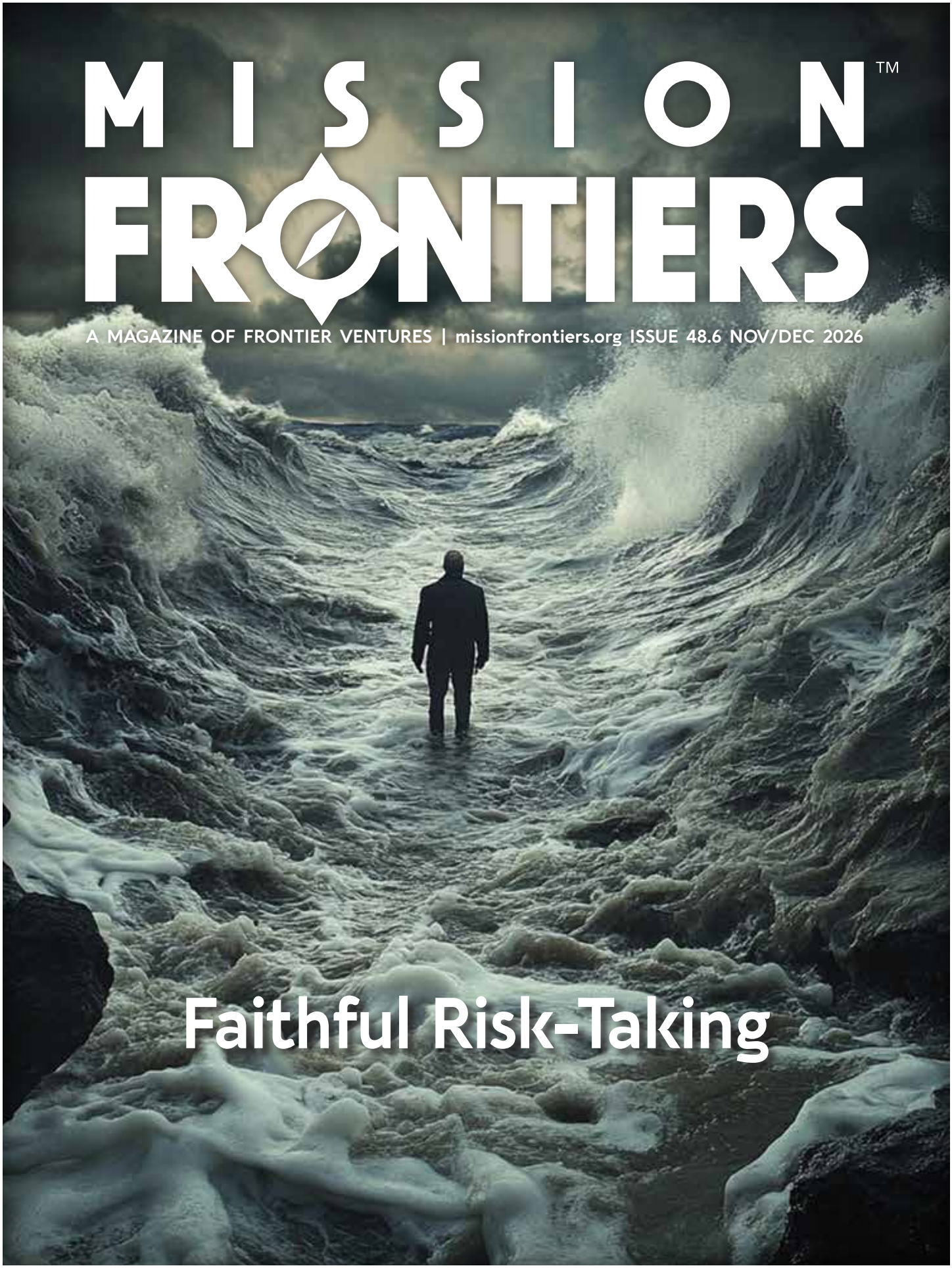
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We're trying something new with this issue of *Unreached of the Day*, and would love your feed back. Does the scaled back layout in terms of prayer points *enhance* or *hinder* your prayer experience? Let us know at:

editor@missionfrontiers.org

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Risk Without Recklessness

By **DUKE DILLARD**, Editor

Duke Dillard served overseas for 18+ years before settling in Denton, Texas, in 2019 with his wife, Laurie, and their seven children. He helps people and organizations become fully who God created them to be. He loves spending time with his wife, children, and grandchildren.

When I consider the theme of "Risk-Taking" in missionary sending, questions fill my mind. Here's a sampling:

- Is risk-taking a personality trait?
- When is it pride/arrogance/vanity and when is it wisdom/obedience?
- Is it risk if we are in God's will?
- Isn't it risky just to drive down the street?
- How did Paul decide when to stay and when to go?
- How can we decide what is risky for someone else?
- If someone goes into a risky situation, are agencies responsible for cleaning up the mess if it goes bad?
- Do risk-takers make better missionaries?
- Do risk-averse people lack faith?
- If people risk their lives for their country, shouldn't we risk our lives for God's kingdom? … And on and on I could go.

Thankfully, our authors have thought deeply about risk and the result is a must-read issue. Church leaders, organizational leaders, field workers, and supporters will all find helpful answers and questions in the following pages.

When I was young and brash, insecure and eager to prove I had faith, I looked at risky mission situations as invitations. People asked us about going to the dangerous Muslim world, and I laughed with naïve ignorance. It wasn't that I was faithless but rather that I was immature and arrogant.

Then, one Sunday morning in Kazakhstan, I was sitting in a worship service when the secret police entered, locked the doors, and started filming everyone. After the service, they questioned the leaders. Over the next two days my team leader and I were questioned at the police headquarters in the city. I was unprepared and scared. What if I said something that endangered my team or the locals? All my earlier swagger was gone. I was just a scared kid who felt faithless and alone.

A short time later, we fled the country. My family made it out, but our teammates were put through a court trial. They were found guilty (falsely), their passports received a stamp, and they were escorted to the airport. Fortunately, they were just deported, but it took all of us months to recover from the ordeal. I had not been prepared for what we experienced.

After that, my tone changed. I wasn't so naïve or arrogant. When we were later expelled from Uzbekistan with most of the expats in the country, we felt grief at the loss of home and friendships, but we were better prepared for the ordeal and experienced a more secure connection to God.

The 1980s and1990s in the US were the days of no seat belts, no safety regulations in churches, covering up abuse, and a general apathy towards risk and wisdom. Perhaps that is chronological snobbery, but the narrative is easy to believe given the stories we hear (and some of us lived through). Our family moved to Central Asia in 1997, and it was many years before any kind of risk training was required. Now, most agencies include such trainings in their field preparation. Our team had Anna Hampton, one of the authors in this issue, come to Turkey and do a risk-management training for all the expats in the region. Our location was in a relatively low-risk zone, but we found the training helpful, nonetheless.

Going to the remaining unreached people groups requires stepping into risky situations. We are not called to avoid risk, nor are we called to engage risk for risk's sake. How to think about and prepare to step into risk faithfully is the focus of this issue, and I think our authors do an excellent job. I wish I had this resource before heading to Kazakhstan.

Duke Dillard

One Never Knows When They Are Making History

By **PRUDENCE DANCY**

Prudence Dancy serves as a Spiritual Formation Associate with Frontier Ventures. Prudence is also the founder and director of Renewed Living Ministries and brings decades of experience as a spiritual director, pastor, counselor, curriculum writer, and contemplative activist.

It was my privilege to be there in the early days of the founding of the US Center for World Mission—now known as Frontier Ventures.

I was the first staff member, starting even before day one, working alongside Ralph and Roberta Winter. I had many roles.

At that time, I did not know I was standing at the beginning of something that would shape mission history, as well as change my own worldview. I was not thinking, "This will reshape global missions." I was thinking about mail to answer. Phone calls to make and return. Letters to send explaining the vision. New office spaces to arrange. Conversations that felt ordinary and yet somehow urgent all at once.

The details are not as vivid now as I wish they were. I cannot replay every meeting or reconstruct every conversation—though there were many.

Conversations with leaders like Billy Graham, Bill Bright, and Ed Dayton. Collaboration with Drs. Glasser, McGavran, Wagner, and Kraft. Interface gatherings every Monday with mission leaders who had offices on campus. Monday through Friday 8 a.m. prayer meetings. Thursday night community dinners. Meetings following dinner with visiting missionaries whose vision intersected with ours. Our children playing games on the large campus. Soccer games for staff on the soccer field after work.

But there were difficult times, too. Trying to understand the cult that rented the campus we were buying. Breaking their curses on us. Cleansing the spaces. Marching seven times around the campus in the spirit of Joshua taking Jericho.

A 9-to-5 job was never part of the imagination. We held mailing "parties" until 10 p.m. and then went home, only to return for the 8 a.m. prayer meeting the next morning. We lived within two blocks of one another, and without quite realizing it, we were raising our families together.

When something is going to make history, no one tells you to take better notes. You are simply doing the next faithful thing.

What I remember most is not the strategy but the atmosphere. There was conviction—a deep, almost disruptive conviction—that God cared about peoples, not just places; that 2.4 billion people were still without access to the gospel; that the Church's task was not yet finished.

There was boldness. We engaged audacious ideas, new language, and questions that unsettled comfortable assumptions, especially in the mission world.

And there was humanity. Ralph was a brilliant man—yes, with two doctorates. Visionary—no question. He was on the cover of *Time* magazine for being one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in the world. But he was also a man thinking aloud, testing language, refining ideas in real time. Yet Ralph was a humble man who lived very simply, with two suits and two pairs of shoes, mostly for the sake of the cause.

Roberta carried the steadiness he needed. She, too, was brilliant—warm, perceptive, and full of practical

wisdom. There was a household feel to those early days—work, calling, and family all braided together. I often felt like one of their four daughters.

And we did not feel historic. We felt driven by an important cause.

Budgets seemed impossible. Deadlines prompted prayer and fasting. $15 million needed to be raised for the campus property and 84 houses. Money would come in just in time for payments. Spaces had to be repurposed. Administrative work piled up, as did stacks of paper, drafts of documents to be typed, and long conversations. Those were faith-building days!

Looking back, I do realize something important: History is usually built on ordinary faithfulness.

A new idea emerged about "the task that remained" that would shape new strategies. The course written that would mobilize generations. The new language about "hidden peoples" that would reframe mission thinking for the next 50 years. And all of it rested on people showing up. Answering phones. Preparing syllabi. Praying. Trusting. Being faithful.

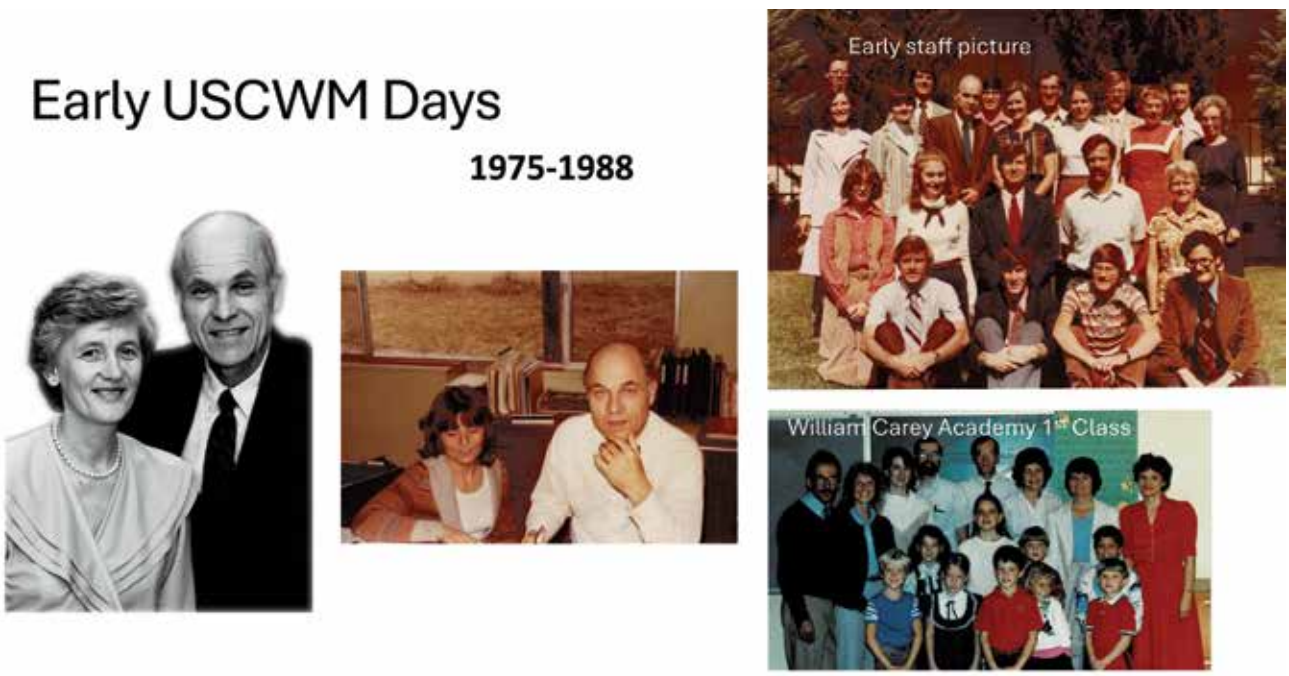
When you are in it, it feels unfinished and uncertain. Only later does it feel almost unbelievable. Miracles before our eyes for which we were not responsible. Perhaps that was the grace of God.

