these two, I interacted with other Muslims on campus. I even tried to woo one, but I was not successful. The Muslim girls somehow intrigued me with their

outward sense of morality and mysterious lifestyles. Nonetheless, I thank God for protecting me from their powerful allure.

Reflecting on Christianity in the Kenyan education system, I realize that despite the numerous sermons and discipleship courses offered to students, almost none emphasizes Muslim evangelism. They are mostly all about personal growth and ministry to individuals of Christian background. My experience with Muslim ministry is likely the journey of most of those who go through the discipleship journey in the Kenyan education system. There is not much emphasis on Muslim evangelism because of political sensitivity and lack of awareness of the threat of Islam against disciples. I believe that discipleship courses should include Muslim evangelism.

Introduction to the Ministry to the Lost Sons of Abraham

When the time came for me to graduate, our Christian union fellowship had a tradition of hosting a dinner where alumni would come and give us tips on survival outside of campus. The day came, and the different alumni gave instructions. They all sounded similar until one lady came up and told us about what she was doing. She was reaching out to Muslims in the Northeastern part of Kenya and the Horn of Africa. Her testimony sounded different from all the presentations and caught my attention. I approached her and asked a myriad of questions. She answered most of them graciously. I had questions she could not answer; therefore, she advised me to make a daring trip to the north and see for myself. I felt I was into something because, out of all my graduating class, I was the only one following up with her on her “tip.” My affinity for adventure and exploring the unfamiliar kicked in, and I was sold into that quest. After gathering all the necessary details, I hit the road the same week immediately after my last exam and headed to one of the towns in Northern Kenya. I arrived safely and was greeted by a strange, warm, and humid air that covered me like a blanket; the air smelled of goat and something else. I have never figured it out, but there is an atmosphere (physical and spiritual) in the north that I cannot easily put into words.

I met my contact person, and we talked. He explained the work to me and showed me around. I stayed there for a few days and returned to Nairobi. I returned as a changed person. I was fully committed to the mission with the Somalis. Something had taken root in me that was completely foreign to my usual self, upbringing, and point of view.

I got home to an excited mother who had organized an internship with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which offered opportunities for the Somali program run in Kenya. I weighed in but could not tell her I had other thoughts. The recruiter from UNDP called me for an interview, and I respectfully declined. When my mother came to learn of this, she was very disappointed. Hearing my alternate plans made things even worse. I had chosen support raising (which she saw as begging) for a ministry involving Muslims, with a majority of my time spent in Garissa, where she had to flee for her life in the 1980s because of religious tensions at the time.

Our relationship did not recover for the next three-plus years. In July 2011, I went to Garissa to begin my orientation into intercultural studies and the ministry to Muslims; I also met converts from Islam. I had taken a journey of living in faith as I discovered my

God-ordained purpose. It was an exciting journey that my former bishop would describe as hot and sweet.

While in the mission field, I had a chance to read many books. Three stood out: Bruchko by Bruce Olson, Crazy Love by Francis Chan, and Honorably Wounded: Stress Among Christian Workers by Marjory F. Foyle. I was interested in stories by missionaries, and I remember many good ones. The sad part is that none of the biographies I could access were from and about Africans, despite the great miracles, signs, and wonders that God had done through indigenous African missionaries. May God help us record the book of Acts or God's generals from Africa, especially those who have labored among the Somali people.

Living Among God's Lost Zealots

It was in Garissa that I became familiar with the sound of bomb explosions, the firing of guns, the hostility to non-Muslims, and the violent persecution of the church. The scenario was so hostile that I could only describe it using John 16:2, "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God." NIV.

One Sunday, we were in church and then started receiving calls from friends who told us that there was an attack on the Africa Inland Church (AIC) building in town, and the Muslim attackers killed 17 people.⁴⁰ At that time, we were having a home cell fellowship. After our church service, we went to the Garissa General Hospital to see how we could help. We viewed the decapitated bodies of men and women who died in the terror attack, and I was frankly traumatized. I had never seen a scene like that in my life. At that time, there was no mortuary in Garissa, so the bodies lay on the floor on a cold, hard concrete slab with no dignity. The distressing image of the bodies is etched in my memory, leaving a deep impact that is hard to erase.

Later on, Muslim gunmen attacked a popular food joint we used to frequent. The customers, primarily non-Somali, were watching the 7:00 PM news. I do not remember how many they killed, but I remember that it was not an isolated incident. Muslim terrorists attacked several non-Somali eating places, and our options for meeting places were shrinking by the day.

Another time, we were in trauma healing training in a church in town when we heard a loud bang followed by the building shaking for a few seconds. We were all shaken up, and I thought they had finally caught up with us. I remember a pregnant woman who was in the meeting. The attack shook her so much that she wailed continuously, even after the tremors ended. She had to be reassured for a while before she cooled down. We later found out that the Muslim militants had planted an improvised explosive device (IED) on the road and detonated it when a police truck passed. That IED claimed the lives of a number of the service members. Many more attacks happened while we were there, but I will only highlight two more.

⁴⁰ Kevin Mwachiro, "Kenya Church Attacks 'Kill 15' in Garissa." BBC, 01 July 2012. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-18662975> (accessed on 08 August 2024).

The first one was in Garissa town in February 2013. I was traveling to Nairobi on the day when a high-profile Somali church leader, Abdi Welli Ahmed, was shot dead in mid-morning.⁴¹ I was at the Muhsin bus park waiting for my bus to depart to Nairobi when I heard a commotion and people whispering in the bus. When I inquired, I was told someone had been shot in town. I only learned later that it was him. He was a very pleasant man with a great sense of humor and unwavering conviction in the faith. I once traveled with him to Nairobi alongside a friend. His boldness and sense of calling made quite an impression on me. His death and what happened later when his Muslim family rejected his body was heart-wrenching. This incident reminds us of the cost some must pay for the sake of the gospel. May we be found faithful to persevere to the end without faltering.

The second story was a thanksgiving for an answered prayer. That same month, a political rally was planned at Garissa Primary School. Martha Karua, a popular Kenyan politician and, at that time, a presidential candidate, was to come and address the people on that podium. The night before the event, an explosion occurred in town. At that time, I lived around 10 km from town, and I heard the sound of an explosion from afar. By that time, it was commonplace to hear the sound of explosions every once in a while. We would always call and ask our friends if they were okay. We never knew who would be hit next. I, therefore, asked around the following morning and learned that the blast was the result of an IED that exploded while being assembled on site.⁴² The person who was planting it was a notorious bomb maker, and he died on the spot after being strewn into pieces by his evil creation. This event was an answered prayer for me and many other believers in the town who sought God to catch the enemy in his own snare. It reminds me of Psalm 141:8-10, “But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death. Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me. Let the wicked fall into their own nets while I pass by in safety.”

Discipleship in the Mission Field

While in the mission field, I deeply appreciated the role of growth in a believer's faith. I was privileged to interact with missionaries worldwide and learn from their experiences as cross-cultural workers. I acquired valuable insights into manhood, marriage, sin, death, persecution, faith, discipline, restraint, and other important life lessons. Additionally, I spent two months under the guidance of a mentor who helped me identify areas for improvement and growth. I also learned how to inductively study the Bible. Looking back, I realize that my time in the mission field profoundly impacted my life holistically. It provided the necessary discipline and guidance that I needed to turn my

⁴¹ Ahmed Abdi Welli, YWAM Associates International. Nd.
<https://www.ywamassociates.com/memorial/ahmed-abdi-welli/> (Accessed on 08 August 2024).

⁴² Abdisalan Ahmed, “Man Killed Assembling Bomb at a Political Rally Venue in Kenya.” 17 February 2013.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/man-killed-assembling-bomb-at-a-political-rally-venue-in-kenya-idUSBRE91G04Y/> (Accessed on 08 August 2024).

life around and mature in the faith. I am grateful for the experience as it has shaped me into who I am today.

Miracles Amidst Persecution

In Garissa, I also saw miracles I might not have seen elsewhere. There was a time we went to a village to give out food when a scorpion stung a boy near us. The team I was with decided that I was to pray with him. The child was writhing in pain, and I leaned towards him and prayed. Then, I went on with the food distribution. A few minutes later, the boy came smiling and playing. He was feeling no more pain. Even the villagers, who were Muslims, were shocked by how quickly he recovered. I later saw other people who were stung by scorpions. Even the local inhabitants would suffer pain for days as the venom terrorized their bodies. This sting the young boy suffered was just a miracle before my eyes.

There was another time I accompanied some guests into the villages, and we had to cross the Tana River. We crossed well by boat and accomplished what we wanted to do on the other side of the river. As we returned, we encountered a bustling herd of goats congregating at the riverbank. It was evident that they needed to be transported across the river to reach the bustling livestock market on the other side. The market day was scheduled to take place the next day.

As culture or fate had it, the ferry operators prioritized the goats over us, and there was no amount of money we could give to be given priority over the “desert cruisers.” The only option was to ride alongside the goats, one of the most hilarious boat rides I have ever had. The goats were very fussy and would jump off into the crocodile-infested river only to be pulled back by the hook-end staff of the shepherd. The river was rocky, and the crocodiles were in the vicinity. I spotted two. Despite the captain trying to steer the boat toward the proper course, the waters pushed us downstream, and we hit a sandbank some 60 meters from the bank. A few meters from where we got stuck, we saw movement in the water, and I knew it must have been a crocodile.

Being stuck was just the beginning of the bad news. The goats became fussy and started jumping off, making the shepherd anxious as they brought the rogue creatures back to safety. In that milieu of chaos, the captain commanded us out of the boat and told us to walk to the bank. The logic was that if we disembarked, the boat would be lighter and thus would be easier to move out of the sandbank. We refused, knowing the danger in the water, but he would not have it. We had no choice but to walk out of the boat one by one into the crocodile and hippo-infested water. We walked in a line towards the bank. That was the longest and scariest walk I have ever had. I was expecting a crocodile to get hold of my heel or, worse, one of our guests. We prayed and, miraculously, walked out of the water safe and sound.

The third miracle among so many was our project car. It was a tutor of faith and perseverance. It was an old and unpredictable Land Rover. It would stall just before a trip and cost us hours trying to fix it. We had to hammer different parts, call a mechanic, and consult Google, all while praying. Sometimes, all failed, and we gave thanks and

returned home. On one trip, we went to a village deep in the bush. The car initially had some issues, but after some tinkering and adjustments, it seemed to be running fine. We spent quite a bit of time fixing it, so we ended up leaving late in the afternoon.

Halfway through the journey, dusk fell, and it was pitch dark. No moon, no stars, no villages. Just the bush and the darkness. We switched on the headlights, which had been working before. Believe it or not, they were not working. We called the mechanic and did our usual hammering and adjustments. It did not budge. In this darkness, you could hardly see past a meter. You could tell that it was time for the night predators. In the area we were in, hyenas roamed unrestricted. We were both frustrated and angry. Luckily, we were not alone and had gone with our director, who was in another car. His car was working well. We said a prayer and let the car with the lights lead the way while our car dragged behind, hitting each pothole, bump, tree stump, and any obstacle on the road. The journey was quite rough, with the vehicle swerving into the bushes several times. Despite the challenges, we miraculously arrived safe and sound after nearly 3 hours, thanks to the grace of God. It was truly an unforgettable miracle in the bush.

I cannot fully capture my ministry experience in a nutshell; it was a daily journey of faith with miracles pouring down like rain. Alongside the victories, there were many moments of loneliness, personal setbacks, and losses in both my family and ministry. These tough times became the foundation for my faith and trust in God to flourish, showing that joy would not be so sweet without pain. God was my provider, protector, guide, and source of strength throughout this journey, and I give Him all the glory. When it was time for me to step down, I did so with a light heart.

The Failure in the Mission Field

While in the mission field, I felt so lonely. The people I served with were mostly in families. I was single and away from my family and friends. I had not made substantial friends among the people I was serving, so I was, by default, alone most of the time.

In my time there, I had not dealt with a weakness named lust. I had been exposed to it on campus when I first began dating. I had suppressed it for years in the mission field, but a time of weakness came in my fourth year. I had just started courting a lady who used to live and teach in the bush. We had not seen each other in a long while, but she got a job closer to me, and she moved to town. One random afternoon, I was home working when she visited, and the spirit of lust took over. At that first occurrence, she conceived. We had to confess to the entire team, which was traumatic. She resigned and returned home, and I was dismissed from the missions' program shortly after. I was now on my own. It is true that in the Christian battlefield, the wounded are often left to fend for themselves. I was one of such. I, however, blame no one because when left alone, you experience the friend who sticks closer than a brother – God. I also acknowledge my family for their support, Pastor James Mbau for mediating between the families, and Oscar Omiti, who came in later and mentored me toward healing and taking fatherly responsibility. There is also a book that helped me through that process:

Toward Authentic Manhood by Boniface Nyoike, which my friend, Olivia Maina, gifted me.

On 31 May 2014, at 9:30 AM, a beautiful baby girl was born in her mother's hometown while I was in Garissa. I did not sleep that night prior. I was too broke to go to the hospital; hence, I stared into the darkness and was deep in thought all night. It was only God who kept the lights on in my brain; I would have gone mad at that time. The baby girl was named Ahavah based on Songs of Solomon 2:4. God showed me His love.

The period following the birth of the baby girl was overshadowed by unresolved trauma, internal and familial disagreements, financial instability, and miscommunication within and between us.

Ahavah's mother and I went our separate ways and are now co-parenting. I take full responsibility for this fall, and my most profound regret was sinning against God and bringing a child into the world without the union of the parents. She did not deserve such an environment. Living away from your beloved child is very difficult. Co-parenting is also grossly overrated.

I urge single people in the mission field to be careful when dealing with loneliness. All missionaries should deal decisively with any weakness at the cross of Jesus.

Re-entry into Society

I moved back home in September 2014, and by God's provision, I got an internship at the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), an intergovernmental body of the African Union. I was working with a department dealing with Climate and Livestock Development. I was placed under the tutelage of a believer and a nonreligious scholar. They oriented me to global policy issues dealing with development. I engaged with expatriates and had the opportunity to discuss important issues that have an impact on nations when implemented. I enjoyed the experience even though the internship ended soon. The fixed contract was over, and there was no renewal.

One thing I noticed was that the subject of religion in the international development field is greatly restricted and monitored. Sharing your faith at the workplace puts you at risk of dismissal by policy. Most of the international development agencies prefer to be nonreligious, but I noticed that they gave special treatment to Muslims due to their assertive nature. When policies restrict Christians from sharing their faith, they generally comply. However, Muslims remained steadfast in practicing their faith. They wore their religious attire, carried their prayer beads, attended mosque during prayer times (even interrupting meetings), advocated for prayer rooms, and even insisted on consuming only halal products within the organization. Christians in the field of development must assert their faith and stop being docile.