If we had known we were making history, we might have frozen—or performed—or tried too hard to preserve it. Instead, we were simply faithful to the light we had.

Memory fades around the edges of my mind, but something deeper remains: a sense of having stood near a fire when it was being kindled. Not grand. Just a spark at the time.

And perhaps that is enough. Because what shapes history is not perfect memory—it is faithfulness in the moment… a long faithfulness in the same direction. And in those early days, that is what we were doing.

I thank God for those days!



I Was RDW's Assistant, Personnel Director, Cafeteria Director, Property Manager, Principal of William Carey Academy

Cultivating Risk Tolerance for Mission in Dangerous Places

By **ANNA HAMPTON** All Scripture references are from the NASB.

Anna Hampton, author of *Facing Danger: A Guide Through Risk*, serves with Barnabas International in member care and as a global risk consultant, equipping workers for faithful witness in dangerous contexts. Contact: anna.hampton@barnabas.org.

There are more than two billion people[1] who live in places where they have never heard of Jesus, where the gospel has not taken root, and where the cost of bearing witness can include imprisonment, violence, or death. These are the hardest places—contexts of severe political oppression, active conflict, extreme poverty, and systematic hostility toward the Christian faith. Yet many mission organizations and churches in the West remain functionally risk-averse, sending workers primarily to relatively safe locations while the unreached remain unreached.

To send people into environments of prolonged despair, danger, and uncertainty requires more than courageous slogans or better insurance policies. It calls for a deeper understanding of the biblical and practical importance of risk, fostering purpose and resolve in the Christ-follower.

This article synthesizes insights from resiliency science, Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's ethics of costly responsibility, the Islamic concept of *sabr* as a point of cross-cultural resonance, contemporary hope research, and attachment-informed neurotheology with a holistic theology of risk.[2] I argue that churches and mission agencies must deliberately grow their risk capacity—using tools such as the Risk Tolerance Inventory (RTI)[3]—to obey Jesus's call to the ends of the earth.

The Reality of Hostility and Risk in Frontier Mission

Workers who go and Christ-followers who remain in the hardest places typically face what can only be described as extreme and prolonged despair, isolation, cultural hostility, family separation, physical danger, unanswered prayers, and the daily weight of living among people who have never heard of Christ. In this environment, ordinary coping mechanisms often collapse. Fear and hypervigilance become constant companions. The temptation to withdraw, prioritize institutional safety over gospel advance, or melt into spiritualized paralysis is overwhelming; yet too often, when the topic of risk assessment is brought up, these same Christ followers respond with pithy statements like, "I just trust God."

Scripture never promises safety to those who follow Jesus into gospel advancement. Jesus himself moved toward and away from danger with shrewd wisdom (John 7:1; Luke 13:31–33). Paul fled Damascus by night yet later walked into Jerusalem knowing chains were waiting for him (Acts 9:23–25; 2 Cor 11:32–33). The early Church rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Name (Acts 5:41). Witness risk—the potential for loss or gain when

1 media.joshuaproject.net/public/assets/media/handouts/frontier-peoples-overview.pdf.

2 As delineated in my book, *Facing Danger: A Guide Through Risk* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2024).

3 The Risk Tolerance Inventory is available free in multiple languages at theologyofrisk.com/risk-tolerance-inventory.

following Christ[4]—is not optional for those called to the unreached; it is the normal cost of obedience. So, the question is not whether risk will be present, but whether God's people will develop the theological depth, emotional resilience, and practical capacity to engage it faithfully.

Resilience Facing Risk and Persecution: Guidance from Experts and Experience

Modern resilience research reveals guidance for those living and serving in hostile environments. Viktor Frankl, who endured years in Nazi concentration camps, discovered that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."[5] Life has meaning under all circumstances. The will to meaning is a primary human drive. When suffering blocks creative and experiential pathways, only the attitudinal pathway remains: the freedom to decide what suffering will mean and how one will face it.

This is not positive thinking or denial. Frankl insisted that freedom of attitude is meaningful only when suffering is unavoidable. In the hardest mission fields, workers cannot "fix" or "solve" persecution, war, or hostility. Evil is real, targeted, and often unrelenting. Christ-followers can, however, choose to face it with dignity, responsibility, and purpose. Turning our attention from excessive self-focus to other people or a higher purpose, Socratic dialogue (gentle questioning that surfaces personal meaning),

4 Hampton, Anna. *Facing Fear: The Journey to Mature Courage in Risk and Persecution* (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2023), xxii.

5 Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 66.

MORE from Anna Hampton

Facing Fear
The Journey to Mature Courage in Risk and Persecution

Facing Fear is a practical guide for believers who long to have bold, mature courage. Cultivating this courage is necessary to endure wisely for Christ's sake. Anna Hampton integrates exegesis and psychology to explain how humans respond to fear and how the Holy Spirit enables us to make a different choice than our normal. Learning to face our fears, name them, and manage them requires learning specific steps to reduce their impact on us.

Facing Danger
A Guide through Risk

Facing Danger: A Guide through Risk is that resource. Against the rich backdrop of her family's own sojourn in perilous places, Anna Hampton presents a treasure trove of practical tools and profound insights to help you thrive in an increasingly hazardous world. With deep spiritual contemplation and meticulous research, she offers a unique viewpoint on cross-cultural service and the art of making sacrifices.



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and attitude modulation become practical tools for remaining free in spirit.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing under the shadow of the Third Reich and later from prison, rejected "cheap grace"[6] in favor of costly grace that calls us to follow Jesus even when it costs everything. His ethics of responsibility insist that the Christian must act for the concrete neighbor—accepting personal risk, ethical uncertainty, and even guilt—rather than withdrawing into righteous purity. Christ and love of one's neighbor motivate this. For Bonhoeffer, hope is not optimism about a positive outcome but demonstrated by faithful action rooted in the reality of that hope.

Recent hope research[7] shows that the felt emotion of hope uniquely predicts a stronger sense of meaning in life, beyond a general positive effect. Battle-steadied hope is hope that has looked straight at suffering and still affirms meaning, self-transcendence, and courage. This type of confidence is far more durable than naïve optimism.

"Ritualizing resilience"[8] includes the daily habits of normal life. Resilience is cultivated by [increasing] "self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strength of character, and relational connection to others."[9] But making resilience the goal falls short of Christ-like strength. Antifragility[10] in gospel advancement means that even when suffering, both post-traumatic stress growth (PTSG) and post-traumatic stress joy (PTSJ) are the results.[11] In prolonged despair, secure attachment (to other humans and God) regulates the nervous system, making the freedom of attitude more neurologically accessible. Neurotheological insights confirm that practices of trust, prayer, and felt connection with a reliable God reshape brain pathways toward greater emotional regulation and hope.[12]

Cross-culturally, the Islamic concept of *sabr* (steadfast patience, endurance in calamity, obedience, and restraint from despair)[13] offers a beginning point of contextualization. *Sabr* is active, God-centered perseverance. If integrated carefully, it enriches conversations with Muslim friends about enduring hardships and loss for the sake of faith.

A Theology of Risk and the Need for Greater Risk Tolerance

A theology of risk begins with the recognition that following Jesus into the world involves both potential loss and opportunity for profound faithfulness and impact, motivating the Christ-follower to embrace their calling. Risk is not always right.[14] Sometimes withdrawal is wise and obedient. Yet risk aversion that consistently prioritizes institutional preservation or personal comfort over advancing the gospel among the unreached is a form of unfaithfulness and sin.

Risk tolerance[15] is the degree to which an individual or organization can emotionally and practically operate under threat or uncertainty. Risk capacity is the actual ability to absorb and manage risk. Many organizations have low risk tolerance even when their stated theology affirms risk. The result is a quiet, systemic refusal to send workers to the most dangerous unreached places.

6 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1963), 45.

7 Megan E. Edwards, et al. "Hope as a Meaningful Emotion: Hope, Positive Affect, and Meaning in Life," in *Emotion* 25, no. 6 (September 2025), 1365-80.

8 Hampton, *Facing Fear*, 216.

9 Ibid.

10 I first mentioned antifragility in *Facing Fear* based on Nassim Taleb's *Antifragility*. In the "Masterclass on Shrewdness" (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2025), courses.missionbooks.org/courses/shrewdness, I further developed and defined antifragile, courageous faith as growing stronger, more powerful, purified, and more fully developed fruits of the Spirit. It is a faith that grows deeper from disorder and chaos. It is a faith that results in PTSG and PTSJ.

11 Hampton, *Facing Fear*, 270-71.

12 Argued in the book by Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman. *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 164.

13 Hina Khalid, "Integrating Grief and Hope: Reflections from Christian and Islamic Traditions," *Woolf Institute Blog*, February 1, 2019, www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/blog/integrating-grief-and-hope-reflections-from-christian-and-islamic-traditions.

14 See my criticism of John Piper's book, *Risk is Right* at this link: theologyofrisk.com/blog/a-thoughtful-review-of-risk-is-right-by-john-piper.

15 The terms "Risk Tolerance" and "Risk Capacity" are defined in my Witness Risk Glossary, a beginning primer of words related to gospel-based risk. See theologyofrisk.com/risk-glossary.

Developing greater risk tolerance is not recklessness. It is discipleship. It requires becoming risk literate; becoming aware of personal and organizational biases (including risk aversion vs. risk tolerance); learning to assess and mitigate wisely; regulating emotions, especially fear; practicing the 12 components of shrewdness;[16] and growing an anti-fragile faith that is strengthened rather than diminished by adversity.

> **Risk tolerance is the degree to which an individual or organization can emotionally and practically operate under threat or uncertainty. Risk capacity is the actual ability to absorb and manage risk.**

The Risk Tolerance Inventory (RTI) is a practical discipleship tool developed by a team of mission, security, risk, and psychology professionals. It helps individuals and teams become more aware of their risk tendencies across areas such as risk assessment, mitigation, leadership, emotion regulation, stewardship, impulsivity, and self-awareness about uncertainty. It draws on personality research while remaining Christo-centric, examining how faith shapes risk tolerance and aversion. Available in multiple languages, the RTI serves three purposes: individual awareness, community understanding (how one person's tolerance affects marriage, team, or organization), and actionable growth steps for further training and discipleship.

Using the RTI is not an end. It is simply the starting point for the harder work of increasing risk literacy, fear management, theological formation, and practical skills building in the 12 components of shrewdness. The saying, "I just have faith," or "I just trust God," too easily masks spiritual naivete that refuses to use the minds God gave us to exercise stewardship. The hardest places are hard for a reason. We can—and must—disciple people into the capacity to go there with eyes open, hearts anchored, and skills honed.

16 Defined in the Masterclass on Shrewdness (Littleton: William Carey Publishing, 2025), courses.missionbooks.org/courses/shrewdness.

Integration: Resilience Fuels Risk Tolerance

Here is the crucial integration: Greater risk tolerance is not produced by willpower alone or by better security protocols. It is sustained by the resources that enable resilience in despair:

- Meaning (Frankl): When Christ-followers can discover the meaning of their suffering through union with the crucified and risen Christ, they can endure what would otherwise destroy them. Meaning makes risk and suffering sustainable with battle-hardened joy.
- Costly Responsibility (Bonhoeffer): Choosing the action that gives God the most glory while at the same time demonstrates love of neighbor, even at cost to one's own purity.
- Mature Hope: Hope that has faced the worst and still chooses to move toward others and toward the unfinished task of the gospel. This hope is both cognitive and affective (the felt sense that life remains meaningful even in total despair).
- Secure Attachment: A felt sense of being held by God as a secure base and haven, even when not physically "safe." This regulates the nervous system so that fear does not paralyze decision-making or force premature withdrawal.
- Antifragile Faith: Steadfast endurance that does not collapse into complaint or despair and does not stop at resilience. It grows stronger through the very pressures and hostilities of the hard places.

When these resources are cultivated and developed through personal spiritual practices, team formation, theological education, and tools like the RTI, risk tolerance increases organically. Christ-followers are freer to go to dangerous places, freer to stay when called, freer to leave when wisdom requires it. Organizations have then developed greater risk capacity as well as risk tolerance.

A Call to Churches and Mission Organizations

If the remaining unreached peoples live disproportionately in the most dangerous and restricted places on earth, then risk-averse sending is a form of quiet

disobedience flying under the name of "prudence" or "calling." Senders must do more than celebrate the very few who go to hard places; they must intentionally develop the capacity of the next generation of gospel workers. This requires:

- Honest assessment of organizational and individual risk tolerance using tools such as the RTI.
- Theological formation that treats risk, fear, and persecution as core discipleship issues rather than specialized topics for "extreme" workers.
- Training in resilience practices drawn from meaning-centered approaches, hope cultivation, and secure attachment to God.
- Leadership that models mature courage rather than institutional self-protection.
- Pastoral care systems that support workers in despair without automatically interpreting suffering as a sign to come home.

The goal is not to produce reckless martyrs. It is to form mature disciples who can assess risk wisely, endure despair with meaning and hope, act with costly responsibility for those who have never heard, and remain free in spirit even when outer freedom is stripped away. Such people can be sent—and can stay—where the need is greatest.

The Last Freedom and Unfinished Task

Frankl taught us that the last freedom cannot be taken. Bonhoeffer showed us that costly grace calls us into responsibility for others even at great personal cost. Contemporary science confirms that meaning, mature hope, and secure attachment form a reinforcing loop that sustains resilience under extreme pressure. A biblical theology of risk insists that the gospel advance among the unreached will always involve witness risk—and that avoiding that risk systematically is itself a theological and discipleship failure.

The Risk Tolerance Inventory offers a concrete starting point for individuals, teams, and organizations to measure their current capacity and begin or enhance the discipleship road toward greater risk tolerance. But tools alone are insufficient. What is needed is a generation of churches and mission leaders who refuse to let safety become the highest value, who form people in the school of meaning and hope, and who are willing to release workers to the hardest places because Jesus is worthy and the lost are still waiting.

In a world full of despair, the church that cultivates both resilience and risk tolerance will not only survive; it will send. And those who are sent will discover the last freedom—the freedom to choose meaning, hope, and responsible love even in the darkest places—is more than enough.

The unreached are waiting. The question is whether we will develop the capacity to go. MF





Faithful and Prepared

Trusting God in a World of Risk

By **FALK SCISSEK** All Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

Falk Scissek has been a risk and crisis manager for over 10 years. Through the Biblical Risk Academy, he helps Christian workers and organizations navigate risk through online and in-person training and coaching. biblical-risk-academy.com

Does preparing for risk reflect faith in God, or a lack of it?

Pete—whose name has been changed to protect his ongoing ministry—was fascinated by the simplicity with which Jesus had sent the disciples out on one of their first missions. In Luke 10, Jesus instructed them to set out without any spare cash or equipment (Luke 10:4).

After working for several years as a member of a mission organization in a high-risk context, Pete decided to leave his formal role with the organization. He was particularly critical of their risk and crisis management and did not see preparing for contingencies as an expression of trust in God. He viewed the "faith-inspired minimalism" of the first commission not just as a model but as a mandate for all time—a conviction that would later be tested in the crucible of a kidnapping.

The Simplicity of Luke 10 and the Preparedness of Luke 22

Admittedly, the simplicity of Jesus' instructions in Luke 10 is appealing. It is especially encouraging for those who have left today's baggage of consumerism and material prosperity behind to follow Jesus. I appreciate my brother's conviction not to make mission overcomplicated. His desire was to trust Jesus for what might be lacking, materially or otherwise. And yet Jesus's later teaching in Luke 22 shows that the Church cannot treat Luke 10 as a timeless model for all mission and risk management.

"Then Jesus asked them, 'When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' 'Nothing,' they answered" (Luke 22:35).

The disciples acknowledged God's provision during their first missionary journey. They had everything they needed and were provided for by those who welcomed them because they came in the name of Jesus. And

Jesus confirmed that the way they had trusted him and followed his instructions was absolutely correct. Next, Jesus announced a significant shift:

"He said to them, 'But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one'" (Luke 22:36–38).

"But now." With these words Jesus signaled that the circumstances of ministry were changing dramatically. Jesus was on the threshold of his passion. The disciples were moving from a period in which Jesus's public popularity provided them with a measure of protection into an era marked by opposition and vulnerability. The warning of Luke 10:3—that they were being sent like *lambs among wolves*—would now take on a new intensity.

Pete experienced his own "But now" moment not long after leaving his organization. He had since married and brought his wife with him. One evening, on his way back from a visit, he was kidnapped. Pete's church found itself overwhelmed, facing a crisis they were not prepared to handle.

Extreme Risks—Extraordinary Preparation

The urgency of Jesus is clearly seen in the contrast he was making: "If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one" (Luke 22:36). It is hard to overestimate the significance of a cloak in the ancient world. For many ordinary people, it was their outer garment during the day and their blanket at night. It was so essential that Jewish law protected it. A cloak taken as collateral had to be returned by sunset (Exod 22:25–26). Through this stark contrast, Jesus emphasizes the costly nature of the changed circumstances ahead.

The disciples' response suggests that they may initially have understood him more literally:

"See, Lord, here are two swords."

"That's enough!" he replied (Luke 22:38).

The disciples had no problem producing two swords at once. Certainly, two swords would have been insufficient if Jesus had called the disciples to fight against the Romans. And if Jesus had literally intended armed resistance, he would have approved Peter's use of the sword in Gethsemane a few hours later. Instead, Jesus immediately stopped him and healed the wounded man (Luke 22:50–51).

While interpreters differ on the precise meaning of the sword, Jesus's words clearly communicate a need for readiness in the face of coming opposition. Elsewhere, Paul also uses military imagery to describe Christian preparedness, discipline, and perseverance (Eph 6:11–17; 2 Tim 2:3–4). Read in this way, the sword points beyond physical protection to the mindset of a disciplined and mission-focused servant of Christ.

While following Christ into danger today rarely requires a literal sword, this kind of readiness often takes the form of training and systems. For Pete, this "sword of readiness" appeared unexpectedly in the form of a forgotten document. As a proactive step of stewardship, Pete's church leadership had required an agreement before letting him transition to serving as an informal team member. By signing it, Pete authorized his former organization to support him in a major crisis as though he were still a formal team member.

Pete had initially viewed this document as unnecessary formality, but since it was signed, that piece of paper became the authorization the crisis management team needed to mobilize care for his wife and support the release efforts. The provision he had reluctantly accepted before the crisis became a means of grace when the crisis came. God graciously used an administrative requirement as a means to support his wife while he was unable to.

Pete was eventually released and reunited with his wife. He became deeply grateful for the people who had sustained her and supported his release and recovery—even at a time when he was very skeptical of them. Today, Pete and his wife serve as witnesses of this care, helping train new workers by sharing lessons from that painful season.

Pete's kidnapping does not merely illustrate the value of crisis management. It highlights broader principles that should shape how churches and mission organizations prepare workers for ministry in challenging contexts.

Faithful Stewardship in Practice

First, faithful preparation begins with the worker, not the protocol. Churches and mission organizations should seek to identify and send those who neither pursue danger recklessly nor give in to a safety-first mentality. They should help workers take an honest look at their own struggles to embrace the full range between obedient courage and wise prudence. Pete was no different. For a long time, he saw himself as faithful by letting go of organizational ties. After the kidnapping, he acknowledged that his early attitude was not entirely "deep faith," but partly an expression of pride.

> By viewing preparation as a spiritual discipline—similar to *putting on the full armor of God*—workers can move toward a posture of mission-focused obedience.

True readiness goes deeper than systems and protocols; it requires building theological resilience. Those in pastoral ministry should prepare workers for the reality of suffering and disappointment so that when hardship comes, workers have theological resources to sustain them through it. Pete can now look young, zealous workers in the eye and ask: "What would happen to your faith if obedience led you somewhere you never expected?"

By viewing preparation as a spiritual discipline—similar to *putting on the full armor of God*—workers can move toward a posture of mission-focused obedience. This includes understanding not just the "contextual risks" of their destination, but their own personal vulnerabilities. Their painful experience profoundly reshaped Pete's and his wife's faith and deepened their humility. Pete speaks honestly about where his earlier thinking had fallen short, while together they testify to God's goodness throughout the kidnapping.

Second, risk should be discerned in community rather than carried alone. The person who goes must hear God's call, but the community also has a responsibility to discern, test, confirm, and support that calling. As the Church, we should send workers with confidence that Christ has called them to their ministry through the Holy Spirit—nothing short of the confidence that the first disciples had about their mandate. In earlier years, Pete made such decisions largely on his own. Now, he and his wife teach groups of new workers together, inviting them to grapple with a theology of risk and suffering.

By clarifying leadership roles and fostering partnerships, the body of Christ can share the responsibility of care. This means sitting down with family and church leadership to write out a unified support plan. By doing this, Pete's "signed document" became a gift, allowing others to carry the weight when he could no longer help himself.

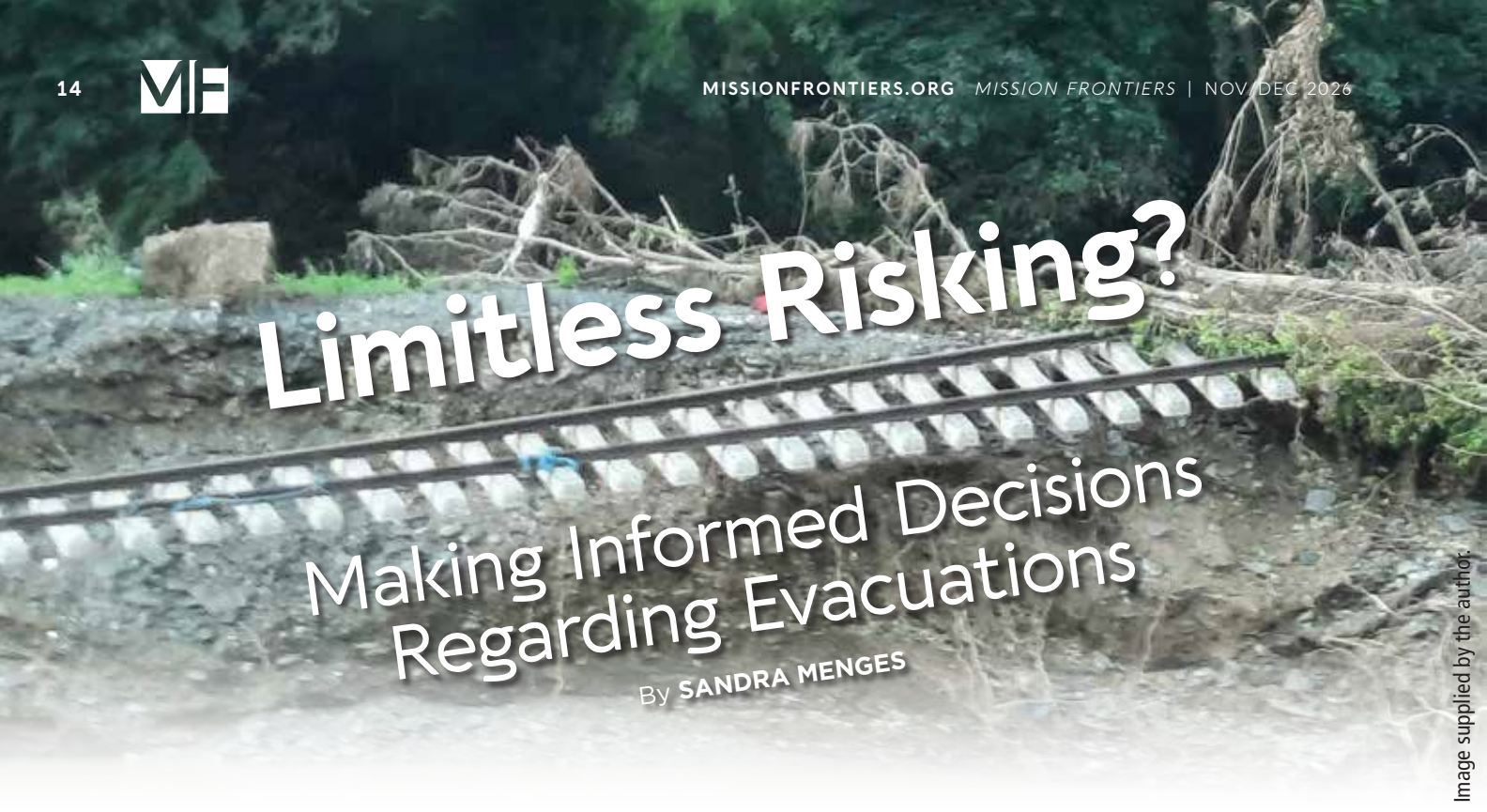
Finally, communities must prepare not only to disciple and send people but to sustain them when circumstances change. At its core, risk and crisis management is about caring for people before, during, and after difficult events. Workers, spouses, and families need more than policies and plans. They need timely information, ready access to help, committed prayer, and long-term care when difficult experiences leave lasting wounds.