During my time with IGAD, I thank God for my exposure, especially to the socioeconomic factors in Somalia and their effect on the gospel's spread among the

Somalis. For instance, the drought and war have brought many of them to Kenya, where preachers have not been prepared to reach out to them.

While at IGAD, I also became a member of my current church and served actively in the missions and young professionals' forum.

The Wilderness Seasons

When I left IGAD in April 2015, I was out of work for the next one and a half years. I applied for many jobs and was invited for a few interviews but was unsuccessful. I remember being so broke that I could not afford the bus fare to church. I would wake up early on Sunday morning and hitch a ride on a church bus (of another church) going the opposite direction and get to the church, only to take another bus that was going to pick up members in the direction of my church. I did that for quite a while to access fellowship. I would always wonder where I would get money to go back home. Only God provided for me through that season. I also went through doctrinal classes during that season to grow in the faith. I also actively participated in church missions, which the church sponsored.

While there, I came across the Young Professional ministry, the leader of which had a vision to see the spiritual growth of the members through evangelism and missions. We would go to secondary schools and preach and disciple using materials offered by a national fellowship of secondary schools. I thought I would infuse my knowledge of Muslim evangelism in the work at hand but soon realized that the need and demand in the Christian background ministry was already very consuming. At that time, there was a need for discipleship to counter the drastic effects of secularism, cultism/occultism, African Traditional Religions (ATR), and worldliness among believers. I soon got engulfed in high school ministry and lost traction in Muslim evangelism. I remember being brought back to reality when I went to one of the churches in Nairobi and accidentally came across a room where Muslim background believers (MBBs) were meeting for a fellowship. I knew they were MBBs because of how they were dressed and because they met in a private inner room with limited access to all.

The experience took me by surprise and made me realize that it was a wake-up call, not a coincidence. Despite understanding the need to put my knowledge, experience, and exposure to Muslim ministry into practice, I found myself in a wilderness season. I had limited networks in Nairobi to connect with, scarce resources to move around, and personal challenges that clouded my vision of the work. These limitations became barriers to being effective in Muslim ministry. I also realized that the absence of opportunity and resources may have meant that I was taking a break to rest, refocus my ministry, and gather strength for the next phase. During this time, I remained active in my church, taking part in fellowship, Bible study, missions, and mentoring peers.

Later in that year, 2015, I joined a team of youth workers to develop a curriculum for High school discipleship. It was a thrilling journey that brought me into contact with a variety of individuals: some with heartfelt passion, others with personal agendas, some with overinflated egos, and yet others fulfilling their purpose while serving in the

ministry. One thing was clear: we are all God's children, broken vessels full of treasure, and the excellence of power is of God and not us. We were privileged to attend and facilitate a national convention with secondary school students.

The conclusion I had after that convention is that the human soul is lost, whatever place it comes from – Christian background, Muslim, or atheist. However, there are places on earth where the darkness of the evil one is so pronounced that it takes much more work to spread the light, and even those that exist are snuffed out by the evil one. Some of these places are Northern Kenya, Somalia, and Eastern Ethiopia, where the Somali people live. There is a great need to mobilize evangelistic and mission movements to give attention to reaching out to Muslims. If a great army of evangelists is to be built, it must be done at the high school level, where the students can be released from fear of Muslims and equipped to reach them effectively. This plan requires initiative and exceptional discipline to flourish.

Pastoral Internship

I attest that God was with me through my wilderness season. I did not lack in anything good, and even though I struggled to pull through, He never let me fall. He was my strength, comfort, protector, and provider. During this season, I served actively in church and was recommended to participate in a pastoral internship program. I joined in September 2016 and was posted to a church in Eldoret.

A church's dynamics differ from those of the mission field or the underground church movement. With the mainstream church, there is intentional ministry and monitoring to ensure fruit in ministry. Accountability in the church is also high, beginning with leadership. I realized that in this system, one could not just live how they wanted without being questioned. Also, when leaders were asked questions, they were expected to speak the truth and bear the consequences of their actions gracefully. This experience was a great exposure for me. I now agree with Dr. Aweis' conclusion in the book *Understanding the Somali Church* that doctrinal unity is crucial for the Somali church not only for evangelistic purposes but also for a host of other benefits like consistent and coherent doctrine, a model of impeccable work ethics and the importance of belonging to a local church and larger denomination.⁴³ I would dare to add that they get consistent fellowship, accountability, and a sense of belonging in a local church. I, however, acknowledge that this is not a silver bullet that solves all issues, and implementation must consider other aspects of the believer's security.

In my time in that church, I experienced much growth regarding interpersonal relations and conflict resolution. I observe how, through God's wisdom, the pastors were able to navigate the congregations through turbulent times. I was encouraged by Pastor John Piper's summary of Charles Spurgeon's life in the article "Preaching Through Adversity." I could not engage actively with Muslim evangelism while at the Eldoret church. It was a season of learning how to shepherd God's flock.

⁴³ Aweis A. Ali, *Understanding the Somali Church*, 99.

Preparation for a Brisk Assignment

I finished my internship and applied to various schools outside Kenya for a scholarship. However, I was not accepted and could not raise the necessary funds needed to enroll in school locally. I was also apprehensive about joining a local school. I spent half a year in a wilderness season, looking for opportunities to advance my schooling in theology. I failed repeatedly, and by March 2018, I was frustrated and tired of the uncertainty of my life.

I then spoke to a friend who linked me with her friend in Nairobi, who was scaling up a start-up company called BlueInventure, a business endeavor to transform Africa through enterprise. Three Christian men intentionally founded the company to use the business to empower entrepreneurs. The leadership team expected staff members to live by Godly principles in the mentorship of businesses. They did not force religion on staff but had Christian core values, ingrained prayer, and Christian disciplines in the ethos and everyday practice. Many staff members became more aware of their faith while at the organization. I recall one individual who experienced a spiritual rebirth there.

The CEO, Mr. Brian Sing'ora, inspired me. He was a witty visionary with a high IQ, a firm conviction, an optimist with great faith in people, and an intentional drive to build their capacity to become great. He is the best boss I have had in my working career. He showed me everything there is to know about the company. He ensured that I went through the training in business advisory, monitoring and evaluation, business development, and any other opportunity that came my way. He taught me how to draft proposals, use the Microsoft Office 365 suite, and draw budgets, templates, and reports to different stakeholders.

The CEO came to visit me at home after I had an accident where a laptop battery exploded in my face. He paid all my bills and ensured I had sufficient leave time to recover. He always spoke encouraging words and charged me to be excellent. He tagged me in high-stakes meetings and gave me the platform to sharpen my interpersonal skills. He called me out to work alongside him for long hours, and through this, I learned how to put in the time and sit through to finish a task. I admired him and still do. So, it is unsurprising that when the company ran out of money, I did not leave. We went on without a salary for about six months. I would still go to the office because I believed in the cause and him. I never realized that the intense training I received from him would prepare me for my next high-pressure and high-stakes assignment. A friend of mine often refers to me as a firefighter due to the unpredictable and volatile nature of my work.

Securing my current job required God's grace in abundance, a lot of effort and skill, and a lot of favor. It involved two lengthy interviews, thorough background checks with my previous employers, and a substantial waiting period. I was offered the opportunity to work as a researcher for an organization that supports the persecuted church. Due to security reasons, I will not discuss my experience in detail, but I can tell you that it has been incredibly impactful.

Serving the Persecuted Church in AS



Tonny Ashubwe in Mogadishu, Somalia.

I reported to work in January 2019 and was coordinating research for the persecuted church in a few East African countries. I was personally responsible for Kenya and Somalia. Given my prior bias toward the Somali church and Muslim converts, I embarked on various research projects to understand who they were, where they were, and what kind of persecution they were facing.

This chapter of my life is so intense, and each of the four years would take a chapter of a book. I have heard of and seen the worst atrocities towards Somali believers, families, fellowship, and church. No amount of aid, counseling, or projects would fully address

their needs; they only strengthen them to remain in the faith. Only Christ and His resurrection power can bring back to life what the enemy has stolen, killed, and destroyed in and among them.

I finish my testimony rather abruptly with this: God prepared me for this time and season through my experience. The many failures and rejections, successes, and uplifting moments all contributed to who I ought to be to fulfill His divine purpose. Nothing that has happened to me was coincidental. He planned it all to serve His purpose. We all exist to serve His purpose—glory to God.

Reflection

In my life and ministry, I concur with Proverbs 5:21, “For your ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all your paths.”

Never in my life had I imagined that I would serve in ministry. I had led a simple religious life and was not particularly inspired by the clergy or any Christian workers. I had not encountered any missionaries until I attended university. I greatly admired my maternal grandmother for her love and dedication to serving the clergy. She was also a woman of the cloth. I never met my grandfather, even though his life path made way for me. I cannot tell why my journey has much to do with my maternal side, but as was the case of Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5), women play a vital role in nurturing the generations into faith in God.

As an individual, I see that God orchestrated everything in my life, including my education, exposure to life, the environment that I lived in, my personality, my intellect, the people I met and the ideas that I interacted with, the things I had and those I lacked, the loss of my father, the hardship I had to go through and the victories He gave me. All

these, He gave just the right measure to direct me in the path He had chosen. If I had been a bit smarter, I would have excelled in school and joined my dream course, but I would have never set foot at Egerton University or met the lady who introduced me to missions.

Conclusion

If my father had been alive, I would not have joined missions (I do not think he would have allowed it). Had I been born with privilege and not known hardship, I would have given up on the mission field way earlier (or may not have joined). Had I not been phlegmatic with fear of death to some degree, I would have entertained suicidal thoughts when depression hit me in the mission field. I would have not lived to see the light of day. Had I not been born with an adventurous bone, I would have never ventured into missions in Garissa, a place of great danger and turmoil for those who follow Christ. I would have settled for a mundane, well-paying job with the UN.

Having said all this, I am also aware that through it all, I had no idea what tomorrow holds. In the past, I could never even ascertain what would come next. Only God knew then and now for me and the next man. I acknowledge Him in all that I have been through. I am alive because of Him. Without Him, I have no story to tell. He has done all this. I give him all the glory.

I also acknowledge that God used many people to minister to me. I begin with my mum, who is very precious to me. She has been with me through all the seasons, sought the best for me, and loved me even when I defied her. I acknowledge my brother, three sisters, Ahavah's mother for caring for Ahavah, and my uncle Ben, who stood in as a father all along. In no particular order, I acknowledge the following, who I have not included in the text: Steve Sandagi, Newton Mureithi, Pastor Aggrey Omukunga, Dr. Solomon Munyua, Dan Wambete, Pascal Ainea, Ann Shake, and Pastor George Murichu for their various roles in my faith and ministry journey. I have not mentioned many more because each one is a testimony in and of itself. God bless you for the role you played in my life story.

I finally thank Dr. Aweis Ali for the challenge he gave me in coming up with this chapter. Thank you for your support, patience, and prayers throughout the process. God bless you.

It began with God, was sustained by God, and will end with God. In Him, I live, breathe, and have my being.

About the Author

Tonny Ashubwe had no prior exposure to missions or a desire for ministry until he finished his undergraduate studies and entered the mission field. Over the past thirteen years, he has taught computer classes, learned the Somali language, participated in relief and educational projects, taught in primary schools, provided business coaching,

and more, all within the path of missions. With a background in environmental science, he has interests in Monitoring and Evaluation as well as Theology. Tonny is a program information leader who supports the persecuted church in the East and South Africa region. He still has a passion for the Somali church and gets involved in the Somali ministry wherever he is needed. The author can be reached at Ashubwetonybenjamin@gmail.com.

CHAPTER 9: IBRAHIM ABDUR-RAHMAN

Introduction

I once had a professor, a dear Christian mentor, who said, “It is good to dwell in the House of Islam.” After striving to be a witness for Christ among Muslims for three decades, I agree with him. Living among them, interacting with them daily, working side-by-side with them on humanitarian projects, sharing the Gospel of Christ with them, and listening to them explain what they believe and do has enriched my life more than I can fully realize. I owe them a debt. To paraphrase what the Apostle Paul wrote, “I am a debtor [under obligation] both to Muslims and others in the Muslim world... For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God...” (Romans 1:14).

I have met a few bad Muslims along the way. My life has been threatened, and once I was beaten. But overall, it has been an incredible journey filled with hospitality and friendships. I entered the Muslim world by a winding route. I never intended to go there. Here is a story about part of my journey—a journey yet to be completed.

My Call to Ministry

I grew up attending church and Sunday school, and I was baptized into Christ when I was 12. I believe I did love Jesus. But after about six months, my behavior changed. I began to rebel against God. Perhaps it was because I was going through puberty, and I was discovering the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Perhaps it was also a reaction to watching my little sister die from a disease that slowly consumed her body. Whatever the reason for my rebellion, it did not last long.

When I was 14, I remember standing on the edge of a cliff on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, watching a beautiful sunset, and being overwhelmed with the love of God. I could fight against the fear of hell. I could fight against God’s commandments. But I could not fight against the love of God. How do you fight against love? God’s love overpowered me—and broke me. I said, Lord, I have made a mess of my life. Please forgive me. I want to serve you, helping other young people who are as messed up as me. On that day, I gave my life to ministry for Christ. But what would God do with a skinny, pimply-faced 14-year-old kid? I had no idea.

I began to read my Bible intensely—sometimes for two or three hours each day—even when I needed to prepare for a chemistry exam. I thought, “Maybe the Lord will return before the exam, and I will be spared this humiliation of a low grade.” I excelled in some classes, especially English, drama, art, and history, but the science and math classes confused me. I began carrying my Bible to school and always put it on top of all my other books. Surprisingly, my classmates did not make fun of me. They knew I wanted to study for the ministry after high school, and they respected that. Perhaps it also helped that my hairstyle was unconventional, and I taught martial arts to my classmates.

*Near the end of high school, I devoured David Wilkerson’s book *The Cross and the Switchblade*. He told his story of ministry among gangs in New York City. I thought,*

“That is what I want to do. I want to work in the inner city among poor young people.” Four years later, after graduating from a Christian university with a Bachelor’s degree in Bible and ministry, I moved to New York City and began serving a small, ethnically diverse congregation in one of the poorer neighborhoods.

“Black Muslims” & New Religions in America

Much of my ministry was on the streets among young blacks. It was at the height of the black power movement. That was when I first met Muslims—at least, that is what they called themselves. Outsiders often called them “Black Muslims.” These were members of Elijah Muhammad’s Nation of Islam. I was impressed with their discipline, modest dress, hard work, business acumen, and how they transformed little sections of the communities where they congregated. Their lifestyle was different from anyone else I saw in the city. I would buy Muhammad Speaks newspapers from them to learn about their strange doctrines and practices. Even though I was a “white devil” from their perspective, they still engaged me in respectful conversations. And, of course, I would buy from them bean pies—a Nation of Islam culinary delight.