Pete and his wife now testify to this privilege of community as they prepare the next generation of workers. In their sessions, they regularly remind new workers that even the best preparation does not guarantee safety, nor does it eliminate the cost of obedience. At times, faithfulness will still require believers to accept significant sacrifice for the sake of Christ, who is worth our complete devotion.

Trusting God and Preparing Wisely

Pete's experience is an extreme example, but the question it raises belongs to all of us: How do we trust God fully while preparing wisely for the responsibilities he has given us? Faithful preparation is one way we steward what God has entrusted to us while acknowledging that our security remains ultimately in his hands.

As Pete discovered, the simplicity of Luke 10 and the preparedness of Luke 22 need not be rivals. Christian courage is not the absence of preparation. It is the willingness to obey Christ wholeheartedly after wise preparation has been made.



Limitless Risking?

Making Informed Decisions Regarding Evacuations

By SANDRA MENGES

Image supplied by the author.

Sandra Menges (CIC; CTSS) is an independent Intercultural Coach and Trauma Services Specialist, serving faith-based workers worldwide. She does crisis intervention, -management and -consultation, trauma debriefs (individual, group, and collective) and tailor-made training. mengessandra@gmail.com

Risks always have a decision-making factor built in, and decision making always includes risk. Risks worth taking are complex. Your circumstances change constantly, and unknown factors loom in the dark. Individuals, organizations, and churches repeatedly face the need to make risky decisions with long-term consequences.

The following factors are worth considering regarding evacuations:

Decision Making Is Highly Individual

The decision to stay or to go will be different for each family, individual, and team. So many factors need to be considered. It is impossible to make a one-size-fits-all decision.

A decision can only be based on what you know currently. Things keep changing. The current decision might look wise/unwise in hindsight. Yet right now, all you have is current knowledge and your own perspective. Be gracious with yourself.

For organizations or churches: It is important to hear the opinion of the person(s) on the ground. Remember to ask both partners in the case of couples/families! If a decision is made for a person, with no co-determination, it will affect the processing afterwards, the ongoing relationship between leadership and the individual, and future opportunities in the country. Only decide over a person's head if they are currently unable to make decisions themselves.

What Does the Holy Spirit Say?

The safest place is in the center of God's will. It is hard to hear God's voice above the internal and external voices and alarms, but this should be the first place we run to. God knows the complete picture. His kingdom is secure and you, as part of that kingdom, are in a secure place in his presence. Ask the Spirit to lead and guide you.

Geographical Considerations

How far is the danger from you? It might be more dangerous in a city or a village—depending on the targets and where the tension epicenter is. Regional conflict, gang fighting, war, and terrorism all have a target and a goal. Natural disasters also have a danger zone. Understanding this will help determine what is safe.

Note: Not all people in a country of concern are in immediate danger. On the other hand, internally displaced people flock to safe areas and can make a safe place dangerous.

Another level of consideration is your accommodation. Look at quality of foundations, doors, locks, and windows. How high and secure are the fences? Which story do you live on? Is the actual building safe and secure? Are there secure places in the vicinity (like bomb shelters, friends' houses, etc.), if needed? How did recent events impact the safety of the building? Are the neighborhood and its people safe?

Also, check the probability for the quality and quantity of water, food supplies, heating, and electricity to deteriorate. This, together with anticipated or unexpected extreme weather conditions, might be a bigger safety factor than the actual looming danger.

Safety and Security Concerns

Determine if there is a potential or perceived life threat. Check existing contingency plans for validity in the current circumstances. This includes having more than one "safe place" within range in case your situation changes suddenly and drastically.

Note: Thinking of safety concerns, you also need to think not only about your safety but also about the local people. If your being there puts someone else at risk, it might be best to leave.

Communication

Check if your usual communication and information channels are still working and have an alternative if these fail. Make sure that all parties inside and outside know about the alternatives. Check if the next-of-kin information on file is still valid.

Have a plan of action if communication fails completely and make sure all involved know about this plan (place of meeting, alerts, expectations, etc.).

Family (or Personal) Circumstances

Each individual family member is important (including the children). If one suffers, all suffer.

Physical health: The need for regular medication or hospitalization and the consequences of a possible failing medical care system or electricity supply must be thought through carefully.

Serious mental health issues: Chronic depression, suicidal tendencies, schizophrenia, or anything else along these lines calls for immediate evacuation. The combination of mental health problems and trauma is dangerous for the individual and for those around them when risk is present.

Note: Traumatic incidents might create, in the immediate weeks afterwards, temporary physical, emotional, cognitive, and mental symptoms that feel like you're turning crazy or deathly ill. This is normal, manageable, and reversible and not a reason to evacuate.

Other factors, like pregnancies, a struggling marriage, addictions, etc. can also influence a decision. Pregnancies: If your embassy withdraws, getting a passport for your newborn might become impossible, which should influence your choice to leave or not.

Each family/team has an anchor person who supports everyone else. Even if some family members are ready to stay, if this person feels the load of responsibility is too heavy to carry, it is wise to leave.

Think through possible losses when staying and going. How do they add up in the current situation? Leaving might mean never again seeing the things you leave behind—including opportunities. Staying might mean losing them (or other things) as well.

Our personal history plays a role, too. Previous traumatic experiences might make you currently more resilient or more vulnerable. How trauma has been processed and the possibility of being triggered needs to be considered.

Other parts of our stories, like aging parents, special needs children, etc., might play a major role in our decision making.

Social Support System

A functioning social support system is one of the most important resilience factors. Some of this can happen remotely, but others must be close for practical support, a hug, or a safe place. Being together when all communication breaks down makes it more bearable.

Make sure to have an emergency contact list with people who need to be informed when you are in trouble, and people who can support you when things get rough (don't forget time zone differences).

Consider how your choice to leave or stay influences those you support. If you do carry responsibility for others who cannot leave with you, who can take your place in caring for them? Remember: Not all people you feel responsible for are your responsibility.

If your social support system is leaving, reconsider if you want to stay. If you choose to stay, make sure you have a new support system in place. Isolation makes experiences more traumatic.

Calling/Ministry Opportunities

Being clear on your calling will help you to navigate your decisions. For one person, "calling" would clearly mean staying. For another, "calling" can also be lived out in another setting.

The current situation influences your ministry opportunities which might shrink, grow, or change in the given circumstances. Doors can open or close. Remote work might be possible or not. If ministry opportunities change, check if your abilities, personality, and skill set fit the changing opportunities. Also: If a team is needed for this, check if a team is staying. If not, you cannot replace a team.

> If ministry opportunities change, check if your abilities, personality, and skill set fit the changing opportunities.

Needs + Resources + Skills + Opportunities + Openness + My current spiritual walk with God + The place I am at emotionally = worth staying or not, regarding ministry.

Evacuation Options

Knowing about current evacuation routes is important. Know what your options are by plane, boat, car, and on foot. These options need to be realistic and based on facts, not speculation, social media, or grapevine news.

Practical matters: Border posts, visa requirements en route, roadblocks, functioning airports, roads and bridges, availability of tickets, gas or diesel, a taxi or vehicle, cash, and spiking costs because of the crisis need to be considered. And, how safe is your plan?

Note: This changes constantly. Research the details, but don't study them extensively until evacuation is a real option since it is time and energy consuming.

Factors Outside of the Situation

Reaching the end of commitment in the foreseeable future might make an early departure a logical option.

Dependent family members needing you financially, emotionally, or physically, is a consideration. Where is this person(s)? Can care be transferred? How does your decision influence them? Aging parents that might need support fall into this category.

Upcoming events, like the wedding of your own child in your home country also need to be considered (fly out while you can or decide to be willing to miss it, if you cannot leave later).

Educational needs of your children, including good internet or open schools, should be on your list. Do they have other needs that must be considered?

Expiration dates of passports and visas may take the decision out of your hands.

Again, there are no right or wrong answers, just a deliberate act of taking all factors into consideration and making deliberate choices.

Factors NOT to Take into Consideration

Expectations of the organization, family, the church, etc. are not reason enough to stay or go.

Pressure to act a certain way needs to be recognized and addressed. (How can you do it to your kids?!/ This is clearly God's will ...). People, including myself, only have opinions. God alone has the full picture.

Jobs, money, and houses are part of the calculus. (Often workers don't feel they have another option than staying. They might have invested all their

savings and pension funds into a house in the country of service. Going home feels impossible.)

Is It Okay If Some Go and Some Stay?

It is always better to stay/go together, as far as possible. Mutual support through the crisis makes it more bearable. Sometimes changing realities can cause family members to be separated for months or years—which can be very tough.

However, in some cases, the decision to be separated for a time has been made. In case a family splits up, and one stays behind, both need to be at peace with the fact that they might be separated for longer than expected or never see one another again. Clear decisions need to be made to cover all eventualities, e.g., in the case of abduction, death, sickness, etc. Also, the parent leaving with the children needs to have written permission to make decisions on behalf of both parents for the children (full guardianship).

> Clear decisions need to be made to cover all eventualities, e.g., in the case of abduction, death, sickness, etc.

Children should not be left with the adult that stays in the danger zone. In case something might happen to this adult, the children would be left without a significant caregiver and will be doubly traumatized.

We Decided to Stay. When Should We Revisit Our Decision?

Things change. To constantly revisit the decision can be exhausting and counterproductive. Sit down, count the cost, and make the decision. Then live fully with that decision as if it were the only option. When new information surfaces that significantly changes the picture, sit down, revisit the decision, and make a new one. This should not happen more than once a day—ideally less—like weekly or monthly. Good sources for new information should be determined, such as monitoring agencies, government sources, local people who have inside information, and the organization's crisis management team.

Remember: Fear is never a good advisor. If fear overwhelms you, don't make the decision alone.

We Decided to Go

Start communicating and executing your plan immediately.

Consider going to an interim place first. It gives time and space to consider future options from a place of peace. It is an opportunity to rest, recuperate, and process. It creates space to watch developments in the crisis zone and the option of communicating with all role players without pressure. If the whole team evacuates to the same interim space, it also can be a place of mutual support from people who understand.

Going immediately home to family or church may be more difficult than you think. You might come back as the hero, which leads to expectations to perform in a time when you need space. You might need to move in with family or friends in small quarters and have high expectations. Even in the best of circumstances, this might be emotionally taxing—especially if the stay becomes longer than originally intended.

Finding practical solutions for schooling, housing, a job, etc. might take more energy and decision-making stamina than you currently have.

Well-meaning people may say hurtful things or be insensitive to your needs. The expectation to be happy to be back might not be your reality. It can lead to strained relationships with loved ones.

The emotional space you need might not be available for various reasons. You might be in shock, grieving or grappling with what is happening in your beloved country of service. You might also go through re-entry shock, feel like a failure, or struggle finding your way "back home," which feels foreign.

In all these considerations, commit your ways to the Lord, for we only see in part. He has the full picture. He can and wants to be your guide.

Faithful Risk

Lessons from My Journey as a Muslim-Background Bishop



By **BISHOP DR. YASSIR ERIC**

All Scripture references are from the NIV.

Bishop Dr. Yassir Eric is a Sudanese Anglican bishop, theologian, and missiologist from a Muslim background. He is Presiding Bishop of the Diocese of Ekkios. www.ekkios.com

I grew up as a devout Muslim in Sudan. Today, I serve as a bishop among believers from Muslim backgrounds across different parts of the Muslim world. Between these two realities lies a journey marked by prayer, persecution, imprisonment, loss, and unexpected encounters with the faithfulness of God.