Years later, after Elijah Muhammad’s death, I came to know Elijah’s son, Wallace, whom his father chose to be the next leader. Wallace renamed himself W. Deen Mohamed and introduced this nationalistic sect to the beliefs and practices of the wider Muslim world. Even though we only met a few times for me to interview him, I considered W. Deen Mohamed to be a friend.

I had long been interested in different religions. At the time, new religions, what Christians called “cults,” heavily impacted the religious scene in America, especially in urban areas like New York City. I began studying these new religions because we were losing some of our young people to them.

I wanted to pursue a Master’s degree in comparative religion, so I applied to Harvard University, thinking that would be the best place to go. They rejected my application, probably because my undergraduate grades were insufficient. In my Bachelor’s work, if I liked a subject, I would excel, but if I became tired of a course, I would do the bare minimum to pass. I then applied to another school and was accepted, not knowing that it was one of the best schools in the world to earn a major in Islam and a minor in comparative religion.

Academic Study of Islam

When I began to study Islam and other religions, I wanted to show where they were wrong. I tried to explain to Christians the dangers of different faiths. But something unexpected happened. As I began to study Islam, I greatly liked what I heard. I did not agree with everything Muslims believed and did, but I saw we had more in common than I ever expected. There was darkness, yes, but there was also light. I came to realize that of all the religions of the world, none were closer to what Christians believe, not even Judaism, than Islam. That shook me. It unsettled me. It intrigued me. It called

to me. How can I help Muslims transition to full faith in Christ if they already believe in much of the Bible?

*When I was a graduate student, we had various well-known scholars visit our school to speak on Islam. One visitor was Kenneth Cragg, author of *The Call of the Minaret* and numerous other thought-provoking books on Christian-Muslim relations. I asked him why it was that, according to Islam, conversion was only one way. Why did Muslims insist on freedom of religion in America and the West, but in many parts of the Muslim world, a convert to Christianity was ostracized, beaten, imprisoned, or even killed? Under this circumstance, it seemed nearly impossible to plant congregations among those who fled their homes or were imprisoned or killed for their faith. Of course, he could give me no simple answer. This view was just the way most Muslims saw the world based on their understanding of Shariah.*

A small Christian university called me to be a professor, and I taught several courses on Islam there. It was there that I began to look for loopholes in Shariah. Could a person remain legally or culturally Muslim yet become fully committed to Christ as Lord? How could we “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5) among people in the House of Islam?

Sharing the Gospel with Muslims

For several years, I had tried to live as a Muslim among Muslims without surrendering anything of my loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. I wanted to understand the mindset of Muslims so I could communicate the Gospel with them in a way they would better understand. I took Paul's example seriously to “become all things to all people that by all means I might save some.” Like Paul, I wanted to “do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). Some Christians liked my approach, but others hated it, and they ostracized me.

I believed Muslims knew many good things about God and al-Masih 'Isa (the Messiah Jesus), but it was not enough. I wanted to share the rest of the story with them. I studied the Qur'an and classical interpretations of it along with other writings that would help me present the Gospel story as a reliable witness that calls us to transformed lives. I developed what I believe to be reasonable approaches to answering Muslim objections, especially concerning Jesus as the “Son of God,” the crucifixion of Jesus, and Muslim claims that the Gospel had been corrupted.

Sometime after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I was invited to teach an ethnic minority of Muslims who had been severely persecuted. They were returning to their homeland but had no homes to reclaim. They captured farmland and unfinished buildings in which to live. They built shanties, often out of plastic, cardboard, and wood scraps. Life was difficult for them. This group faced discrimination. But they were united on two things: they wanted to live once again in their homeland, and they knew they were Muslims. Even though they understood very little of what Muslims should believe or do, they were eager to learn more about their religion.

I prepared a series of lessons on the five pillars of faith all Muslims should believe: faith in God, His angels, the Books of God, the messengers and prophets of God, and the Day of Judgment. Many Muslims added a sixth pillar concerning predestination, but I did not include it since these Muslims wanted to change their situation, and they emphasized free will. I planned to teach these Muslims by examining both the Bible and the Qur'an. I thought I would begin the lessons with a small group of perhaps two or three people, return to the university, and later improve the approach.

Instead, something unexpected happened. My coworker and I were invited to teach in several homes that summer. About 30 people came for the lessons in one house, some traveling for up to three hours to listen. Some came to Christ, and we baptized them early on, while others took years to commit their lives to Christ. They retained their cultural identity and heritage that the Soviet Union had tried to destroy, but they chose Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

That was years ago. Since that time, I have worked among Muslims in war zones and places of peace, among refugees and victims of natural disasters, in various countries and circumstances. What I have learned is to treat Muslims the way they desire to be treated, trying to follow Jesus, who said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). This includes listening respectfully, learning their cultures, and speaking the truth with love.

Conclusion

Near the beginning of this testimony, I said that I could not fight against the love of God. How do you fight against love? Long ago, God's love overpowered me, and my life was no longer the same. In the same way, I hope that Muslims will see the love of God in me. They may argue against what I teach. But it is more difficult for them to argue against the love shown to them. I pray that they will see the love of God in me. Perhaps they may also be attracted to the Gospel of Jesus Christ if that happens.

I have found that most Muslims I meet are friendly and very hospitable. They have welcomed me into their homes. But I also know that some Muslims are difficult to speak with, some are antagonistic, and some are dangerous. But we can pray that the love of Christ touches them, much like it did to me—and even to Saul on his Damascus journey. The clearest way Muslims will see the love of Christ is through our behavior toward them. To the best of our ability, let's obey the words of Christ: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you... love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." (Luke 6:27-28, 35, ESV).

About the Author

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CHAPTER 10: JASON MCKNIGHT

Called

Each of us has callings. In different seasons of our lives, the Lord may call us to himself, a people to serve, or a task to complete. There is no place for boasting in any of these callings. It is simply a response to the Lord's voice and work of grace in our lives by his Spirit. The following is my story of how the Lord called me to salvation and continues to call me to journey with him in his mission of discipling the nations.

Called to Christ

Everything changes when Jesus is revealed. In 1996, at 23 years old, God turned on the lights in my soul. He gave me a new heart that beats for him. Indeed, God was mightily at work in me before then. He had been preserving me alive despite my foolish living. He was sometimes convicting me of sin and drawing me back to him. Only at the one-week Intersarsity Pioneer Camp in Canada did I understand the gospel of the "great exchange." I received the good news with joy that Christ *became* my sin, effectively taking it away, and I became a new creation in Christ clothed in his righteousness.

From that day, I started the race looking unto Jesus, and I have not looked back. When I returned to the University of Ottawa for my third year of Physiotherapy, I dove into Christian fellowship in campus ministry. With unfettered zeal, I sought to evangelize all my friends and family. Some were intrigued by the radical change; others were turned off. A few joined this journey with Jesus, most notably the woman who would become my wife years later. My first year as a new believer was formative and foundational in the family of faith at Intersarsity Christian Fellowship. I intentionally found the most serious Christian and invited myself to her church—the Ottawa Reformed Presbyterian Church.

In June 1997, I was baptized and brought into membership after a year of worshipping at the Ottawa RP Church. Immediately following, I returned to the same camp where Christ found me and, this time, served as a Counsellor to the Leaders in Training. There was much forbearance with my intensity as I slowly learned that everyone is unique in their understanding and experience of God and the Scriptures. I returned for my last year of the university, serving in the leadership of Intersarsity and starting to take courses at our church-based seminary. At that point, I was not thinking of full-time pastoral ministry as I was purely studying out of a love for God's Word.

Called to Missions

Bringing in the new year 1999, I joined 18,000 other students at the Urbana Student Missions Conference. When the call went out to commit to missions, I felt compelled to commit publicly. My first experience overseas was that summer on "Medi Quest" with Africa Inland Mission (AIM), which provided an exposure trip to medical missions. At the end of the summer trip, as I looked over the Rift Valley at Kijabe Hospital, I prayed that

the Lord would give me a people to serve in Africa. God had already started to answer that prayer by putting Sudanese people in my life in Ottawa and that summer in Kenya.

Naturally, I prayed that the Lord would use my physiotherapy training to serve in Africa. As I searched for physiotherapy opportunities in that vast continent, I found an opening with Serving in Missions (SIM) at a hospital in Zambia. When I was approved, I proposed this to my elders at the Ottawa RP Church and requested their blessing. Their clear counsel was to finish my seminary studies and consider church planting somewhere in Africa. I emailed Ken Smith, my professor and mentor, that afternoon for advice. His response was simply Hebrews 13:17. I looked it up to read, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you." There, in my room, I got on my knees. I took the acceptance package from SIM, laid it aside, lay face down, and re-committed myself again to the Lord, "Lord, whatever you want me to do, wherever you want me to go, I am yours."

Called to Sudan

The next day, as I walked from the parking lot to the front door of the clinic where I worked, the word "Sudan" struck me like lightning. As clear as day, this was where the Lord was leading me to go to plant churches. As my mind was racing, I sat down at my work desk. I wrote down everything I would need to do to prepare: become a "student-under-care of the Presbytery" (regional council of church elders), finish seminary, learn a Sudanese language, and get married. Who I should marry would not become evident until after another summer mission.

With this calling to the largest country in Africa at the time, I took a deep dive into the history of the land and people. As I learned that the ancient Kingdom of Cush (Nubia) was in modern-day Sudan, the words "Cush4Christ" came to mind as a name for this new mission. Books and presentations by organizations like Voice of the Martyrs and their work in Sudan stirred my heart for both the Muslim Northerners and the "Christian/Animistic" Southerners. I learned from the prayer book *Operation World* that Darfur was the least evangelized region in Africa. In my burden for this area, I put together a "30 Days of Prayer for Darfur" guide for people to use during Ramadan. However, instead of being called to Darfur through strings of providence, the Lord directed my steps to a people living right along the border of southern Darfur.

Called to Aweil

That summer, I set up a trip to find a mission organization to work with in Sudan and grow my understanding of Sudanese cultures. My journey began at a Frontline Fellowship training in Cape Town, South Africa. I then spent a month in Kenya visiting the people I had met the summer before with AIM. One of the Sudanese, David Makuac, a student I had sponsored over the last year in Bible college, took me up to Kakuma Refugee Camp in northern Kenya, where he introduced me to his people in

Group 6, Zone 6, the Dinka people from Aweil in southern Sudan. There, under the shade of a tree, I could see the answer to my prayer: a people to serve. I committed myself to the Aweil people. One day, I believed I would go to their homeland and make disciples of this people group.

I spent the last month of the summer in Cairo building relationships with southern Sudanese who had escaped the war in Sudan and whose only hope was to get asylum in the West. It was understandable that they were seeking another land of peace and opportunity, but seeing they were not longing for a better and heavenly country was disheartening. Without training in the language, I did not make much progress in learning Dinka or Arabic. Only the Lord knew I would be back 20 years later to the All Saints Church compound, where I recently taught a missions course at the Alexandria School of Theology.

Called to Marry

Following that summer of 2001 and upon my return to physiotherapy work and seminary studies in Canada, God convicted me that he had given my friend of seven years to be my bride. The Lord confirmed that she was the one when I met with Albert Martin, a preacher who deeply impacted me in my early years as a Christian. After I shared my excitement about the opportunities in Sudan and sought his advice on evangelistic methods, he responded, “Young man, you need to get married.” I knew that if I did not ask her to be my wife, I was disobeying God, and he would deal with me severely.

In Gettysburg, a few hours before attending a friend’s wedding, Julie and I went for a walk surrounded by the multicolored leaves on the trees in the Fall. Seeing a Gazebo, we *entered and* sat down. The conversation moved into a discussion about her sense of calling to missions. The words just came out of my mouth, “Will you come to Sudan with me?” Without hesitating, she said, “Yes!” We knelt down and prayed that the Lord would direct us to serve him together. As we walked away, we agreed that this commitment meant we would start preparing for marriage. The following summer, we made covenant vows to one another that the Lord would be faithful to keep “until death do us part.”

We took our official honeymoon in Mombasa, Kenya. The financial gifts received during our June wedding enabled us to spend the next two months traveling in Kenya, including visiting Kakuma Refugee Camp. With David Makuac, we formed a team of five members and traveled to southern Sudan. We found a small commercial airline that dropped us in Malual Kon in Aweil East County. As the pilot made wide detours around the garrison towns looking for any helicopter gunships and anti-aircraft fire, I looked over to my newlywed wife to see if she was concerned. She said, “If we die, we die.” She was braver than I was. When we landed on the dirt airstrip, someone pointed out the t-shirt of a blind man hanging in a tree – a Sudanese government Antonov bomber had hit him just a month before.

Called to a War Zone

The Dinka Malual people living in this densely rural population in the State of Northern Bahr El Ghazal were known for resisting the Sudan government-backed Arab militia or Murahaleen. These Baggara tribesmen would ride horseback along the train tracks from the North of Sudan down to the Southern garrison towns of Aweil and Wau. As the tribe members went back up north, they would go into surrounding villages to kill or kidnap boys and rape women and take the cattle and burn down the mud and grass homes and church buildings. We heard the stories of 20 years of struggle defending their land from the “holy warriors” waging Jihad on the Dinka along the state borders between the Northern and Southern States.

We visited markets that had been burned down multiple times. The people had to rebuild their grass shelter shops over and over again. We were led north of this tiny Wanyjok market to see a plot of land the elders offered for our mission. As we walked through the tall grass, we prayed that the Lord would bring us back to settle in this village of Parot. It would not be for another two years that we would move there to build our homes.

In the autumn of 2002, as newlyweds, we returned to Canada, where we both worked in physiotherapy. I also finished my seminary studies and passed the Presbytery student-under-care exams. The following summer, 2003, we returned to Kenya to minister to the Aweil refugees in Kenya and Uganda. Early that summer, it became evident that David Makuac was dishonest in financial dealings, and we had to dismiss him from the ministry. Through many more trials, we were able to revisit the Wanyjok area and continue building relationships with the people.

Called to a Land of Peace

Despite the Lord walking us through the deepest valley of disappointment and disillusionment, I was still hopeful to return the following year. The Reformed Presbyterian Global Missions Board counseled us to take time to do an internship before returning. In November 2003, Samuel was born, and soon after, we attended an intensive version of the Perspectives Course at the U.S. Center for World Missions. Men like Dr Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne taught it. While there, we met someone who became the first member of our team. We had nine months of internship with an RP Church plant in Toronto, Canada, one of the most multicultural cities in the world. We then served with a Presbyterian mission in Karamoja, Uganda. At the end of the twelve months of internships, we took a five-week trip to Wanyjok.