Over the years, I have learned that faithful risk is neither recklessness nor fearfulness. It is learning to walk with Christ in obedience, wisdom, and trust. For some Christians, risk is something to be minimized, managed, or avoided whenever possible. For many believers, however, risk is not an occasional challenge but part of everyday discipleship. Here are some of the lessons I have learned along the journey.

The Risk of Prayer

When I was still a Muslim, I witnessed an event that changed my life forever. A close relative of mine became seriously ill (had been in a coma for several weeks) and was admitted to a hospital in Sudan. Two Coptic Christians came to visit him and asked whether they could pray for him.

At the time, I did not realize how much courage their offer required. They were offering prayer for a Muslim who may not have believed in their prayers. They were praying publicly in a hospital. They were praying for healing, knowing that God may heal—but may also choose not to. And they were praying in the presence of Muslims, including members of a more radical family background.

It would have been easier for them to remain silent. Instead, love moved them beyond their comfort zone. They prayed because they loved my suffering cousin and because they believed that Jesus hears prayer and can heal.

Looking back, I often ask myself whether we in the Church still take the risk of prayer. Do we dare to pray



for healing? Do we pray for people who are not Christians? Do we pray in public places? Do we pray in situations where we may be misunderstood or rejected? Sometimes prayer itself is risky.

The Risk of Witness

The story did not end with prayer. My cousin recovered and woke up after weeks of being in a coma. But the healing itself was not what impacted me most deeply. What struck me was this: Christians had prayed for a Muslim. And they spoke with God in a language of friendship and intimacy. As a devout Muslim at the time, I knew I would probably not have done the same for them. That experience opened the door to conversations with these Christians that continued throughout the night. Those conversations eventually led me to Christ.

The Christians who prayed that day did not know what God would do with their witness. Witness always involves risk. We risk rejection. We risk uncomfortable conversations. Sometimes we risk relationships, careers, or even our safety. Yet God often works through simple acts of faithful witness. Who knows what may happen when we take the risk of speaking about Christ?

The Risk of Following Christ

For many believers around the world, following Christ carries enormous cost. In my case, my decision to follow Jesus led my family to publicly declare me dead. My father told me, "You are no longer my son." My family organized a public funeral ceremony to announce to the community that their son no longer existed. Later, I spent weeks in prison.

At one point I found myself surrounded by death, isolation, and despair. Yet even there I experienced the presence of Christ in a profound way. One sentence of Scripture became especially precious to me: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). One experience has remained with me ever since. Standing in front of my own grave, overwhelmed by grief and loneliness, I suddenly sensed a touch and heard words that changed everything: "You are standing in front of your own grave—but your grave is empty. And be encouraged: My grave is empty, too." I knew immediately who was speaking—Jesus Christ himself.

Following Christ does not always make life safer. But it does make us part of a story larger than our own survival. Jesus never promised that discipleship would avoid suffering. He promised his presence within it.

The Security that Frees Us to Risk

Years later, during a visit to northern Nigeria, I sat together with a group of Boko Haram leaders. After they had listened to my personal journey to Christ, they asked me: "How do you know that we will not kill you?" My answer was: "You do not determine the end of my life. The end of my life is not in your hands, but in God's hands alone." This was not courage produced by personality or self-confidence. It was the quiet confidence that comes from belonging to Christ.

Perhaps this is one of the deepest secrets of faithful risk: We can take risks because our lives are already

held securely in God's hands. We know that our future rests in God's hands rather than in our own ability to control circumstances.

Not Every Risk Is Faithful

At the same time, not every risk is an appropriate risk. Faithful risk is not reckless risk. On one occasion, I was already seated on an airplane preparing for departure when a trusted friend in the destination country urgently advised me not to travel. I immediately asked the stewardess to open the doors of the aircraft again and let me leave.

Sometimes obedience means staying. Sometimes obedience means leaving. Jesus himself moved between accepting and avoiding risk. At times, he openly moved into situations of danger. At other times, he withdrew because he knew his hour had not yet come. Wisdom is part of discipleship. The question is not simply, "Am I willing to take this risk?" The better question is: "Is this the risk God is calling me to take in this season and in this situation?"

Faithful Risk Is Communal

One final lesson I have learned is that faithful risk is never merely personal. Sometimes, we think about risk individually: "What am I willing to sacrifice?" However, it is wise to also ask an additional question: "How will my decision affect others?"

My decisions may affect local believers, churches, ministry partners, my spouse, my children, or vulnerable communities around me. There may be risks I am personally willing to take, but it would be irresponsible to impose those risks on others. Faithful risk therefore requires community, accountability, and discernment. Risk is not merely a personal spiritual adventure; it is part of belonging to the Body of Christ.

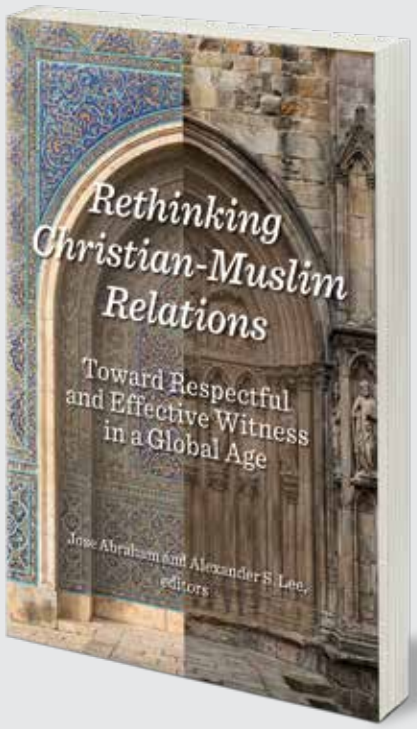
Encountering Risk Faithfully

Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual risks facing many Christians today is not persecution but comfort. Comfort can slowly make us spiritually passive and less attentive to the voice of God. Faithful risk is not about seeking danger. No, it is about following Jesus wherever he leads. MF

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Jose Abraham and Alexander S. Lee

Rethinking Christian-Muslim Relations gathers leading global voices to reflect on Christian engagement with Islam and Muslim communities in our interconnected world. Building on Fuller Seminary's legacy of pioneering Islamic Studies—shaped by the scholarship of J. Dudley Woodberry and Evelyn Reisacher—the contributors explore themes ranging from peacemaking and contextualization to attachment theory and reciprocal hospitality. Contributors assess post-Orientalist approaches to Islamic studies, explore models of contextualization in Muslim-majority societies, and examine the theological implications of Muslim-background believers for mission. Together, the authors offer fresh pathways for understanding and collaboration while affirming the lordship of Jesus.



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When Mission Involves



The Moral Responsibility of Sending

By **EDWARD NYE**

Edward Nye has served with Assemblies of God World Missions (AGWM) for nearly 25 years as a missionary, field leader in restricted access countries, and now Global Security Coordinator. He hosts the podcast "Security Briefs with Ed Nye" and can be reached at edwardnye@ag.org.

The Moral Question

Is it morally right to knowingly send followers of Christ into dangerous places?

Or, is the Church acting irresponsibly when it commissions people for missionary service in locations where their lives, health, freedom, or emotional well-being may be at risk? This is not a theoretical concern. Missionaries encounter many forms of risk. Some are spiritual. Others involve illness, crime, political instability, terrorism, governmental hostility, isolation, trauma, or the strain of living as cultural outsiders. Even when a missionary enters a country legally and peacefully, the movement from familiar surroundings into another culture creates vulnerability.

Missionary service always includes some level of risk. Yet some ministry contexts involve risks that are far beyond the ordinary pressures of cross-cultural life. In some countries, criminal networks operate freely. In others, governments restrict or oppose Christian witness, or extremist groups target religious minorities, expatriates, or those connected to Western institutions. If such realities are known in advance, what moral responsibility belongs to those who send?

To answer that question well, several distinctions are necessary.

First, missionaries are not coerced into service. They respond voluntarily to the call of God. Because of this, the moral issue is not primarily one of personal freedom. Second, missionaries do not enter dangerous places because they desire danger. Their aim is not to suffer, to prove courage, or to seek martyrdom. They go because they believe Christ is worthy, the gospel is true, and people who have not heard should have access to the good news. Therefore, the moral concern is not primarily their motivation. The central moral issue is whether it is right to place human life at risk for the sake of mission.

The Purpose of Life and Mission

Christian mission begins with a view of life that differs from the assumptions of a risk-averse culture. The ultimate purpose of the gospel is not merely the preservation or extension of natural life. Rather, the gospel announces salvation, reconciliation, and the renewal of all things in God's redemptive purposes. Because of this, followers of Christ are free to risk their lives in obedience to him.

The pattern begins with Christ himself. The Father sent the Son not merely into danger but toward suffering and death. The cross stands at the center of Christian faith, and it shapes the way believers understand obedience, sacrifice, and mission.

Still, the example of Christ must not be used carelessly. His suffering does not give the Church permission to be reckless with the lives of others. It does, however, prevent the Church from treating safety as the highest good. The New Testament repeatedly calls followers of Christ to faithful witness, costly obedience, and participation in the mission of God. The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled if the Church refuses to go where obedience may be costly.

A preservation posture is difficult to defend from Scripture. The Parable of the Talents warns against protecting what has been entrusted to us in such a way that it remains unused for the master's purposes. The servant who buried what he had been given was not commended for caution. He was condemned for failing to act.[1]

This does not mean every risk is faithful. It does mean that avoiding risk altogether is not biblical faithfulness. The Church is not called to preserve itself indefinitely in safe places while unreached people remain without access to the gospel. The question is not simply, "Is this place dangerous?" The better question is, "What is God asking of us, and how do we obey with courage, wisdom, and love?"

The Responsibility of Senders

In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which he had called them, and the church sends them out.[2] This pattern matters. Sending is not merely an institutional decision, a strategic deployment, or a response to organizational need. It is an act of discernment and obedience.

If God calls a person or family to serve in a difficult place, the Church should not stand in the way simply because the place is dangerous. To refuse to send those whom God has called may itself become an act of disobedience. There are times when the immoral choice is not sending people into danger but refusing to send them because of fear.

Those who send must also equip, prepare, support, and care for those who go. If a church, agency, or mission organization affirms a missionary's calling but fails to prepare that person for the realities of the field, the sending community bears responsibility. Likewise, if leaders knowingly send people into complex environments without training, counsel, risk assessment, contingency planning, member care, or crisis support, they cannot claim moral innocence.

Sending is not complete when a missionary boards a plane. The responsibility continues through preparation, deployment, crisis response, pastoral care, and, when necessary, evacuation or relocation. Faithful sending includes both courage and stewardship.

Wisdom Is Not the Enemy of Faith

A theology of risk must never become an excuse for carelessness. Jesus warned his followers about the cost of discipleship, but he also used examples of a builder counting the cost and a king evaluating whether he could face an opposing army.[3] These examples do not weaken faith. They show that obedience should be thoughtful, deliberate, and wise.

Jesus himself did not treat every threat the same way. At times, he continued directly toward suffering. At other times, he withdrew, avoided premature confrontation, or refused to act before the appointed time. Paul also accepted suffering for the sake of the gospel, yet he sometimes escaped danger, appealed to legal protections, or accepted help from others to preserve his life and ministry.[4]

This pattern is important. Taking risks for the gospel does not mean taking every risk that appears. Some risks should be accepted. Some should be mitigated. Some should be avoided. Wisdom does not oppose faith; it helps faith act rightly.

Leaders also have a shepherding responsibility. Those in authority may encourage people to endure hardship, help them remain steady in a moment of fear, or direct them to withdraw from danger. The decision depends on calling, context, timing, threat, family impact, team impact, local believers, and the broader witness of the Church. Good shepherds do

1 Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 19:11–27.

2 Acts 13:1–3.

3 Luke 14:25–32.

4 For examples of danger, escape, protection, and continued witness in the New Testament, see Acts 9:25; 17:10; 19:30; 23:10; 24:11–14.

not preserve the sheep merely for comfort, but neither do they treat the sheep as expendable.

Risk and Fruitfulness

Another error must also be avoided: the belief that risk automatically produces ministry fruit. It is tempting to assume that the more dangerous a situation is, the more spiritually significant it must be. Scripture does not support this assumption. Personal safety is not guaranteed, ministry fruit is not guaranteed, and heavenly reward is not earned by imprudence.

Suffering may accompany obedience, but suffering itself is not the goal. Danger does not make a decision holy. Persecution does not prove that a strategy is wise. Martyrdom is never something the Church should manufacture by poor judgment. When Christians romanticize risk, they may unintentionally place missionaries, local believers, families, and communities in unnecessary danger.

Yet the opposite error is equally serious. Avoiding all risk guarantees a lack of missionary fruit. A Church that will only go where it is safe will eventually abandon places where witness is most needed. If risk becomes the deciding factor, then the most difficult fields will be left untouched, not because God has not called, but because the Church has chosen comfort over obedience.

A mature theology of risk avoids both recklessness and fear. It neither glorifies danger nor idolizes safety. It asks what faithfulness requires and then seeks to obey with preparation, humility, and courage.

More Than Individual Risk

Risk decisions are often framed around the individual missionary: Is he or she willing to go? Is the family willing to accept the danger? These are necessary questions, but they are not sufficient.

Missionary risk affects spouses, children, teammates, national believers, ministry partners, supporting churches, and the wider Christian community. In some contexts, the presence of expatriate missionaries may increase risk for local believers. In others, leaving too quickly may discourage or endanger them. At times, a missionary's courage strengthens the Church. At other times, a missionary's insistence on staying may create unnecessary burdens for others.

Therefore, risk decisions must be communal as well as personal. The missionary's sense of calling matters deeply, but so do the voices of family, field leaders, local believers, sending churches, and mission leadership. The Holy Spirit may still lead people toward costly obedience even when others urge caution. But such decisions should be made through prayerful discernment, honest counsel, and careful attention to those who may bear the consequences.

Love for the lost compels the Church to go. Love for missionaries requires preparation and care. Love for local believers requires humility. Love for Christ requires obedience.

So, Is It Moral?

It is moral to knowingly send missionaries to dangerous places when God has called them, when they go voluntarily, when the purpose is faithful witness to Christ, and when the sending community acts with wisdom, preparation, and continuing care.

In fact, when God has clearly called a person or family to proclaim the gospel in a dangerous place, refusing to send may be the greater moral failure. Fear can appear responsible when it is actually disobedience. A sending community may be judged not only for what it does but also for what it refuses to do.

But moral sending is never careless sending. The Church and its mission agencies must not hide behind the language of calling while neglecting their own responsibilities. They must help missionaries understand the risks before them, prepare them for difficult environments, provide appropriate training, establish contingency plans, support them during crisis, and care for them afterward.

A ship may be safer in harbor, but a ship was not built to remain there. At the same time, wise captains do not ignore weather, neglect supplies, or sail without charts. They prepare carefully because the voyage matters.

Missionaries are called to leave safe harbors. Some will sail into difficult waters. Some will face storms. A faithful sending Church does not keep them tied to the dock out of fear, nor does it send them out unprepared. It discerns the call of God, equips those who go, walks with them in danger, and entrusts them to the Captain who is worthy of their obedience.



Hidden Risks for the Faithful

By **REBECCA BLACK** (Pseudonym)
Scriptures references are from the ESV.

As a country leader for a mission organization in a high-risk field in the Middle East, **Rebecca Black** (pseudonym) delights in helping other field workers thrive as they minister to Muslims.

Journeying with God and sharing his gospel among unreached peoples continues to be a privileged adventure I treasure. Witnessing God transform the lives of the lost and lead them to his salvation has brought me great joy. Yet where there are highs, lows also exist. Separation from family, spiritual warfare, and the persecution of disciples and disciple-makers rank as some of the lowest points. Far too often the lows on the field can outnumber the highs. The pain of lows can deter, distract, or derail a person if not laid before the Lord and released. Lows are inevitable, as no one lives their life solely on the mountaintop. During the lows, we experience God's faithful strength to help us persevere.

While lows will inevitably challenge each Christian worker on the field, there are ways to mitigate the effects. Counting the costs and developing risk management strategies can help one navigate the lows with grace. Understanding risks helps one adjust expectations, anticipate challenges, and make wiser decisions. It is my desire to outline for readers some of the hidden or less-talked-about risks field workers confront daily in the countries where the spread of the gospel is restricted or forbidden. In this article, two categories of risks are highlighted: the Risk of Suffering and Risks for Marketplace Workers.

Risk of Suffering

All Christians are at risk of pain and suffering; it's a normal part of life. Missionaries serving in cross-cultural contexts seem to get an extra measure of suffering. The apostle Paul suffered greatly on his missionary journeys and counted his suffering worth it to know Christ. In Philippians 3:10, Paul states, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." Like Paul, as missionaries endure suffering and hardships, we witness Christ's extraordinary love, provision, and encouragement as he comforts us with his presence.

In the Middle East, life revolves around honored relationships. Ministering to people in highly relational communities requires building genuine loving relationships. In John 13:34–35, Jesus commands us to love one another: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Keeping this commandment is not always easy because loving your Muslim neighbor or coworker can be challenging, yet God provides us with a love for the people he places in our path. Pouring into others and loving them allows us to be able to share


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the gospel in meaningful ways. Because we participate with Christ in loving our friends and neighbors, we open ourselves to the risk of pain and suffering.

Pain and suffering come in many forms, such as persecution, loss of relationships and connections, trauma, and grief. While there is great joy in the privilege of discipling Muslim Background Believers (MBBs), it is very painful to watch them suffer persecution at the hands of their families and/or communities. To walk with a disciple through persecution is both a remarkable privilege and a costly responsibility, marked by weariness, stress, and heartbreak. The task of encouraging the persecuted is one that Christ's followers readily accept. Sadly, sometimes a persecuted MBB is required by his family to relinquish all contact with his disciple-maker and other Christians. It is heartbreaking for a disciple-maker to not be able to visit, encourage, or comfort the disciple. One of the risks we choose is being vulnerable enough to love people well while we're with them, and being willing to let them go when the time comes.

The revolving door of loss and grief also includes the loss of close team members and friends. As foreigners in our countries of residence, all eventually leave to return to their home countries. This can occur suddenly through expulsion from the country due to persecution of local believers, general Christian persecution, completion of a person's contract, or personal matters that require relocation. While the depth of loss and grief experienced each time someone leaves may vary, the understanding of our temporary status creates a constant tugging on one's heart.

Missionaries in the Middle East are at a high risk for suffering direct trauma as well as secondary trauma. War looms across the region these days. Sights, sounds, loss, and uncertainty can be traumatizing. Trauma can also be caused by car accidents, serious injuries, violent interactions, and isolation. Secondary trauma, received from listening to other people's traumatic events, is a common occurrence for Christian workers, who are often the first responders to the trauma of their local friends. Locals feel no shame or fear in telling a foreigner their traumatic event because the foreigner isn't connected to their family or community who could shame them. Listening to people unload their burdens of war, abuse, suicidal thoughts, and other traumas can produce secondary trauma in the listener. The listener may replay the story repeatedly in her mind or lose sleep. Having a pastor, counselor, or member-care source to debrief with, helps to protect the Christian worker from harsher effects of trauma or secondary trauma.

Risks for Marketplace Workers (Tentmakers)

Global missions have been greatly impacted by tent-maker missionaries throughout history. A tentmaker, like the Apostle Paul, supports his or her livelihood and ministry through secular employment rather than relying on financial support from a church or a mission organization. The term tentmaker has evolved into the phrase of marketplace workers, and the role has gained valid notoriety in recent years. Mission-intentional marketplace workers can be found across the globe, especially in countries where creative access is needed.

Risk of Being Misled

Mission-intentional marketplace workers bear the same risks as other missionaries. In addition, they also take on risks directly related to working in a foreign marketplace. A frequent risk for marketplace

workers involves being misled intentionally regarding their job requirements, expected work hours, benefits, or the amount of travel expected. A friend used the expression, "It's not like the brochure!" to describe the difference in what the employer promised and what was delivered.

Workers contracted for a 48-hour work week may be required to work 70 hours per week with a promise of overtime compensation that never materializes. It's common for salaries to be delayed for several months. In one of the Gulf countries, the Ministry of Labor advertises that if you haven't been paid for three months or more, you should find other employment. Companies regularly do not fulfill other contract obligations, such as housing payments, flight costs, or family medical coverage. There are little to no repercussions for companies or their owners when they do not uphold contractual agreements. Mission-intentional marketplace workers will often tolerate these working conditions in order to remain in the country in order to share the gospel. These workers need to be prepared with available contingency finances.

Risk of Cultural Misunderstandings

The risk of cultural mistakes and misunderstandings is common to all missionaries living in foreign countries. Traditional missionaries generally receive some basic training in the cultural norms and expectations for their new country of residence. However, most mission-intentional marketplace workers enter into life in a new country with little to no training in culture or missional strategies appropriate for the local population. In addition, marketplace workers must adapt to a different workplace culture as well.

Cultural mistakes and misunderstandings impact relationship building, communication, performance at work, and assimilation into the culture. In addition, cultural mishaps can cause embarrassment, stress, anxiety, and social isolation. To overcome cultural challenges, marketplace workers can seek out appropriate culture training and become an astute observer of local culture. One suggestion is for the worker to ask local colleagues and friends to help him gain cultural understanding, and then give permission for them to correct him when mistakes occur.

Risk of Loss of Job Due to Sharing the Gospel

Mission-intentional marketplace workers run the risk of losing their jobs because they are sharing the gospel. This is the risk we are called to take as we obediently follow Christ. When a marketplace worker becomes known by the authorities for sharing the gospel, giving a Bible to a local, or discipling a local believer, the authorities will often summon him to the police station. Sometimes workers are arrested, interrogated, and put in jail. Ultimately, the worker will be fired and expelled from the country. These are common occurrences in countries where evangelism or proselytizing is illegal. I was told by a seasoned missionary early in my career, "If you are doing what you are called to do, you will eventually be kicked out of the country."

Mission organizations help their missionaries prepare contingency plans for when they are expelled from their country of assignment. These contingency plans include guidance, financial preparations, and member-care personnel to assist with emotional needs. Many marketplace workers are not aligned with a mission organization, which means member care and contingency plans do not exist for them. They typically do not have financial support other than their employment salary. Mission-intentional marketplace workers need to count the cost of job loss and expulsion carefully and prepare for it by having a contingency plan, funds available for relocating and transition time, and an emotional-support network of people to rely upon. Church, take note of marketplace missionaries within your reach so that you can care for them well.

Our journey of obedient service with Christ includes faith-filled risk-taking. Wisdom, knowledge, and preparedness help us to calculate risks and mitigate some consequences. Faith-filled risk is part of the adventure with our Lord. I want to encourage each Christ follower to not fear risk when the Holy Spirit is guiding you to take it. It is Christ's faithfulness guiding each step. Remember, he is able to do immeasurably more than we can think or imagine. MF


Image supplied by author.

The Importance of Objective Faith in Great Commission Risk Management

By **SCOTT BRAWNER** All Scripture references are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

Scott Brawner is President of Concilium, an international ministry that equips and resources gospel workers and persecuted Christians with biblically grounded security, risk, and crisis management resources to faithfully navigate complex global challenges.

Serving the Lord is risky.

That statement should not surprise anyone familiar with Scripture or the history of the Great Commission. Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus promise his followers their lives would be free from danger, hardship, persecution, suffering, or loss. In fact, Jesus shows us that sharing the gospel with a lost world is a higher priority than our own safety, comfort, or justice. Every Christian must eventually wrestle with whether serving the Lord and obeying Jesus's commands is a risk worth taking.

The answer to that question has profound implications for how Christians understand faithful and effective obedience to God's call as they manage the risks associated with the call to go.

For our purposes, risk can be understood as something that we engage in (an action) that exposes someone or something we value to danger, harm, or loss. But remember that risk can also be found in inaction, such as being overwhelmed by fear and unable to function, or in other concerns that keep a Christian from stepping out by faith (an important conversation for another time). When we take risks, the potential consequences are real. We can lose money, reputation, health, well-being, or even life. The question, therefore, is not whether Christians should acknowledge risk. The question is how Christians should faithfully respond to risk while pursuing obedience.

This is where we need a theology of risk.

A theology of risk helps Christians define personal obedience while considering tangible risks. It is developed through God's Word and applies biblical principles to decisions that may lead us into dangerous situations. A biblical theology of risk does

not teach Christians to avoid danger at all costs. It also does not encourage reckless exposure to danger in the name of faith. Instead, it calls Christians to practice **objective faith**.

Objective Faith

Objective faith is rooted in wisdom, discernment, and prudence.

That distinction matters because objective faith differs significantly from blind faith or subjective faith.