During our stay in Wanyjok, we attempted to visit Aweil town. The *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* between the North and South had recently been signed, and we believed that our travel document with the Southern interim government would get us into this town held by the Sudan Army for 20 years. We passed through the first security roadblock, but a security officer called us down from our truck. After several hours of different types of interrogation, the head of security came in a fury, firing rapid questions

at us: “How did you come to Sudan?!” and “What are you doing in Sudan?!”. He pointed to the door and angrily barked, “Leave now!”. They ushered us out of the office and put us in the back of a land cruiser, which precipitously careened out of the town. They then put us on a lorry, which brought us back to another market, from where we walked back to Wanyjok, arriving at midnight. I will never forget the contempt on that Sudanese man’s face. Conversely, among the Dinka, we were openly welcomed to bring the gospel to Aweil town. The Sudan government was not going to leave the South without expressing their great displeasure at having missionaries coming to a town that was an Islamic stronghold for a couple of decades during the war.

Called to Trust

We returned to Kenya and led an AIM short-term team ministering to the Aweil people in the Kakuma Refugee camp. Back in Canada, we did a cross-country tour, and in the U.S., we added the PILAT Language Learning program at Missionary Training Institute. While pregnant with our second child, my wife was chronically ill with giardiasis. We were very concerned as she was losing weight in her first trimester. The doctor did not have any other treatment to recommend after trying everything. We went to our elders, who anointed my wife with oil. She also tried a concentrated garlic supplement. The Lord was merciful to her and brought her healing and strength to carry her through the pregnancy.

In January 2006, my ordination service at my home church included a commissioning service for our little team. Two days later, we left for Africa, this time to settle and begin the work. We landed in Malual Kon, where we stayed for two weeks, awaiting the completion of drilling a borehole in the village of Parot next to the land we would lease. During this time, our son was vomiting everything he ingested over three days. Our concern for him reached a peak when the doctor at a small Catholic hospital could not get an IV line in. We could only commit him to our merciful Father, who heard our prayers and the local pastor’s prayers who had prayed for him that morning. Our son fell into a deep sleep for a few hours, and when he awoke, he was ravenously hungry, wanting to eat everything we could give him: a Power Bar and Weetabix cereal. The Lord healed him in answer to our pleas for mercy.

We finally moved our belongings and camped in a grass shelter in the middle of the land given to us in this village of Parot. We started contracting workers to build three huts, which would be our homes for the next four years. During this time, we interacted with many young Darfurian men who had come to work in local shops. We started sharing the gospel with them, taking them through chronological Bible stories from Creation to Christ. Within a few months, they seemed sincere in their repentance from sin, renouncing the devil and trusting in Jesus Christ as King and Savior. They were the first I baptized in Sudan.

Called to Love Muslims

Working with a Dinka pastor, we discipled twelve Darfurians who we baptized and discipled together. We walked them through Chronological Bible Storying and taught them how to worship together in a house fellowship. In response to their many questions about their newfound faith, I put together a discipleship series called *Our New Life*, explaining all the essential doctrines and practices as a Christian replacing the rituals in Islam (*Our New Deen*). After about six months, the leaders of the Darfurian community heard of these meetings and brought an end to them by sending these young men to train with the South Sudanese Liberation Army. We heard that some died in the fighting, and some found their way back to Sudan or the West. Others remained in South Sudan, with some falling away after facing persecution. Only a handful of this group have continued in the faith.

Despite the discouragement of seeing these young men scatter, my burden for the Darfurians did not abate. Often, I would come out of my hut looking northward and pray earnestly that the Lord would send his Word to those masses who had not yet heard it. I befriended many Darfurian shopkeepers in Wanyjok and Aweil. I met one who was the only known believer in his tribe. We worked together to teach a three-level workshop for Dinkas, who had spent years in Darfur, so they could return better equipped for discipleship and church planting in Darfur. There was great excitement in these training sessions. Still, there was little spiritual progress as there was an expectation they could not do anything without providing a budget for their travels, lodging, food, and family who remained. I was not going to start a practice of funding the entire trip. I had learned enough about dependency. It was not an unhealthy precedent I wanted to set.

My efforts to mobilize the Dinka church to fulfill their call to reach their Muslim neighbors were made through “Loving Muslims” workshops and prayer services for Muslims in the North during Ramadan. For multiple years, we had a large all-night prayer meeting on the “Night of Power” (Laylat al-Qadr). In all these efforts, I did not see any sustained effort from the Dinka to reach out to the growing number of Muslims who had come to do business and settle as their neighbors. While most of my ministry was focused on the Dinka people of Aweil over the ten years in Sudan/South Sudan, my particular emphasis in this chapter is my ministry to Muslims and Muslim Background Believers (MBBs).

In 2012, one of the most joyful moments in my service in South Sudan was with a Muslim I had just led to Christ and a Dinka pastor baptized. The Lord had been preparing him to make the commitment for over a year. This young man from the Fur tribe, a recruiter in Darfur’s Sudan Liberation Army, came to South Sudan on a quest for truth but did not know what it was. When he heard the gospel message, it was the message of peace he had been searching for. He did not have any objections to Christian doctrine that usually causes Muslims to stumble, such as the un-corruptness of the Scriptures, the three Persons in the Godhead, and salvation through the cross. He unreservedly and fearlessly received baptism with the profession of his faith. The following week, my heart overflowed as I sat on a mat with him in his home, doing a

verse-by-verse study through the gospel of John. This series of meetings in the Word and prayer were short-lived. Years later, it had proved to be foundational in his discipleship.

Carrying this burden to impact Darfur, I would get impatient and often distracted from the work before me in Aweil. A wise older teammate counseled me that it was not the time to focus my energies on Darfurians. However, I could not stop having this urge to jump at every opportunity to minister to them, especially when I was in the market. I took time to visit with them in their shops and shared the gospel in my broken Arabic. During our breaks in Nairobi, Kenya, I would amass gospel tracts and Bibles in Arabic that I would share with the few Darfurian believers and Dinka brothers who had a heart for Muslims. In the early days, when we still used cassette tapes in Sudan, I had hundreds of tapes with recordings of gospel stories in the three major tribal languages of Darfur (Fur, Massalit, and Zaghawa). We sent the cassette tapes to Nyala through some connections there. We heard that some came to faith through that distribution of tapes.

Others Called to Sudan

While I could not go to Sudan, the Lord brought a young man to join our team, who himself would later receive a call to Sudan. He served on our team for a few years and learned much about life and ministry in South Sudan. Over time, this young man developed a deep love for the Sudanese, who had not been given any attention in outreach. He started learning Arabic and sought to find his way to Darfur (Jebel Marra), but all avenues seemed closed. He joined another organization that allowed him to serve the Sudanese in Chad and then in Sudan proper. He is setting an excellent example of total immersion and becoming effective in communicating the gospel to the Sudanese people.

In the Lord's providence, I met some missionaries who had to leave the country during a purge of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the region of Darfur. The removal of the NGOs brought great suffering for the Darfurians facing their civil war against the Khartoum government and the President's para-military force called the "Janjaweed," which later became the "Rapid Response Forces." In this case, it was Muslims fighting Muslims. The senseless violence has caused many Darfurians to question Islam as a religion of peace and turn outright from Islam or show an interest in Christianity.

Since the Independence of South Sudan, Juba, the capital, has grown dramatically. It has brought many Darfurians to set up their businesses. When I heard that one of the original twelve disciples was in Juba, I made an effort to encourage him to find a church that preaches the gospel. I took him to a church that turned out to be a "health, wealth, prosperity" church. However, a couple of years later, he invited me to his church, Light of Christ Bible Church. The members were all Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). They were in Juba, taking different Bible programs in the city. We had many conversations about biblically-based theology. What are ancient or modern traditions?

Which are extra-biblical or unbiblical? I also developed a bond with these men who were hungry and thirsty for the Word. I expanded the curriculum I created for the MBBs in Aweil to teach these brothers eager to be challenged in handling the Word of Truth. This curriculum, called Cross Training, takes a disciple-maker through the four phases of church planting (Evangelize, Establish, Equip, and Extend).

Called to Train MBBs

Though the church leadership has sadly split over resources, I have continued to mentor the remaining vital leaders in the Light Christ Bible Church. The lead pastor has been to Sudan a few times with the help of a friend who sponsored part of the trip. With the *Cross Training* that this brother received from me, he established two house churches in the capital and four in Darfur. He has shown patience with the many challenges of discipling MBBs who have been steeped in Islam and are very new to the Christian worldview. He is careful and wise not to ordain men too quickly. However, he is committed to training them thoroughly before they are given responsibility in the church. These men are far more effective in reaching their people because of their expert knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith. My role has been to equip them in the Scriptures with the theology and practices of biblical worship and discipleship. These men are showing themselves to be very mature in many ways.

In 2017, the brother who came to faith in 2012 in Aweil returned to the circle of men I mentored. I met him in Arua, Uganda, where he stayed with his wife, whom he led to faith. Some Baptist missionaries in South Sudan and Uganda further equipped him. His zeal for the Lord was noticeable. When he returned to Aweil for a visit, he preached in the Parot church, speaking of his bold witness to his people. His voice roared, "I am like a lion in the field of the Lord." We have been meeting almost annually on short-term trips since our return to settle in Canada in 2015. Using *Cross Training* as his curriculum, he has planted churches for Darfurians in Kampala and Arua, Uganda, Juba, South Sudan, and El Fashir, Sudan. Next to the gospel, his greatest passion is being an Envoy with OneTribe, which "empowers local people in divided societies to build a God-centered peace from the grassroots up." OneTribe's ministry has proven to be a very effective tool for gaining a hearing with Sudanese Muslims who are desperate to hear how they can have peace with God living in conflict-ridden Sudan.

Called to the Nations

I now serve as a mission consultant and trainer for our denomination. I have the privilege of opening up different fields around the world. My first trip to a closed country in South Asia enabled me to see and feel, for the first time, "oppression" in a country dominated by Islam. When we visited the city in this country with the most mosques, I remember standing on a rooftop, hearing the dawn call to prayer (*Fajr*) sounding like shrieks reverberating in waves across the city. It brought a sinking feeling, sadness, and discouragement to know that the Christian population, which is less than 1% of the population in this country, has always been drowned out and oppressed under such a siege. Yet, when I visited the small group of believers in this country, I was encouraged

by their commitment to Christ despite having a “sword on their neck ready to fall at any time” under the threat of blasphemy and anti-conversion laws. We also visited the country’s largest city and found a wide door of service opportunities.

My second trip to this country was with a brother and his family, whom I had mentored for many years. He did an internship with us on our team. He completed seminary, did another internship, and received further training in ministry to Muslims. We visited this country together, and the Lord confirmed he was leading this brother and his family to this country and focusing on the fiercest people group. There has never been a movement in this very large people group, possibly because they have not heard the gospel in their heart language. This family and now others have begun to make inroads with relationships, sowing the seed of the gospel among those whose religion and honor system had previously enslaved. With a long-term commitment to build a team and serve among people groups in the region, we pray for a gospel movement like that we are hearing about among other formerly hardened hearts.

On a subsequent trip to the Horn of Africa, the Lord opened my eyes to another aspect of work in an Islamic country. This country has seen stability in recent years, allowing workers to settle in the capital city with a genuine heart for long-term service. As we trained a tiny group of believers in a house, we heard the stories of how the other fellowships in the city were just as small and weak with a lack of training. It was disheartening to hear how, once again, financial support from outside has spoiled the motivation of the national workers in another country. During this visit, we did not see this problem with the three believers we trained, but I am sad that our communications have waned. The hope of having monthly financial help with a safe house and other means of income has probably been dashed; we did not want to start a relationship of unhealthy financial dependence. We still long to be part of the work in this region and trust that our first visit will not be the last in this desperately needy area for a long-term partnership in disciple-making and church planting.

On a very different level, I have seen, as many others have, that Egypt is a uniquely positioned country to reach the Arabic-speaking world. The entire Arab world enjoys Egyptian movies and music. Egypt’s impact is excellent, with the largest Christian churches in the Middle East and Northern Africa. As the Reformed Presbyterian Church, we are seeking to serve in partnership with a Reformed ministry called El Soora. They host the largest reformation rally in the Middle East every year. They translate reformed books into Arabic and provide training workshops throughout the year. We seek to bring reformation in preaching and worship, two areas of declension in the Arabic-speaking churches. Our greatest desire is for Muslims to hear Christians singing the Psalms as they did in the Early Church and Church of the Reformation. The co-founder of the largest organization in the Muslim world testified that when he heard of the Psalm sung in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, this could be a very effective tool in reaching Muslims who already (should) value the Psalms (*Zaboor*) as a holy book and would be readily accepted when sung without instruments.

Called to Train Missionaries

While practicing Psalm singing in worship has been more than the norm in past centuries, it is an anomaly today. However, our publishing house, *Crown & Covenant*, is seeing a resurgence in Psalm singing in the West. We believe this hymnal used by the Church will lead to deeper discipleship in God's Word as we recount the history of redemption. Memorizing the Psalms in song, especially by oral learners, will supply them with a song for every moment and emotion they experience as Christians. Persecuted MBBs can sing the Psalms as imprecation upon the Church's enemies as they seek justice. They can sing of the covenant love of God to remind them to love their persecutors by praying for and blessing them.

At the seminary where I teach missions, I seek to equip all the students to love the world with prayers. My burden is that they will focus most of their prayers on those people groups who have not yet heard the gospel even once, especially within the 10/40 Window. The *Missionary Cross Training* curriculum is comprehensive in its scope and Christ-centered in its focus. It takes the students through five modules grounded in our union with Christ (Module) and, from there, work through the four ministry dynamics (Theological, Team, Missional, and Cultural). The course I teach for those preparing for service in a Western Context seeks to equip these students to cast the vision for God's concern for the nations and how to mobilize, send, and shepherd members serving cross-culturally at home and overseas.

Using the image of a funnel, our mission agency seeks to bring every member to participate in the mission of God to the nations. Whether they "support the funnel" by praying, giving, or mobilizing. They also can "enter the funnel" through our short-term internships and long-term trips. In our learning opportunities, we provide pre-field and on-the-field training with post-field debriefing. The training seeks to form godly character, renew the mind, and equip for cross-cultural service. We are committed to coming alongside everyone, preparing to serve wherever the Lord calls them. We see no country as impenetrable to the gospel. We increasingly desire to be a part of reaching the beloved Muslim nations of the world.

Called to Disciple the Nations at Home and Abroad

Here in Canada, there is a growing number of Muslims, both through immigration and natural growth. Just 15 minutes from my own home is the largest concentration of Muslims in Canada, with the second-largest mosque. A couple of years ago, I befriended the imam of the Mosque and enjoyed many meetings to share our understanding of who God is and what he has done to provide forgiveness for sins. In the downtown core, there is an Islamic Dawa group that is putting Christians to shame with their religious zeal and advocating for their religion. We have a friendly exchange, but they are just as passionate about seeing people convert as we are in street evangelism. I love all Muslim friends in this city, but I have yet to see any of them turn to Christ as their Mediator for the Day of Judgement. I have even poured my heart out to a

pastor's kid, now a young man who has converted to Islam. The pull to "come to Islam" and join the Umma is growing among those who are not rooted and grounded in Christ.

While the West is hardening hearts toward the gospel, we know there is a great turning to Christ in the Global South. As many others have observed, the West is no longer reaching the rest. It is now the time for the church in South America, Africa, and Asia to rise up and finish disciplining the nations for Christ. Movements of Muslims to Christ are sweeping the globe. These MBBs must rely upon Christ to support, govern, propagate, and train themselves. Western partners must come alongside to mentor them in their development through the stages of maturity. I am close to many brothers with long-term ministering experience in Islamic countries. They wisely seek to empower national believers to fulfill the Great Commission among their people and even cross cultures as missionaries to unreached people groups.

Based in Canada, I continue to train missionary and national workers in other lands in the work of church planting and missions. One of the training tracks is called the Global Training Network (GTN), a two-year Associate Degree program. We use a secure online platform to deliver content for church planting cohorts who gather in person worldwide. The training equips them with the convictions, character, and competencies necessary for multiplying disciple-making and church-planting movements. This training is a long-term project that we hope will be available in all the world's major languages within ten years.

In my Doctoral Ministry project, I seek to equip the wider Church to stay the course in discipling the nations even in the growing hostility against Christ and the rise of centralization of world powers. It is a call to be faithful and fruitful in discipling the nations in the 21st century. The fruit of my work is a proposed roadmap to navigate the many challenges and opportunities ahead. I use the same disciple-making and church-planting materials developed over 25 years of gospel ministry.

Conclusion

While we serve Christ the King in this broken and troubled world, especially among beloved Muslims, we must not cower in fear of the future but boldly press on with our mission to disciple the nations. Christ has not given us all the details of "what first must take place" (Luke 21:9) before his return. However, we have calls for endurance, faith, and wisdom (Revelation 13:10,18). The Church will be preserved as a testimony to the nations that Christ reigns now and forever. May all the people praise Him! As followers of Christ, we are called to be a light in the darkness, to show love and compassion to all around us, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Through our actions and attitudes, we can truly represent the message of Christ and make a positive impact on the world. While the future may seem uncertain, we are called to trust in God's plan and walk in faith, knowing that He is in control and His purposes will ultimately prevail. In the face of challenges and adversity, we are reminded to stand firm in our faith, be courageous, and continue spreading hope and

redemption. Our mission is to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to all nations, make disciples, and demonstrate God's loving and transformative power. As we navigate the complexities of this world, may we find strength and resolve in our calling to be ambassadors of Christ, sharing His love and truth with those around us. Let us be encouraged by the promise that the Church will endure as a testimony to the nations that Christ reigns now and forever. This serves as a reminder that our efforts to spread the gospel and to live out our faith are not in vain. May all the people praise Him as we strive to fulfill the great commission and to advance the kingdom of God in the world.

About the Author

Jason McKnight (pseudonym) is a passionate individual who has dedicated ten years to serving as a missionary in Sudan and South Sudan. His invaluable experiences in these regions have shaped his perspective and deepened his commitment to fostering positive change. Currently residing in Canada with his wife and three grown children, who are also fervently pursuing missions, Jason is actively training and mentoring ministry workers while spearheading efforts to expand into new mission fields. A dedicated scholar, Jason is on the path to further enriching his knowledge and skills. He is a doctoral candidate pursuing a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree, with an anticipated graduation in May 2025. Jason's academic journey began with completing a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree, which laid a solid foundation for his later pursuit of a Master of Divinity (MDiv) degree. Jason's multifaceted journey is a testament to his unwavering dedication to serving others and spreading the message of hope and compassion. Through his diverse experiences and academic endeavors, Jason continues to exemplify the qualities of an inspiring and influential leader in missions and ministry. The author can be reached at info@somalibiblesociety.org.

CHAPTER 11: KENNETH NISSLEY

Our Journey to Somalia

For my wife Elizabeth (“Libby”) and I, our journey to Somalia began during the mission/service week in a hallway at Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) in the early spring of 1966, my senior year in college. Harold Stauffer, a representative from Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM), passed me and asked if he could speak with me for a few minutes. In a nearby student lounge, Harold explained that EMM was looking for a Math/Science teacher for Jowhar, Somalia, and wanted Elizabeth and I to consider this possibility. That evening, the two of us, a young couple married for a year and a half and trying to figure out our next steps in life, first began seriously considering what such an assignment might entail. I would graduate in a few months with a major in mathematics, and Elizabeth had already completed her 3-year Registered Nurse training. Our Christian faith was essential to us, which meant asking God for guidance and choosing a path that included service to others in some meaningful way.

Several things were taking place at that time, all of which would help to influence our decision. The Vietnam War was underway, and I knew as soon as I graduated that the military draft could call me. I also learned that teachers could usually obtain exemptions from the draft, so early in 1966, I applied to several schools for a math teaching position. Before the meeting with Harold Stauffer, both schools where I had applied responded that they did not have any math teacher openings for that fall; thus, the invitation to Somalia came at a critical decision-making time. After weeks of praying and sharing with family and friends, we accepted this invitation and planned to go to Somalia for a 3-year term in August. A few weeks before leaving for Somalia, I received phone calls from both schools stating that a teaching position had opened if I was still available. By then, we felt at peace about our decision to go to Somalia, and it was easy to decline these other options. Further, I could fulfill the US government’s military obligation by serving at least two years abroad as a teacher in Somalia.

Ministering in Mogadishu

We arrived in Mogadishu by plane from Nairobi in early August 1966. Having had no previous experience and with minimal orientation to living in a different culture, we quickly discovered that we had a lot to learn about living in a semi-arid country with tropical temperatures, with people who spoke a language that we did not understand and whose religious life as Muslims dictated a way of life very different from where we grew up, in rural Lancaster County, PA. After several days in Mogadishu and with a very brief orientation by Bert Lind, we took a bus after purchasing a few household supplies. Bert told us to travel for an hour and a half or two hours, and when we saw the windmill on our left, we were to tell the bus driver to stop and let us off. Thus began our new life at the Shebelli Intermediate School (grades 5-8), a boys’ boarding school in Jowhar, Somalia. Elizabeth did not have a specific assignment but quickly filled the school nurse role and eventually assisted with some English teaching classes and activities with Somali women from the village.

Our first term in Somalia was a time of new experiences and learning about our giftings.

I discovered that I enjoyed teaching Somali students who were eager to learn. We quickly learned to appreciate and enjoy the local practice of stopping work and resting for several hours after lunch during the heat of the day. I learned a lot from our Somali teaching staff about how to manage discipline in a boys' boarding school and relate to parents who had high expectations for their children – children attending the only English-speaking school in that part of the country. I began to understand how this foreign Christian organization, the Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM), gained acceptance within this Muslim country through the medical and education services offered in Jowhar and several other places. I realized that this acceptance was enhanced by the decision of SMM to accept the government-provided religion and Arabic language teachers into the school program. A spot was designated on the school campus for a place of prayer (a small, open-air mosque) for Muslim students who followed the Muslim prayer rituals. We spent some time with language tutors and learned enough Somali language to interact in a limited way with people outside of the school and in the local market. Near the end of our first year at Jowhar, David Shenk, who was serving as the school principal, called me into his office and said that since his family was going on furlough to the US for a year, he wanted me to step in and be the school principal for the coming school year, which I agreed to do. I then continued in the same position for a second year until the end of our 3-year term.

During the last year of our 3-year term, the SMM was making final plans to expand the Shebelli Intermediate School into a complete secondary school, including grades 9-12.

Return to the US & Back to Mogadishu

Before we returned to the US in 1969, SMM asked us to consider returning to Jowhar after a year's furlough to give leadership to the new secondary school, and we agreed to this.

Upon return to the US, we lived in Philadelphia for about 18 months. During that time, I completed a master's degree in math education, and Elizabeth completed additional college courses to earn her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing. While in Philadelphia, we adopted our first child, a 7-week-old baby boy. We delayed our return to Somalia a few months to complete the adoption process. In early 1971, we found ourselves back in Somalia with a young child, building a new secondary school, and the challenges of organizing and preparing for the opening of the new school later that year.

The first year of the new secondary school had a small first class, but larger classes followed. As plans were shaping up to begin the next school year, the Somali government made an unanticipated announcement nationalizing all private schools in Somalia, including the Shebelli Intermediate and Secondary School at Jowhar. This news was a jolt to EMM workers as we needed to quickly shift gears to meet this new reality. The government appointed Ahmed Gedi as the new principal. Ahmed was a former teacher in the intermediate school at Jowhar, attending the government teachers' training college at the time. Ahmed was a good friend and supporter of the mission's educational efforts in the past, and he asked me to continue giving leadership to the school as acting principal until he finished his studies. The government appointed another teacher as the "official" head of the school even though I carried most of the

responsibilities for running the daily functions of the school. We completed the school year under this arrangement, and then Elizabeth and I decided to terminate our time in Somalia.

The Shebelli School Clan

In the years following my six years at the Jowhar Boys' Boarding School, I have become aware that something very significant happened there - something not directly related to the academic part of this institution. Boys who attended Shebelli School came from all parts of the country and, therefore, from different Somali clans and family systems. The parents of these boys had one thing in common - they valued a good education with a solid English component. The country of Somalia was still in the first decades of independence and creating its own national identity, which was more critical than what clan a person belonged to. Within the boarding school experience, these boys developed friendships that superseded clan loyalties. There was never a significant conflict between students based on their clan. However, 15 years later, the country became embroiled in a civil war based on clan conflicts and desire for power, which continues to some extent today. It has been 50 years since I left Shebelli School, and I continue receiving calls from former students who lament the condition of their homeland and talk about and miss the Shebelli School clan, where multiple clans became one clan. If only the friendship clan model could be replicated in today's world.

Serving in Pennsylvania

Back in the US, we adopted two other children and added a birth child, making our family complete.

I also accepted an invitation to work in the Salunga, PA, EMM office as an Overseas Office Associate. I continued working at EMM for the next ten years with varied responsibilities. One of my roles involved contacting, communicating, and recruiting prospective personnel for overseas assignments. This role involved occasional trips to Mennonite colleges, and on one of the trips to Goshen College, I met a Somali student, Ahmed Haile.

Ahmed was a young Somali man who, a few years earlier, had decided to become a follower of Jesus through the ministry of a Christian doctor from Milwaukee – the doctor was working with Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) in Ahmed's home area in Somalia. During our conversation, I invited him to spend the Christmas holidays with us in Pennsylvania - this was the beginning of a close friendship of many years. Ahmed continued to spend most of his college holiday time at our home. At some point, we began to discuss and dream about both of us returning to Somalia for further ministry and to support the local Christian fellowship there.

Ahmed completed his college studies and a graduate degree, and in the early 1980s, he returned to his homeland of Somalia. Doors opened for him to accept assignments, first with World Vision and later with the Eastbrook Church from Milwaukee as program director for their community development programs. At about the same time, our family began discussions with EMM *about returning* to Somalia to be director of EMM's

presence there and to teach in one of the government universities in Mogadishu. The Women's Education Department invited Elizabeth to work as a consultant/editor.

Return to Mogadishu

In July 1983, our family of six moved to Mogadishu, where we lived and worked for the next three years. We worked closely with Ahmed to build relationships with community and government leaders during this time. Our SMM team grew slowly in response to the Somali government's invitation for English-speaking personnel to support their education initiatives, and together, we gave leadership to a small group of believers in Mogadishu. As followers of Jesus, our goal was to respect all our Muslim friends and be ready to share how our faith in Jesus added purpose and meaning to our lives. Numerous Somalis expressed interest in knowing more about the Jesus of the Bible. Still, at the same time, we were aware that there was a growing movement of mosques and religious circles teaching a more radical expression of Islam. At this time, though, there was not much overt resistance to our Christian presence and activities, which were low-key. In a conversation I had on one occasion with a government official, he expressed appreciation for the Mennonite teachers who were present in Mogadishu, saying that he would rather have Mennonites than some of the Muslim activists who were coming into the schools and beginning to promote a much more radical style of Islam than was the traditional Somali way.

Ahmed Haile

During this time, we learned of Ahmed's growing interest in an American woman, Martha Wilson, whom we learned to know when she came to Mogadishu for an assignment with the Eastbrook Church in Milwaukee. Several years later, both our family and Ahmed returned to the US.⁴⁴ We traveled to Milwaukee for Ahmed and Martha's wedding, having shared, counseled, and prayed with them many times about their future. Eventually, Ahmed and Martha accepted an assignment with EMM to teach at Daystar University in Nairobi and to relate closely with the small Somali believer group there, despite Ahmed's traumatic loss of his leg during a peacemaking mission to Somalia several years earlier.

Eventually, Ahmed was diagnosed with prostate cancer, but with treatment, he and Martha were able to continue their role in Nairobi for several more years. During their furlough times in the US, we met often and learned to know their three children, but Ahmed's illness eventually caused them to terminate their Nairobi assignment. We were able to visit their family in Milwaukee several times during his illness up until several weeks before his eventual death. As soon as we got word of his passing, we traveled back to Milwaukee and were able to spend a few days with the family as they prepared for his funeral and memorial service, and at Martha's request, we were able to share some words at his service.

Ahmed was a man of high intelligence who enjoyed talking about challenging issues and deeply understood how his faith in Jesus built upon and extended his childhood

⁴⁴ Here is Ahmed Haile's memoir: *Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011.*

religious experiences as a Muslim who knew and followed God. Within his own Somalia family and community, he unashamedly shared his faith in Jesus. Though this brought reaction and rejection from certain family members and others, Ahmed found a way to maintain close relationships with his family and Somali culture and was recognized and respected by many. During our years together in Somalia, he served as a bridge to the Somali culture and people for our family and the EMM team. We enjoyed many meals, competitive table games, and celebrations together, which endeared him to our children, Elizabeth and me.

Reflecting on our almost nine years of living in Somalia and interacting with Somali culture and people, I feel deeply grateful for all these experiences. As a follower of Jesus, I discovered that my image of who God is needed to be expanded. I found a God who is more expansive and loving of all people. My Muslim friends challenged me with their devotion to prayer. I was privileged to share my belief and faith in the reconciling love of Jesus as the “better way” to achieve God’s peaceable kingdom here on earth.

Conclusion

After nearly nine years of living and working in Somalia as a follower of Jesus, I have had the opportunity to learn and grow in various ways. One of the most important lessons I have learned is the significance of maintaining a “listen and learn” stance when encountering a new and different culture. Doing so has allowed me to build trusting relationships with the local community, which has been instrumental in fostering mutual respect and understanding between Muslims and followers of Jesus. This experience taught me that individuals from different religious backgrounds can coexist and even form meaningful friendships. It has become clear to me that we are not enemies but have the potential to support and uplift one another.