Jesus teaches that there is a difference between believing without seeing and walking blindly. John 20:29 commends those who believe without having seen, while Matthew 15:14 warns about the blind leading the blind into a pit. This is why the Lord, consistently throughout the Old and New Testaments, neither asks for nor honors blind faith from his children.

Subjective faith creates a different problem. It elevates personal experience and individual interpretation to a position of authority they were never intended to possess. This is where I often find Christians practicing, "I can do all things through a verse taken out of context." In the context of risk and obedience, subjective faith can cause Christians to justify decisions based on what they believe God will do rather than what God has actually said.

The consequences can be serious.

Blind faith and subjective faith can lead Christians to take risks the Lord never commanded while expecting protection the Lord never promised. When the expected protection does not come, tragedy can be followed by confusion, disappointment, and even spiritual disillusionment.

Objective faith takes another path.

Objective faith asks us to open our eyes, understand our environment, identify threats, recognize vulnerabilities, exercise wisdom, and then obey. It does not replace trust in God with trust in security practices. Rather, it recognizes that wisdom, discernment, prudence, preparation, and good stewardship are themselves expressions of faithfulness.

The truth is that this kind of faith requires maturity. The writer of Hebrews describes mature believers as "… those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Heb 5:14b).

Faithful risk-taking, therefore, involves more than courage. It involves trained discernment.

The Great Commission Demands Risk

While the call of the Great Commission is to go, God's heart is for his people to thrive where he calls them and remain effective where he plants them.[1]

Objective faith should never become an excuse for avoiding obedience. The reality is that risk is inherent to gospel obedience.

The purpose of godly risk management is not to make the Great Commission safe. That is impossible. Risk is inherent in Great Commission obedience because Jesus sends his people into a fallen world hostile to the gospel.

Jesus made this reality unmistakable in Matthew 10 when he told his disciples, "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves" (Matt 10:16a). Jesus did not pretend the wolves were absent; he acknowledged the threat. Yet in the same verse he told his followers to "Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16b), and to "Beware of them" (Matt 10:17), and " When they persecute you in one town, flee to another" (Matt 10:23), all while encouraging his followers, "Therefore, don't be afraid of them" (Matt 10:26a).

Those instructions provide a remarkably complete picture of faithful risk:

Go.

Understand that danger exists.

Be shrewd.

Be alert.

1 Scott A. Brawner, "Duty of Care as Faithful Stewardship: A Biblical Mandate for Mission Agency Executives," *The Watchman's Brief* (April 2026): 2. www.concilium.us/app/uploads/2026/03/The-Watchmans-Brief-First-Edition-Duty-of-Care-as-Faithful-Stewardship.pdf

Take appropriate action when threats materialize.

And (most of all) do not be afraid.

Courage and risk management are not opposites; neither are faith and prudence.

Jesus can send his disciples among wolves while simultaneously commanding them to be on their guard. He can tell them not to fear while also telling them when to flee. Biblical courage is therefore not the absence of risk management. Biblical courage allows us to face genuine danger without allowing fear to become the controlling factor in our obedience.

This is why security risk management should never throttle Great Commission advance for the sake of safety. Gospel-centered security exists to empower obedience so the lost can be saved.

Risk Cannot Be Eliminated

One of the great mistakes in security is believing that success means eliminating risk.

For Christians engaged in Great Commission work, risk elimination cannot be the objective. Mission leaders must pursue risk stewardship rather than risk aversion or risk elimination. Great Commission engagement has always involved risk. Paul experienced persecution, imprisonment, physical danger, and threats to his life. Yet Paul did not approach those dangers recklessly. He demonstrated careful planning, situational awareness, and strategic decision-making.

Paul is particularly helpful because he demonstrates the difference between accepting necessary risks and unnecessarily surrendering his life.

In Acts 21, Paul continued toward Jerusalem despite knowing what obedience could cost him. Importantly, based on the prophecies of his suffering in Acts 21, Paul shrewdly used his Roman citizenship to escape a bloody interrogation (Acts 22:25–29), relied upon local intelligence to avoid assassination (Acts 23:12–22), accepted a state-sponsored armed evacuation from Jerusalem (Acts 23:23–24), and appealed to the Roman legal system when doing so gave Paul the opportunity to preach the gospel before Caesar (Acts 25:10–12).

Paul was willing to die, but willingness to die did not mean unwillingness to preserve his life for a greater opportunity to live and share the gospel.

There is an important lesson here: Losing your life is not necessarily the same thing as wasting your life. But unnecessarily risking your life is not the same as faithfully offering it to God.

Faithful risk rooted in objective faith requires wisdom to know the difference.

Managing the Risks We Cannot Avoid

If obedience involves unavoidable risk, then our responsibility is not to pretend the risk does not exist. Our responsibility is to steward it.

Risk is found where vulnerability meets threat. We may have little ability to eliminate many threats in complex ministry environments. Political instability, criminal violence, persecution, terrorism, hostile governments, natural disasters, and social unrest remain beyond our control.

The key to reducing the likelihood of an incident is reducing vulnerability to the threats in an environment. This is accomplished through personal security training, threat analysis, policies and procedures, and security collaboration. The key to decreasing the impact of an incident is preparation through well-defined planning and procedures, crisis management training, member care, and related measures.

This is faithful stewardship.

Security risk management does not promise that nothing bad will happen. It prepares God's people to serve wisely in a world where bad things sometimes do happen.

This is why objective faith can actually increase the extent of our obedience. As we reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate the impact of risks associated with God's call to go, Christians can often remain longer, travel farther, operate more effectively, and continue serving in places where unmanaged risk might otherwise

force ministry to stop.

Security, properly understood, is therefore not the enemy of mission; it is a force multiplier for mission.

Predictable Tragedies Are Not Faithfulness

There is also a difficult truth that Christians must confront: Some suffering is unavoidable, and some persecution comes precisely because we are obedient. Most of all, some believers will be called to give their lives for the testimony of Jesus.

But not every tragedy experienced in ministry should automatically be labeled persecution or sacrifice.

There is a difference between persecution, in which we are encouraged to rejoice (Matt 5:11–12), and victimization, which God abhors (Ps 11:5). This wisdom helps us to see that not every death on the mission field is martyrdom. Objective faith requires wisdom to distinguish between them.

There are also what I call predictable tragedies: consequences that result from failing to acknowledge and mitigate known threats and vulnerabilities. Suffering predictable consequences is not necessarily evidence of faithfulness. Sometimes it is negligence.

That distinction is essential.

If we know a threat exists, recognize a vulnerability, have a reasonable means of reducing that vulnerability, and simply refuse to act because "God will protect us," we have crossed from objective faith into something else. The prudent believer can recognize danger, take appropriate action, and continue trusting completely in God's sovereignty and goodness.

Faithful Stewardship Makes Greater Obedience Possible

The gospel must remain the highest value, not safety.

That means safety cannot become the controlling value of Christian mission. A security program motivated by love does not exist merely to keep Christians safe. It seeks to lower their vulnerability so that those called by God can go to dangerous places and thrive there.

At the same time, calling does not eliminate responsibility. Calling should increase our commitment to wise preparation and care. Mission leaders have a responsibility both to advance the mission and to protect those entrusted to them. Calling and care are not competing priorities; they are complementary responsibilities.

Faithful risk therefore rejects two opposite errors. On one side is fear-driven risk avoidance that makes personal safety more important than gospel obedience. On the other is reckless risk-taking that spiritualizes negligence and calls it faith.

Risk management rooted in objective faith rejects both.

It recognizes the danger, counts the cost, prepares wisely, mitigates what can reasonably be mitigated, accepts what cannot be removed, and then obeys.

Friends, the Great Commission demands risk. We will never see every language, people, tribe, and nation worship Jesus Christ apart from faithful men and women willing to accept that reality. But what matters is how we risk. Our obedience should honor the Lord not only in our willingness to go but also in how faithfully we steward our time, resources, opportunities, and lives as we go.

Faithful risk is not safe Christianity.

Neither is it reckless Christianity.

It is eyes-open obedience.

It is courage informed by wisdom.

It is prudence without fear.

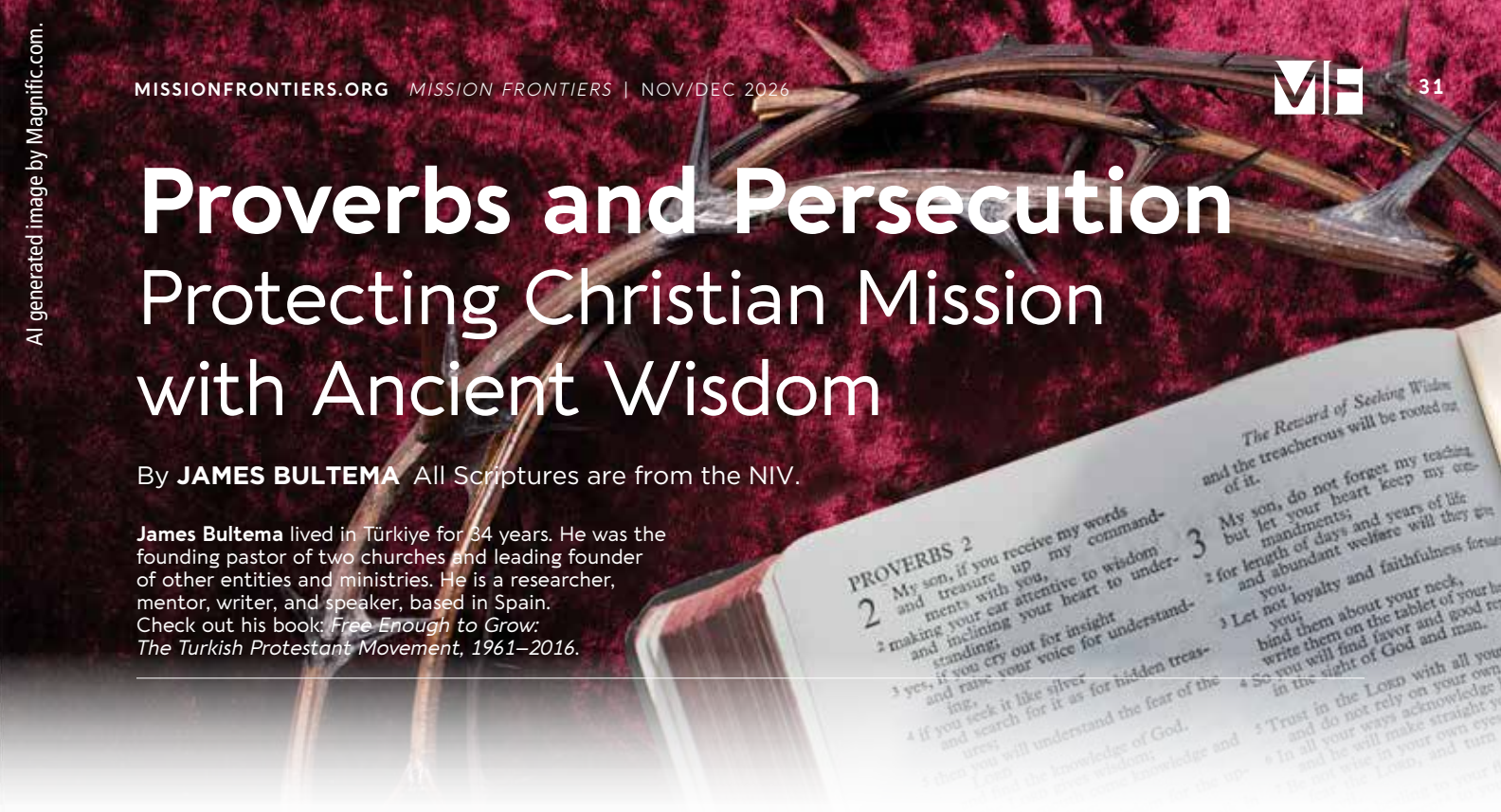
It is preparation without presumption.

It is accepting the risks inherent in God's call while faithfully managing those risks so we can keep going wherever the Lord sends us.

That is objective faith.

And that is faithful risk.

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Proverbs and Persecution

Protecting Christian Mission with Ancient Wisdom

By **JAMES BULTEMA** All Scriptures are from the NIV.

James Bultema lived in Türkiye for 34 years. He was the founding pastor of two churches and leading founder of other entities and ministries. He is a researcher, mentor, writer, and speaker, based in Spain. Check out his book: *Free Enough to Grow: The Turkish Protestant Movement, 1961–2016.*

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you" (Prov 4:6).