This realization has also presented opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus, fostering an open, respectful dialogue that transcends religious differences. Moreover, living in and immersing myself in a different culture has enabled me to recognize and reassess the inconsistencies and weaknesses within my own culture. This self-reflection has been transformative, guiding me to strive for personal growth and become a better, more culturally aware individual. It has broadened my perspective and granted me invaluable insights into the human experience, ultimately contributing to my personal and spiritual development. In essence, my time in Somalia has taught me the importance of approaching new cultures with humility and openness. It has reinforced the belief that genuine connections and understanding can transcend religious, cultural, and societal boundaries. This journey has not only deepened my faith but also enriched my life by challenging me to become more compassionate, respectful, and empathetic.

About the Author

Kenneth Nissley retired in 2013 following a varied career, including working as a teacher and administrator in schools in Somalia following his graduation from college. He also worked as an administrator with Eastern Mennonite Missions in Salunga, Pennsylvania, a computer systems analyst and programmer, and social worker for a restorative justice non-profit organization. His academic pursuits include a BS in Mathematics and a MSE

in Math Education. He has been an active member of the Mennonite Church for all of his life, having served in various roles as missionary, teacher and elder. He and his former wife Elizabeth, now deceased, have 4 children and 9 grandchildren. Kenneth currently lives in Philadelphia, PA, with his wife, Mary Martin, and is an active member of the West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship. The author can be reached at ken@kennethnissley.com.

CHAPTER 12: JANE HOOLEY

Introduction



A recent photo of Jane Myers Hooley.

As a child, I learned responsibility by doing farm chores. Sometimes, I accompanied my father to the farm to play with the farmer's children. We often played school but had trouble deciding who would be the teacher. Many years later, two of us would teach high school business courses.

Although my father's employers changed several times before I finished high school, my brother and I enjoyed our childhood centered around home, cousins, school, and church. When I was eleven, I became a believer in Jesus and was baptized later that year. In my early teens, an excellent Sunday School teacher planted in me a desire to become a

secondary school teacher. As a teenager, I was involved in church activities—teaching at summer Bible Schools, helping with children's activities in the winter, teaching Sunday School, and I enjoyed singing in a church chorus.

Missionary Call & Preparation

After working in a bank for three years, I decided to go to Goshen College to study secondary education, and I graduated in 1969. During my senior year in college, I joined a mission-oriented weekly women's Bible study, which included several non-traditional students. All ten women seemed interested in serving Jesus outside North America, except me, but these women influenced me. Also, during my senior year, I participated in Goshen College's new Study-Service Term in Honduras, which widened my worldview.

Before considering an overseas opportunity, I wanted to have teaching experience, so I began teaching at Christopher Dock Mennonite School in 1969, where I gained a wide range of experiences. During my second year, Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) contacted me about opening a business school in Mogadishu, Somalia. My parents prayed with me as I sought the Lord's leading. To my surprise, Christopher Dock Mennonite School informed the two business teachers that one of us would not have a teaching position for the next academic year. I remember thinking, "I know who will not return."

Ministering in Mogadishu

I arrived in Mogadishu on August 11, 1971, where Rhoda Kennel, my housemate, and I taught in the night school; she taught upper-level English, and I taught bookkeeping and typing. Students who had completed most of the English wanted something more, so they enrolled in typing and accounting classes. When we were not teaching, students often stopped by our house with questions and conversation, and we would occasionally visit friends' homes. We were able to share the love of Jesus.

During the office secretary's home leave, I helped with secretarial work while continuing to teach accounting classes. As I recall, many of the dictated letters were technical and related to the construction of the new secondary school—a real challenge for me.

In 1972, during a discussion at a Mission workers' conference, a Mennonite teacher asked about worship. A few Somali believers in attendance heard her and joined in the conversation. This question began many weekly discussions about the nature of church and worship, and I took notes at the meetings. Out of these discussions, the Somali believers developed a sense of what could be meaningful worship and decided worship time should include "The Apostles' Creed" and "The Lord's Prayer." They chose a leadership team, with this group of believers later meeting regularly on Friday mornings and becoming known as the Somali Believers Fellowship.

Nationalization & New Opportunities

Whenever the Mission Director inquired at the Ministry of Education about authorization to start a business school, they responded that they were awaiting forthcoming legislation. On October 21, 1972, a national holiday, Somali, which was previously an unwritten language, was announced to now be written in Latin script when a helicopter flew over the stadium, dropping leaflets announcing this. After three months, Somalis had to write official communication in Somali, and our future became unknown. A few days later, the Government informed the Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM) that all



Jane conferring with Mohamud Gure, director of the Clerical Training Center, and teacher Zenab Haji Mohamud, 1974. The Clerical Training Center was part of the Somali Institute of Public Administration.

private schools and health facilities needed to be handed over to the Government (i.e. nationalized). That included English night schools in Kismayo and Mogadishu, a newly built Shebelli Secondary School at Jowhar, a health clinic at Mahaddie, a hospital, a nursing school, and a school at Jamama. The medical facilities were closed, and the Mission terminated the Somali workers, but the new Somali headmaster at Shebelli Secondary School requested that the Mission teachers remain.

In Mogadishu, where I lived, we had no teaching positions, and the schools and our

houses were to be turned over to the Ministry of Education. The Mission teachers volunteered to teach in government schools, and while we waited to learn if we would be offered teaching positions, EMM asked me to go to another country where they needed my skills. God is not late in letting his intentions be known. I was to leave on December 21, 1972, but on December 20, the Ministry of Education informed the Mission which teachers they had reassigned and at which school they would teach. I was to teach at the Somali Institute of Public Administration (SIPA), a government training and consulting institution, where I later taught at SIPA's Clerical Center.

Therapeutic Gathering

Before nationalization, the Mission women met for prayer each afternoon. One day, Barbara Reed suggested having an open Christmas house and inviting expatriates. We supported the idea and helped with food and decorations. The Reeds' house was ideal for such an event, with a courtyard just outside the living room. This event was therapeutic. It helped us focus on others during this time of uncertainty. SMM medical workers had by now arrived in Mogadishu and were preparing to leave the country, so they participated. Workers serving with another Christian mission were preparing to leave the country and came to this Christmas event. The event was a great success. Each Christmas, the Somali believers and those they invited would join the Mennonite workers for a traditional goat feast. We shared the story of Jesus' birth, and invariably, there was discussion about whether one of the wise men was a Somali. We also showed one or two movies. This event seemed precious—the last Somali feast on the Mission compound.

Challenges & Opportunities

The time to leave the Mission property was fast approaching, and we only had one more Sunday morning to worship in the room we called our "chapel." I recall that before we left the chapel, we sang "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" for the last time, which was comforting. Since we would now be teaching on Sundays, our time of worship changed: we would now meet early Sunday evenings, and the believers would worship on Friday mornings.

In Mogadishu, we needed to find new housing. The Reed family was not living on Mission property, so their house was unaffected. Since their children were returning to boarding school, my housemate and I went to live with them. Someone found a large home for three other women. The Reimer family found a house on a nearby quiet street, where we worshiped.

In January 1973, I began working at SIPA, and my first challenge came from my former accounting students. They complained to the Ministry of Education because they had nearly completed their course, and the school closed. The Ministry of Education proposed they could take a test, and the successful students would receive certificates. It was a good resolution.

It was common knowledge that the Government had closed the Mennonite schools and medical facilities while nationalizing foreign-owned entities. People also knew that the Ministry of Higher Education now used the SMM property in Mogadishu. Hence, the Mission teachers lost their houses and volunteered to teach in government schools. All this uncertainty often led to discussions about who I was and what I believed. A Somali colleague informed me that he had discovered a Bible in the former Mission compound. I was frequently invited to social events with my colleagues from SIPA because I did not drink alcohol, which often sparked conversation.

Since I shared an office with three or four Somalis at SIPA, there was always someone to drink tea with and talk to. There were many conversations when I was not teaching accounting or consulting and was at my desk. During these conversations, there were many opportunities to talk about Jesus. Yet, in my first months at SIPA, I struggled with what I was doing and how it served Jesus.

Once, I confided in my housemate, saying, "If I leave now, no one will miss me; the Mission will not miss me, the believers will not miss me, and SIPA will not miss me." She talked quite sternly and helped me understand that I was part of a team and that what I did was an essential contribution. I needed to see the value in drinking tea, and after that, I drank lots of tea and saw it for the opportunity it was.

More Preparation & Opportunities

In April 1974, I returned to Pennsylvania, knowing that if I wanted to return to Somalia, I should have further education. Shippensburg University (Pennsylvania) accepted me, and there I earned a Master's Degree in Education. I had planned to take accounting courses, but primarily, administrative courses were offered during my program that year. I settled for those courses so I could complete the degree requirements quickly. During that year, I worked in the business education office, preparing self-guided instructional materials for typing classes. I welcomed this opportunity to learn from others how they did it because I often had to prepare instructional materials in Somalia. Later, I realized these classes prepared me for the future more than I could have imagined.

I returned to Somalia in September 1975, and the Ministry of Education assigned me the position of business education consultant. I was to teach five to become business teachers, and I traveled to Hargeisa and Bur'o in northern Somalia, where two of the teachers were.

Since typewriters for three schools were still available, the Ministry of Education Director General required the clerical staff to each take a typing course. I taught this class, so I related to a different group of students and also worked with a student teacher. It was often a challenge since the course was late afternoon when the clerks would rather be at home, and the driver frequently failed to pick up the student teacher and me.

In May 1976, in the middle of the typing course, SMM received a letter telling the Mission to close because recent university graduates would fill our positions. A few of

us took several barrels for packing and drove to Jowhar to inform the Mission teachers at Shebelli Secondary School that they would be leaving Somalia very soon. By May 20, 1976, the last of the Somalia Mission personnel went to Nairobi, Kenya. It was raining in Mogadishu when the last four teachers went to the airport. The Somalis say it is a blessing when it rains. Little did we know that Mission teachers would teach again in Somalia within a few years.

Serving with ACROSS



Jane as an Administrative Officer, ACROSS, Nairobi, Kenya, 1983.

At the Mennonite Guest House in Nairobi, the Somalia Mission team met to discuss options, pray, and discern what the Lord was saying to each of us. Five adults and three children decided to return to the USA, and the Mission reassigned the rest of us to southern Sudan, Kenya, or Zambia. The Mission asked me to consider southern Sudan, working under EMM for ACROSS (a non-governmental organization whose workers were Jesus followers).⁴⁵ Since the ACROSS airplane had space, I could visit all the locations ACROSS served (something difficult to do in later years). I even went to Juba, visited the school, and met the ACROSS deputy field director.

I returned to Nairobi and had mixed feelings.

I knew that going to southern Sudan would be difficult, hot, and humid, with limited electricity, and other supplies would also be scarce. One afternoon, when I was sitting in the garden at the Mennonite Guest House praying and asking God what I should do, I heard an almost audible voice saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." I did not recognize these words but later discovered they are from Isaiah 30:21, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" I knew then that I should accept the invitation to relocate to Juba, southern Sudan.

On June 18, 1976, I went to Juba, southern Sudan, and seconded to ACROSS. I served as a teacher at the Juba Commercial Secondary School, formerly a boys' school which had now begun admitting girls. I taught accounting and commercial arithmetic and was involved with the Christian Union, which ACROSS teachers had started. I kept a small library of Christian books at my desk that students could borrow. Over the next two years, I became increasingly involved in the ACROSS office.

I enjoyed this new teaching experience, but the boys were fierce. Many had been

⁴⁵ At this point, "ACROSS" was an acronym for Africa Committee for the Rehabilitation of South Sudan.

former boy soldiers, of whom the youngest was twenty-five years old. They became increasingly angry and finally boycotted my classes, but I later learned their actions resulted from a former teacher using them.

I was beginning to enjoy living in Juba, yet I did not feel settled and content. Then, one afternoon, when I was walking home from school, I heard a voice say, “You are in Juba because this is where I want you, not because you are [only] completing [a] term of service.” From then on, I was committed to southern Sudan, but sometimes felt pulled in several directions—teaching full time, training ACROSS office staff, and working in the ACROSS office.

After two years at Juba Commercial Secondary School, I took a short home leave. When I returned, I thought I was going to Juba to be an assistant to the ACROSS Director. Still, when I reached Nairobi in September 1978, I learned I would be staying in Nairobi to become familiar with the ACROSS accounting system. I was disappointed, but later, I went to Juba, trained the ACROSS office staff, and became an assistant accountant.

In October 1979, while I was acting field director, the ACROSS board approved a new leadership structure. A few days earlier, I had read Daniel 10:12, “Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.’” I pondered that and even asked my housemate what it meant. I soon learned the new program director’s expanded role would require him to appoint an assistant director-program, which would be me.

I balanced being an assistant accountant and assistant program director the following year. A new expatriate accountant came to work in Juba, and on his second day, he told me I should not be doing the work of a leader because it was not God’s will for a woman to be in leadership. I shared the Scripture that the Lord gave me from Daniel 10:12. Over time, he accepted me as a leader and even became a friend. In June 1981, I moved to Nairobi to become the administrative officer of the ACROSS international office.

Three years later, I received my niece’s letter saying she was to be baptized and that she was sorry I would not be there. I realized I had missed many family events and decided it was time to go home. Before I could tell the Executive Director, he told me he was resigning at the next board meeting, and I said, “That makes two of us.” I left ACROSS in December 1984.

Serving in Pennsylvania

After a five-month leave, I worked at the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) as an Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of Personnel in Akron, PA. I dreamed of purchasing a house, which I did in 1987. I spent time with my two nieces and one nephew—something I felt was important. I am glad for that time of building family

relationships with my only brother, his wife, and his children.

In 1988, my heart reminded me that if I was going to teach school in the USA, I should do it soon. I went to Shippensburg University again to ask how to update my credentials. A professor I knew said I should consider applying to “that school near Lancaster,” meaning Lancaster Mennonite High School. I left her office laughing because I knew that at least one teacher there was not likely to go, but the next week, I learned they had an opening for a business teacher, and in 1988, I started teaching there. In 1994, after teaching there for six years, I resigned due to undiagnosed pain.

Marriage & More Opportunities

1988 had been an eventful year. In addition to starting to teach again, I had a new housemate and then met David Hooley. David and I were married on April 14, 1990, and visited Tanzania and Kenya in June. I stayed in Africa for two more weeks than Dave since I could go to Juba, southern Sudan.

In October 1994, I took a part-time position at the Nazareth Project, which raises funds for the Nazareth Hospital in Nazareth, Israel. In the Spring of 1995, I had an opportunity to go on a tour of Israel, which the Nazareth Project sponsored, and after ten days, I came home mesmerized.

Then, unexpectedly, in February 1996, Dave left his job, and a few weeks later, the Nazareth Hospital requested an information technology manager. My supervisor said, “Take this fax to Dave,” we went to Nazareth in June 1996. I wrote a computer manual for the hospital computer system, was campus host, and taught the nursing students to use computers. We returned to Pennsylvania in January 1998.

In 1998, I began working as an Administrative Assistant in the Overseas Department at EMM. Dave worked contract jobs and earned a master’s degree in computer science from Kutztown University in Pennsylvania.

During the three years that Dave taught in Ohio, I continued working at EMM, where my colleagues in Global Ministries were great prayer supporters. I cannot count the many times they prayed for Dave as he interviewed for jobs. I resigned from my position at EMM in July 2009 after 26 years. I have worked in Somalia, southern Sudan, Kenya, Israel, and the central office.

After Dave taught for a year as an assistant chemistry and computer science professor at the University of Findlay, we moved to Findlay, Ohio, in 2009. Soon after arriving, I met Kathy, who was eager to introduce me to the Intensive English Department. They invited me to be a conversation partner with international students from Taiwan, Japan, China, and Saudi Arabia. My global experience was being used to God’s glory.

A friend from Pennsylvania who now lived in Findlay introduced me to a women’s Bible study group of 15-20 women. Over time, I began to substitute teach. When Dave was ill, these women were a great support.

Illness, Loss & the Lord's Leading

In May 2014, my family received devastating news as we learned that Dave, my beloved husband, had been diagnosed with glioblastoma, an aggressive type of brain tumor. The news was a shock; we were all overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty about the future. However, I found solace and hope in my faith during this difficult time. On the morning of Dave's surgery, I found strength and comfort in reading a passage from the Bible, Philippians 4:6-7, which says, "Do not be anxious about anything...and the peace...will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (paraphrased). These words became a source of comfort and reassurance as I faced the challenges ahead. I felt a profound sense of the Lord's presence throughout Dave's illness, guiding and comforting me. Even though the journey was incredibly difficult, I held onto my faith, knowing I was not walking alone. Despite the inevitable and heartbreaking outcome, I continued to draw strength from my faith in God and found solace in the belief that Dave was in His loving embrace. In the years since Dave's passing, I have continued to experience the Lord's leading in my life.

During Dave's fourteen-month illness, I had time to think about the future and decided to move back to Lancaster, PA, where I would have support, family, and friends. I found a house in a 55+ community, and accepting it as the Lord's plan, I bought it and moved to Mount Joy at the end of January 2016. I continue to experience the Lord's leading in my life. I lead the sewing circle at the church I attend, work part-time at the church office, and serve on a welcoming committee for a family resettled in Lancaster, PA. I enjoy traveling, quilting, embroidery, and reading.

Conclusion

I was excited to serve the Kingdom of God in different capacities during my decades of service in the US and overseas. I shared my faith with many and witnessed people turning to Christ and growing in their faith. Wherever I was needed, I served faithfully. Each time a door closed, God opened another one. Over the years, I experienced both pain and joy and glorified God. I am blessed with friends and family who love the Lord. I will continue loving and serving the Lord as long as I live. My work in the Kingdom of God has taken me to various places, allowing me to meet people from different walks of life and to understand and appreciate diverse cultures. These experiences have broadened my perspective and deepened my empathy for others.

As I reflect on my journey, I am filled with gratitude for the moments when I was able to be a source of hope and encouragement to those in need. The ability to make a positive impact on the lives of others has been immensely fulfilling and has strengthened my own faith. Amid challenges and obstacles, I have found strength in the unwavering support of my friends and family, who share my devotion to the Lord. Their love and encouragement have been a constant source of inspiration, motivating me to continue to spread the message of faith and hope. Looking ahead, I am committed to remaining steadfast in my faith and serving the Lord with unwavering dedication. I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead to further contribute to the Kingdom of God and to

witness the transformative power of faith in the lives of others. Together with my loved ones, I eagerly anticipate the new chapters that God will unfold in our journey of faith and service.

About the Author

Jane (Myers) Hooley has had an extensive and varied career. After growing up in a Pennsylvania farming community, she pursued an education degree and taught in Pennsylvania and Mogadishu, Somalia. She also worked as a business education consultant and taught at Juba Commercial Secondary School in South Sudan. After returning to the USA, she worked as an administrative assistant for various organizations and taught business courses at Lancaster Mennonite High School. She married David Hooley, and they served together in Nazareth, Israel. In 2009, she retired from Eastern Mennonite Missions after 26 years. Later, they moved to Findlay, Ohio. After David's passing, Jane settled in Pennsylvania near family and friends. Currently, she is involved in church activities and enjoys travel, quilting, embroidery, and reading in her leisure time. The author can be reached at hooley90@yahoo.com.

CHAPTER 13: PETER SENSENIG

Joining a Story

My parents, J. Carl and Julia Sensenig brought me into the Mennonite story in Somalia at a young age. They served three years in Mogadishu with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (now called EMM).

By the time my family arrived in Mogadishu, the Mennonite-Somali story was already more than three decades old, with Mennonites sojourning in Somalia through eras of colonial authority and independence, alternating orientation toward the Soviet Union and the United States and war with neighboring Ethiopia. Mennonite missionaries had seen their schools and hospitals nationalized, been dismissed from the country, and later welcomed back when the political winds shifted.

Mogadishu was a cosmopolitan city, with the Italian colonial influence evident in the architecture, language, and ubiquitous pasta. To this day, I consider Somali baasto (spaghetti) to be the tastiest in the world. I seek it out in Nairobi, Minneapolis, Djibouti, and Atlanta; it arrives with a banana and plenty of green hot sauce.

Amusing Childhood

As a child, I experienced Somalis as gregarious and warm, with affection for children. On one occasion, my family strolled along the coast's fish market. I lagged behind the rest, enjoying the beautiful displays of captured sea life – rays, sharks, squid, and countless fish of various shapes and colors. One fishmonger, noting my appreciation for his wares, offered me a small, brightly-colored fish. Knowing my older brothers' tendency to relieve me of my most prized possessions, usually by wily manipulation, I slipped the precious fish into the pocket of my shorts. Then, I promptly forgot about it. The shorts made it into a drawer, where the Mogadishu heat began to do its work. Within a day, the house started to smell a bit funky, and by the following day, the whole place reeked of death. Intensive interrogation and a thorough search uncovered the source of the stench. My attempts to blame it on the kindness of a stranger fell on deaf ears.

On another occasion, I surprised a well-to-do Somali couple strolling near our house when, on a dare from my older brother, I jumped out of a tree and requested baksheesh, a charitable donation often granted during Ramadan. My request was successful, as the man dug in his pocket amusedly. I count the coin as one of the many gifts I owe to Somalis.

The Collapse of the Somali Government



Fellowship after Friday worship service held at the Mogadishu Cathedral, 20 November 1987. From left to right: Fowsiya, Abdullahi Hassan, Peter Sensenig, Kevin Yoder, Victor Sensenig, and Ahmed Ayntow Gobe.

My brothers and I attended the American School of Mogadishu with classmates and teachers from Somalia and all over the globe. We also participated in sporting events with various other national or international schools around the city. On Fridays, our family attended church in the Catholic cathedral, where the Mennonite missionaries worshiped along with Somalis who had found faith in Christ. Often, this meant some degree of estrangement from their families and social circles.

Our parents tried to shield my brothers and me from the turmoil descending upon the country. We heard scattered gunfire and overheard the staff of the Mennonite Mission (including the Mennonite Central Committee) and of other organizations discussing the impact of the conflict on Somali friends, institutions, and the small Christian minority, whom radicals were increasingly persecuting. The 1988 Somali government bombardment of Hargeisa, Somaliland, after rebels had captured it, led Western aid donors to cut off funding. In the summer of 1989, my family, like many of the expatriates and Somalis who had the means, left Mogadishu as rebel groups surrounded the city. These groups eventually toppled the central government, and a protracted civil war enveloped Somalia.

Djibouti

For years, the news from Somalia that reached the West was devastating. The war led to famine, and famine led to more conflict. Refugees fled to Kenya, Ethiopia, Europe, and North America. The US, buoyed by the triumph of the Cold War and a newfound sense of identity as guardians of a new world order, collaborated with the United Nations to send peacekeeping forces to Somalia. The Somali civil conflict, epitomized by the Black Hawk Down incident in October 1993, quickly eroded the West's optimism of an international peace.

Even as our family moved to the United States, I maintained my interest in Somalia. However, my only contact was news articles, reunions for former missionaries in Somalia, and occasional visits from a Somali guest.

However, my dormant interest was rekindled when I fell in love with a young woman who had spent time in Muslim communities in West Africa. Christy agreed to marry me on the condition that we pursue international ministry together as soon as possible. So, we began to explore possibilities, particularly with EMM, and were guided by the East Africa Regional Director Clair Good to consider the EMM work in Djibouti. When Mennonites were forced to leave Somalia in the early 1990s, they pursued other ways of staying engaged in the region. Some of these ways included the Nairobi office and establishing a presence in the small, arid nation of Djibouti, a crossroads of Somali,

Afar, Arab, and other peoples, with strategic military bases for the United States and its former colonists, the French.

A few months after marriage, Christy and I served a six-month mission assignment in Djibouti. We joined another EMM couple who were well-established there. I taught English courses in the University of Djibouti language department, and Christy worked with the culturally diverse Protestant church and as a community health volunteer in a refugee camp.

In Djibouti, we encountered a unique majority-Somali society shaped by French culture, Arab influences, and countless connections with the West. The culture was fascinating and attractive, and the harsh climate complicated every aspect of life. I was also learning French to communicate with people on the street. I began describing Djibouti – or so I thought – as “the hottest country in the world.” Unfortunately, the French words for country and fart are close enough for a beginner like me to confuse the two. Imagine my embarrassment when I realized I had been going around saying that Djibouti was the “hottest fart in the world.” To their credit, no one seemed too offended.

In Djibouti, I encountered Somali converts to the Christian faith, who gathered in pairs or small groups around their newfound religious identities. I met regularly to study the Bible with two Somali men, one of whom was facing severe reactions from his family, including violent beatings. Their dedication to their faith and eagerness to learn was invigorating. We studied the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus’ promise of joy for those persecuted because of him cut directly to our hearts. I have never forgotten what I learned in those moments; the standard of faith is not the comfortable Christian who attends church and lives a godly, generous, and predictable life, as fruitful as this may be. Rather, the kind of faith expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and Hebrews 11 is demanding and can only be understood as a response to the voice of Jesus. choices apart from hearing the voice of Jesus and responding.

Another young man flagged me down on the street in Djibouti. He told me he had encountered Jesus in a dream and wondered if I would talk with him about it. I was surprised as I had no idea who this person was, but I accepted, and we read from the Bible and prayed together. Years later, I heard that this man had gone to Ethiopia for mission training, intending to return to preach the good news to his people.

Though more stable than Somalia, Djibouti was not untouched by war trauma. Refugee camps were full of people fleeing the conflict; how could so many displaced people either integrate into a new place or return to a context that they barely recognized, with no means to make a life?

Peace Clan

From Djibouti, I entered a PhD program at Fuller Theological Seminary with a concentration in Christian ethics. When it came time to choose a dissertation topic, I realized that the subject I most wanted to explore was the Mennonite peacemaking presence in Somalia.

My research started with former Mennonite mission workers in Somalia. I conducted a dozen interviews with people who had served in Somalia, from the beginning of the work in the early 1950s to the more recent academic partnerships in Somaliland.

Two stories in particular emerged as important from the early years of the Somali Mennonite Mission. The Somali constitution included a religious freedom article in the 1950s following independence in 1960. After the Mennonite schools had been operating for several years, a Somali man who had become radicalized by Egyptian extremists attacked and killed a Canadian Mennonite teacher named Merlin Grove. He also stabbed Merlin's wife Dorothy, who survived the attack. At the trial, Dorothy publicly forgave her husband's killer and later returned to Somalia to serve again. Many Somalis expressed deep sympathies for the tragedy. They were profoundly moved by the display of forgiveness and that the Mennonites continued to serve in the country.

In 1963, one year after the murder of Grove, the Somali National Assembly banned the teaching of any religion other than Islam, and the government declared that even Christian mission schools were obligated to teach Islam. The Mennonites, who were there for the sake of Christian witness, faced a crisis. Another mission organization closed its schools rather than include Islam in the curriculum. However, with the bishops' permission in the United States, the Mennonite Mission decided to ask for the advice of their friends, including Somali Christians. They responded by affirming that the Mennonites should continue to run schools with Islam as a subject of study. The Mission hired Muslim teachers to teach classes on Islam.

These two incidents have had a long life in Somali collective memory. Because of the decision to stay, the Mennonite schools significantly influenced the country by educating many Somali students. It communicated to Somalis that the Mennonite Mission was respectful toward Islam. According to one Mennonite worker, decades later, Somalis told him that they could trust the Mennonites because they stayed, and they were not simply there to win numbers but sincerely cared about Somalis.

The clan is an important and well-known identity marker for Somalis. A common Somali proverb puts it this way: "Me and my clan against the world; Me and my family against my clan; Me and my brother against my family; Me against my brother." When Mennonites came to Somalia, they represented the beginning of something new. This new clan is not based on blood relations but on a commitment to making peace with strangers and even enemies. So, even before the Mennonites used the language of peacemaking, they facilitated peaceful coexistence between clans in the Mennonite schools. Fighting between clans was not tolerated, so clan differences rarely played a role in daily life. In the classrooms and the dormitories, the students established friendships across clans, which led them to refer to themselves as the "Somali Mennonites." The school experience had a transformative effect on how they perceived people from other clans. They learned the value of peace, and that formation stayed with them for the rest of their lives. One teacher told me, "Through our schools, the students said they are a tribe. They have something in common. They are Mennonite Mission Somalis."

As I continued my research into later decades of involvement, it became clear that the context had changed significantly in multiple ways. First, Somalia had changed through decades of war, Arab influence, Western and UN military involvement, and the ensuing radicalization that resulted in groups like al-Shabab. Second, Mennonites had changed from a traditional Protestant mission model emphasizing evangelism and church-planting to a mission vision of peacebuilding and social transformation. Third, the international community was conflicted on how to respond to crises such as the Somali civil war and how and when to intervene with the military, food aid, or other outside interventions.

These changes made it difficult to frame Mennonite involvement in Somalia cohesively. Was it indeed the same people group – Anabaptists from North America, who landed in Somalia in the 1950s and set about building schools and hospitals and encouraging conversion to Christian faith – as the progressive Mennonites who now challenged Western intervention at its core, emphasizing the right of Somalis to determine their outcomes, free from outside pressure to change their society, their identity, their religion?

As I waded into the fierce debate among Mennonites about these questions, I found myself sympathizing with both perspectives. The mess that the US and the UN had made out of trying to protect the Somali population from the effects of war by taking sides with particular warlords and the abuses of the aid industry made an anti-intervention approach compelling. But the idea of abandoning Somali friends, who had hosted Mennonite missionaries for decades, to unmitigated suffering to avoid any potential mistakes was not an option either.

To write a dissertation on this subject, I needed a phrase as flexible as the reality I was trying to describe. I landed on the term peace clan, which could be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, peace clan could describe the Mennonite mission workers who served in Somalia over the decades, sometimes with radically different ideas of what that service meant. But they were unified in their commitments to nonviolent peacemaking as an expression of Christian discipleship.

A second, more expansive meaning of peace clan could also include the Somalis connected in some way to the Mennonite Mission, either as members of Christian fellowships or as students or teachers at the Mennonite schools. As I began to collect stories of the Somalis whose lives had intertwined with the Mennonite Mission, a standard description was how this contact had disrupted particular loyalties to clan or ethnic groups and replaced them with a trans-clan identity as peacemakers. As Somalia devolved into civil war, these individuals bore witness to the Kingdom of God that transcends ethnic and family ties. Along with the Mennonite missionaries who left their families and communities behind in North America, these Somalis made up a peace clan with a new identity as peacemakers.

I later published my dissertation as a book entitled Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia. One of my arguments was that outside interventions in Somalia's political and food crises failed because they did not take seriously how

Somali cultural practices addressed conflict. In contrast to the US and UN's approach of selecting a particular warlord to support and legitimize, intending to bring stability to society, the Mennonite approach to peacebuilding was that only Somalis could bring lasting stability to the country.

The contrast between the northern part of Somalia (Somaliland) and the south-central region demonstrates this principle. In the north, the traditional leadership of clan elders known as the Guurti was preserved and integrated into the self-declared independent government of Somaliland. The legal system also incorporated traditional conflict resolution practices known as xeer. In this way, Somaliland built a modicum of credibility amongst the population and could absorb inter-clan conflicts in a way that southern Somalia did not.

When warlords replaced the authority of clan elders, the society became susceptible to whoever had the most weapons, access to aid, and foreign backing. The fabric of relationships unraveled, and families and social norms alienated young men, thus making them easy targets as recruits for militias.

Mennonites played a modest role in encouraging and facilitating peacebuilding meetings between clan elders, intending to preserve traditional structures. An approach "from the ground up" describes the Mennonite ideal well in all kinds of areas, including theology, church practices, peacebuilding, and social change. One critical practitioner of this kind of approach was Ahmed Haile, who applied his studies of peace theology at a Mennonite seminary through practical peacebuilding initiatives in Somalia.

Hargeisa

The special relationship between Mennonites and Somalis has lasted for decades. Sometimes, the connections come up in surprising ways. A Kenyan friend of Mennonites working in Nairobi decided to move to Somaliland as a Christian teacher. He made contact and secured a job, but when the officials discovered he was a Christian, they asked what kind of a Christian he was. They told him, "If you are Mennonite, you can come."

On another occasion, when two Mennonite teachers visited Somaliland, the Minister of Education begged them to send teachers. A man beside them leaned over and whispered, "We do not want just any teachers; we want Mennonite teachers." These sentiments have led to an open door to establishing a peace institute in a university in Hargeisa and to teachers from Eastern Mennonite University offering courses in Somali universities.

But an open door does not mean a welcome embrace, at least not by all. When Christy and I moved to Somaliland in 2015, along with our young son, we were strangers in a strange land. In Somaliland, we were confronted with the reality that some people do not like strangers. We had rocks thrown at us in the streets, young men attacking us physically, and people we did not know telling us to go back to where we came from to get out of their country.

Our arrival in Hargeisa was not easy, but it allowed me to experience firsthand the peace clan I had written about. We were met in Hargeisa by two men named Ahmed and Hussein. Ahmed had been a teacher in the Mennonite schools nearly forty years earlier, and Hussein had been a student. They protected us, introduced us to people, and became our advocates at the university, the hospital, and our neighborhood. They visited us and checked to make sure we had everything we needed. They treated us like their own children and our son like their grandson. Before we arrived in Somaliland, we had never met these two Somali men, but we were their people. They understood that Mennonites believed in peace and identified with that way of being in the world.



Peter Sensenig and Jonathan Rudy meet with Ahmed Geedi and Hussein Mussa during a short peace-building course at the University of Hargeisa in March 2020.

With their help, we began the hard work of building a life in Hargeisa. We put our son in a small school. Christy started working as a nurse at Edna Adan Hospital. I taught courses at the University of Hargeisa's Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. A former vice president of Somaliland was a student in one of my courses, which I co-taught with a former ambassador. My colleagues and students were warm and receptive, and I began to imagine an extended involvement at the university and the Peace Institute.

However, I was unaware that opposition to our presence was building under the surface. My third course at the university began with a middle-aged student confronting me at the beginning of the first session, challenging my credentials and stating that there was no space for people with ties to Christian mission organizations in Somaliland. He promised to disrupt the course and to rally the students against me. I left the classroom shaken and unsure of my future there.

The next day, the university president and the entire administrative staff called me to a meeting. The president pulled out an article that I had previously published describing Ahmed Haile as a Somali Christian peacemaker. "Did you write this?" he asked. I confirmed that I had. He informed me that the student who had confronted me was circulating the article.

Furthermore, he said my name was being published on social media. With the purported activity of al-Shabab in the neighborhood where we were living, he advised that we leave the country within ten days and move around the city until then only with an armed guard. The local police posted guards at our gate.

In a daze, I called Christy and told her the news. Within a few days, we said goodbye to friends and colleagues and flew to Nairobi after being in Hargeisa for only two and a half months. The hurt and disappointment were sharp; we had been planning this move for years and raised support to be in Somaliland indefinitely. We were in it for the long haul, with our education tailored toward joining the work of Somalis. How could God have

called us there, only to have our service cut short so suddenly? Had we indeed heard the voice of God?

Back to Somaliland – as a Guest



Peter Sensenig gives a copy of Peace Clan to Abdikadir Dhamal Hassan at the University of Burao in March 2020.

From Nairobi, we discerned our next steps. We spent time in Eastleigh and visited other parts of the region, praying about where we should go. God led us to Zanzibar, Tanzania, where we served for five years with the Mennonite Mission before shifting to French-speaking Africa, where we currently serve in Chad.

But the connection to Somaliland had not ended. There was still an open door, particularly for me, to keep up the relationship with the University of Hargeisa and the University of Burao. So, I returned to Somaliland in 2016, 2017, and 2020 to offer short courses and seminars at the two universities. I was joined on two of these

occasions by Mennonite professors from the United States who had significant experience in the Horn of Africa: Mike Brislen from James Madison University in 2017 and Jonathan Rudy from Elizabethtown College in 2020.

On each visit, I was struck again by the warmth of the reception given, the thoughtfulness of the students, and the power of the friendships we had made in the Horn years before. A measure of healing took place with each sojourn.

I will never know the full circumstances of our sudden departure from Hargeisa. However, on a later trip to Somaliland, I learned several contributing factors existed. The conflict between those who stayed in Somaliland and the returning Diaspora put the university president, who had spent thirty years in New Jersey before moving back to Somaliland, in an embattled and vulnerable position. He could not use valuable social capital to defend my presence at the university. Secondly, a particular professor I barely knew was unhappy that I was there and coordinated the student resistance. Third, Somaliland moves periodically between orientation toward the Arab world and toward the West, and our arrival in Hargeisa happened just as the pendulum was swinging more toward the Arabian Peninsula.

Conclusion

Over the years, I have spent a lot of time and effort explaining why the story I tell in Peace Clan should continue. I want to persuade Mennonites that our involvement with Somalis is not just an exciting story about the past but a living testament to the faith that

called Mennonite missionaries to move to the Horn in the first place. The encounter with Somalia changed Mennonites and provided great opportunities to engage in Christian witnessing and discipleship.

The current involvement will be different from the past, especially since the Mennonites most likely to have contact with Somalis are now Kenyan Mennonites. In Garissa, Eastleigh, and Migori, Kenyan Christians, along with the growing number of Somali Christians, are continuing to bear witness among Somali Muslim neighbors.

As believers, we must become more skilled at three aspects of incarnational hospitality. A significant part of Christian discipleship is learning how to imitate Christ as guests, imitate God as hosts, and work with the Holy Spirit to create spaces of mutuality. The Mennonite Mission in Somalia has been a fertile ground for developing these skills—do we now have the courage to develop them in new and creative ways?

About the Author

Peter M. Sensenig, who holds a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary, is actively involved in the work of the Mennonite Mission in N'Djamena, Chad. Drawing upon his extensive experience teaching in a variety of African countries, he has developed a specialization in the complex dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations. Furthermore, his scholarly contributions include the authorship of "Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia" (Pickwick, 2016), a book that offers valuable insights into peacebuilding practice within the challenging context of Somalia. Peter's dedication to promoting understanding and collaboration between diverse religious communities is a testament to his commitment to fostering peace and reconciliation in regions affected by religious tensions. The author can be reached at petersensenig@gmail.com.

CONCLUSION

When reflecting on the selfless work of missionaries, it is evident that they do not often receive the credit they truly deserve. They tirelessly advocate for the well-being of others, yet not many people advocate for them. The testimonies of the local believers who have embraced the message of God under the guidance of these missionaries are revered, yet the testimonies of the missionaries themselves, who, with the help of the Holy Spirit, made it all possible, often go unnoticed. This lack of recognition can be attributed to the humility of missionaries, as they rarely speak on their behalf. Instead, they soldier on, driven by their deep commitment to their faith and calling to serve. *However, it is essential to acknowledge their immense sacrifices and their profound impact on communities worldwide. Their commitment to the Great Commission and the Kingdom of God is irreplaceable, and it is crucial to highlight the significance of their role. Throughout the years, I have witnessed the steadfast dedication of missionaries, many of whom hail from the Global North yet struggle to afford necessities. I recently observed Western missionaries in Africa originating from prosperous countries who could not afford meat and other essentials. These individuals could have easily enjoyed a comfortable middle-class lifestyle had they chosen to remain in their home countries. However, guided by their unwavering faith and a profound sense of purpose, they answered the call to leave their comfort behind and embark on a journey to make Christlike disciples in distant and often challenging communities.*

It is vitally important to recognize that the quality of life of these communities significantly improves through the efforts of these missionaries while simultaneously, the missionaries themselves experience a decrease in their own quality of life. Missionaries willingly leave their loved ones behind and forsake the comforts and safety of their home countries, all in pursuit of providing comfort and safety to those in faraway lands. This selfless act of sacrifice epitomizes their deep commitment to serving humanity and ultimately reflects their faith and dedication to the teachings of Christ.

The work of missionaries transcends borders and culture as they tirelessly devote themselves to serving radically different communities from their own. They undertake arduous journeys, crossing borders and oceans to aid and support those in need. While extending their assistance to those who require it the most, missionaries heavily rely on the support of their communities back home. It is essential to acknowledge that missionaries require prayers and financial assistance to carry out their ministries effectively. Without such vital support, the burdens they carry become unbearably heavy.

I sincerely hope that the stories shared in this book have opened your eyes to the profound importance of missionaries. I am confident that this enlightening journey has enriched your perspectives. I fervently pray that this reflection has enriched and perfected your perception of Christian missionaries.

Regardless of whether you identify as a follower of Christ or not, I impassionedly urge you to stand in solidarity with missionaries as they stand with underprivileged individuals across the globe. Their relentless dedication and solid commitment to serving those in

need serve as an inspiration to us all, and it is imperative that we recognize, support, and uplift the crucial work that they do. In conclusion, as we reflect on the invaluable contributions of these missionaries, we must extend our support, gratitude, and recognition to these selfless individuals who continuously strive to impact the world positively. Their tireless efforts, sacrifices, and firm commitment exemplify the epitome of compassion and service, and it is incumbent upon us to stand together to support their vital mission. Let us get behind the missionaries by contributing financially, volunteering, or spreading the word about the obstacles they encounter in the mission field.

Aweis A. Ali

WHAT OTHERS SAID ABOUT THIS BOOK 2/2

Rev. Dr. Aweis Ali has produced a unique book that serves as a powerful reminder of the saints who took the gospel to the Muslim world. This book immortalizes their legacy and, more importantly, ignites a spark of inspiration in us, urging us to follow in their footsteps and live a life that glorifies our King and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Worku H. Mohammed, PhD
SIM Director for East & Central Africa

The tales of missionaries devoting their lives to serving others in faraway regions and countries offer a profound insight into the power of love, faith, and the resilience of the human spirit. The stories in the book will challenge your perspective and deepen your understanding of the global faith communities.

Rev. Dr. Samuel Oketch
Director, Nazarene Compassionate Ministries
Africa East Field

*This book, *Sent to Serve: The Testimonies of 13 Missionaries in the Muslim World*, tells the inspiring and often challenging stories of thirteen missionaries and their spouses who leave behind comfort to serve in remote and difficult regions. Through their narratives, readers witness the missionaries' daily lives, successes, struggles, and their profound impact on the communities they serve. Despite facing numerous obstacles, such as expulsions, blackmail, and intimidation, their unwavering faith and love for the people drive them forward. As I read this book, I was deeply moved by the missionaries' resilience and boundless compassion. I commend Aweis Ali for his remarkable work in creating a platform for these missionaries to share their powerful testimonies.*

Dr. Naol Befkadu Kebede
Physician & Researcher in Missions & Intercultural Studies

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Rev. Aweis Ali, PhD, is an outspoken missiologist, poet, and paremiologist with an impressive work history. He has worked with employers such as the Somali Government, EU, UNICEF, UNOSOM, and Samaritan's Purse. Thanks to the ministry of SIM, Aweis became a follower of Christ in 1986. Aweis is a student of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and is the first person to ever translate the Qur'an into English and Somali (with transliteration). His translations are set to be published in 2025. He is also the first Somali churchman to earn a ministry-related doctoral degree. Aweis is a multifaceted author, editor, lyricist, and hymnodist. He is a passionate advocate for ministering to nomadic pastoralists.

Aweis is a recognized expert on the persecuted church in the Muslim world, with a particular focus on the Somali Church. He has been ministering in the Muslim world for over 30 years and has lived and served in various world areas, including the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and the United States. Aweis completed his Bachelor of Theology degree at the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa, his Master of Divinity degree at Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO, and holds a PhD (in religion) from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia."

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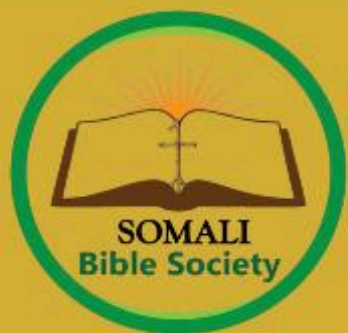
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