One of the most personally influential books that I have read of late is titled *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*.[1] The authors address a variety of human-generated problems, such as eroding democracies, exploding hostilities, and escalating inequalities, but they do not address the pervasive problem of religious persecution. They argue that the answer to the problems that they identify is neither more information nor new innovations but rather *phronesis*, or practical wisdom. *Phronesis* is used in tandem with *sophia* where we read, "God gave Solomon wisdom (*phronesis*) and very great insight (*sophia*), and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore" (1 Kings 4:29). I found myself readily agreeing with the editors' argument, and yet I was left with a question that stuck in my mind like a burr on my pantleg: Why not apply wisdom to the problem of religious persecution?

This article is a further attempt to do this. My first attempt resulted in a chapter titled, "Wild Wisdom and Misconstrued Mission: Protestantism and Its Persecution in Turkey, 1961-2025."[2] In this article, I focus mainly on *phronesis* (or, again, practical wisdom) as a means of protection against the multifaceted face of religious persecution. In essence, I suggest that, through the protection of practical wisdom, Christian mission can be preserved and the plausibility of its message enhanced in potential and even actual persecutive contexts.

Common Missionary Stances toward Persecution

During my 34 years of not only laboring but also researching in Türkiye, I have discerned three common missionary stances toward the ever-present threat of persecution that missionaries have encountered. First, some missionaries adopt a *persecution-prompting stance*. It is as if these missionaries, apparently filled with the spirit of boldness, function in the country with their fists up, so to speak, ready to do battle for the Lord. Of course, these missionaries do not interpret their demeanor as such, but the Muslims among whom they work tend to view them as such. They are essentially seen as, "Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before."

1 Robert J. Sternberg, Howard C. Nusbaum, and Judith Glück, eds., *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

2 James Bultema, "Wild Wisdom and Misconstrued Mission: Protestantism and Its Persecution in Turkey, 1961-2025," in *Religious Persecution: Perspectives from Theology and Missiology*, ed. Christof Sauer and Robert Lilleaasen (Bonn: VKW, 2025), 417-434.

Anonymously, let me give you two examples of this stance from among my acquaintances. The first had the habit of openly preaching the gospel in Türkiye's public squares. Consequently, he was in and out of jail several times and deported from Türkiye repeatedly and, finally, permanently. The second had the passion of distributing New Testaments and other Christian literature wherever he went. He, too, was jailed repeatedly, but that just seemed to embolden him all the more. As one of his final free acts in Türkiye, this man altered the nation's flag, replacing its single white star with a single white cross, and he then posted the altered version of the revered Turkish flag on the internet. Needless to say, it was *outside* Türkiye that I interviewed these two men for my research.

Second, some missionaries adopt a *persecution-proofing stance*. It is as if these missionaries go into hiding and hardly ever come out. You may kindly think such a missionary stance to be rare; however, I could give you several anonymous examples of missionaries who tend to be paralyzingly cautious regarding their purpose for living in Türkiye. One acquaintance of mine has lived in the country for 40 years, but, to the best of my knowledge, he has neither been involved in the life of a local church nor has he led a Turkish person to the Lord. He and I had a mutual businessman friend who once said to me, regarding this missionary, "He is on a decades-long vacation, financed by his gullible supporters in America." Instead of being sensible risk-takers, such missionaries often end up being risk-dodgers.

Third, other missionaries adopt a *persecution-protecting stance*. These missionaries seem to have the uncanny ability, at times anyway, to know when to seek refuge and when to engage in work. They personify prudence in this regard. Last year, my wife and I were suddenly coded; the Turkish government banned us from reentering Türkiye.[3] Because of our having had permanent residency and significant investments in the country, we were thought to be safe. Thus, some missionaries reacted with alarm to the news of our coding, saying or writing to me, "If you and Renata are now being deported, then none of us is safe."

3 The reason for our entry-ban codes from Türkiye's Ministry of Interior was never shared with us.

As a result, one of the thriving ministries for youth that my wife Renata and I had started in 1997, Olive Grove (OG), had been deemed too risky to continue, and the leadership team decided to end the ministry. However, from among the 200+ registered youth for the upcoming OG season, there arose an outcry, which prompted one woman and a few other members of the leadership team to devise an alternative plan. "Let us carry on OG in a slightly different form," they said, "we won't even use the OG name." With our blessing, they came up with the name Fake OG, or FOG for short, and they boldly organized an incredibly successful 2025 FOG ministry, with about 80 participants, who all ended up being protected and pleased.

This particular woman and those working with her proved to be incredible! It is not that they were persecution-prompting in their demeanor, or that they were ignorant of an apparent need to seek refuge and hide behind the rocks of wisdom. Rather, this woman and those working with her perceived the prudence of using those same rocks of wisdom as platforms for ministry.

In summary, then, three common missionary stances toward persecution and the possibility thereof are persecution-prompting, persecution-proofing, and, the recommended stance, persecution-protecting. But how can missionaries develop a persecution-protecting stance?

Drawing upon Ancient Wisdom to Develop a Persecution-Protecting Stance

Missionaries can develop a persecution-protecting stance by procuring and practicing *phronesis:* practical wisdom. The biblical book of Proverbs is, of course, a treasure chest of ancient wisdom, including wisdom regarding protection. Many such proverbs speak of God's protection of his people; for instance, "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Prov 18:10). However, the truth of God's protection of his people is not the main interest of this article.

Herein my interest pertains to the protection that wisdom and prudence afford a person. These words are often used synonymously, although they refer to

slightly different concepts. The more familiar Greek word *sophia* has more of a mystical flavor; it relates to conceptual reasoning with regard to universal truths, as well as to the divine *logos*. *Phronesis*, or prudence, refers to practical, sensible, even clever day-to-day living. We find these words paired not only in 1 Kings 4:29, but also in Proverbs 10:23: "A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes, but a person of understanding (*sophia*) delights in wisdom (*phronesis*)." The distinction between these two words is also brought out in the English translation of Proverbs 8:12, where they are personified: "I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence." Thus, wisdom and prudence are complementary and concerted.

Proverbs offer numerous wise and prudent sayings about the protection they yield. "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you" (Prov 4:6). "Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner" (Prov 13:6). "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty" (Prov 22:3). The instruction that such proverbs make explicit, a host of other proverbs expand upon. The panoply of proverbs illuminates the invaluable protection that wisdom and prudence provide the practicing recipient.

Other books of wisdom literature add to our understanding of wisdom. Job, for example, struggles to understand the mysterious limits of protective wisdom. His righteous living seems to have done him no good; despite it, his personal suffering is extreme. Since being banished from Türkiye, Renata and I have similarly struggled to understand the mysterious limits of protective wisdom. On the one hand, we meditate upon and gain confidence from promises of Scripture such as, "If … you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent (Ps 91:9-10). On the other hand, our "tent" of 34 years is suddenly torn from us! We co-strugglers with Job can only satisfyingly accept such unqualified promises of God in light of the guiding principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.

The Psalms and Ecclesiastes also enrich our understanding of protective wisdom. Psalm 1 conveys the protective and consecrative wisdom of delighting in and abiding by God's law. This is echoed in Psalm 111: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (v. 10). In Ecclesiastes we read, "Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: wisdom preserves those who have it. … Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city" (Eccl 7:12, 19). Finally, "The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure, for there is a proper time and procedure for every matter" (Eccl 8:5b-6a).

What is the missionary to make of pertinent proverbs and other wisdom literature as it applies to protection, particularly when encountering the growl or teeth of persecution? Specifically, each missionary would have to discern specific applications for him or herself. However, the body of biblical wisdom literature, as a whole, suggests that the risky ventures of Christian missionaries can benefit greatly from its teaching. Hand in hand, wisdom and prudence can both protect and augment the missionaries' service and message inherently, but especially in potentially persecutive contexts.

Conclusion

In this article, I have furthered my attempt to apply wisdom to the problem of religious persecution. Although I have implicitly generalized my argument, my experience and examples have arisen from within Türkiye. Yet, religious persecution antagonizes Christian mission in numerous countries and regions of the world. Wisdom can help to change that. Love wisdom, and she will watch over you.

Another book that I read recently is *Ending Persecution: Charting the Path to Global Religious Freedom*.[4] However, as worthwhile as the book is, the author does not appear to reflect upon ancient wisdom at all in his charting of the path to global religious freedom. On the contrary, his last chapter, "New Approaches for New Results," only looks ahead. But must we focus exclusively upon the new? I do not think so. In our pursuit of the new, let us not neglect to probe the wisdom of the past.

4 Thames, H. Knox. *Ending Persecution: Charting the Path to Global Religious Freedom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2024).

Book Review: *The Sending Shepherd: Leading Churches to Disciple All Nations*

By Denny Spitters & Matthew Ellison Review by **ERIK MEBERG**

Erik Meberg is regional team co-leader for Barnabas International providing pastoral care and leadership development for global workers and national leaders serving among the least reached. He is currently working towards his doctorate at Erskine Seminary.



David Platt has famously said that the unreached are unreached for a reason, all the easy ones have already been reached with the gospel.[1]

This tongue-in-cheek quote underscores a harsh reality of the task of world evangelization today, especially as it pertains to the nearly 3 billion people living among the 7,000 unreached people groups scattered throughout the globe. Who will go?

While Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellision's 2025 book, *The Sending Shepherd: Leading Churches to Disciple All Nations* does not specifically address the topic of risk per se, it does speak to the problem of missions mobilization in American churches. The authors' heart is to see the churches in the United States once again take seriously the Great Commission call to send people to the "gospel Sahara zones" where there is no active Christian witness.[2] They see this as the rightful response of all faithful churches.

Spitters and Ellison wrote *The Sending Shepherd* as a joint effort between two respected mission organizations: Pioneers and 16:15. Together they commissioned the Barna Group to conduct new research of American pastors on their attitudes and perspectives towards global missions. This book represents both the findings of that survey as well as their counsel to the church in America on how to proceed. *The Sending Shepherd* is designed to help church leaders honestly assess where their churches stand in relation to God's global mission and to provide practical, encouraging steps to mobilize their congregations for meaningful engagement in the Great Commission.

The book itself is short and easy to read (only 133 pages with generous spacing and margins). The authors' intent seems to be to make the material readily accessible and digestible to busy pastors. As such, it is not an academic work and is lacking in footnotes and cross-references, as well as any framework for deeper missiological dialogue. Spitters and Ellison do open their book with a glossary of their key terms such as missions versus mission versus missional.

The Survey Says...

In the first section of the book, the authors lay out the major findings of the Barna research, grouping the results as five main challenges and five key strengths. The five challenges that emerged from listening to American pastors speak about the state of mobilization are: 1) missions is rarely preached in churches today, 2) the definition of missions is confused and diluted, 3) churches prioritize local outreach over cross-cultural missions, 4) pastors do not feel equipped to talk about missions, and 5) missions success is measured broadly but not strategically. Spitters and Ellison expound on each of these statements in this section.

Next, they identify five key strengths present in the American church that could help foster future missions mobilization efforts. These include: 1) pastors have a strong passion for the Great Commission, 2) missions is regarded as a core biblical mandate, 3) outreach and compassion ministries are esteemed, 4) financial

1 Platt, David. *Don't Hold Back: Leaving Comfortable Plans for the Radical Will of God* (Multnomah, 2023), 114.

2 Spitters, Denny, and Matthew Ellison. *The Sending Shepherd: Leading Churches to Disciple All Nations* (Sixteen:Fifteen, 2025), 4.

support for missions still exists, and finally 5) pastors hold decision-making ability to influence change. In each of these strengths, the authors cite numerous helpful statistics from the survey.

The most fascinating conclusion that emerges from the data is the gap that exists between pastors realizing that the Great Commission is a central mandate for all believers and yet the lack of action steps toward accomplishing it. For example, 98% of pastors agree that the Great Commission is a mandate for all Christians,[3] yet only 22% teach on missions![4]

What Next?

The Sending Shepherd is Spitters and Ellison's attempt to close that gap through concrete steps, motivational teaching, and inspirational testimonies. In section two, the authors present their response to the problem facing American pastors. The authors believe the core problem facing the church is one of mobilization. In the closest they come to a thesis statement, Spitters and Ellison argue, "[W]e are suggesting that to be a healthy disciple of Jesus Christ, we cannot marginalize what is central to Him. Missions is vital not only for reaching the world, but also for the health and obedience of the Church."[5] Integrating the Great Commission into the local church is essential for a healthy church. They use Acts 13 and the church at Antioch as a model for how a church can integrate missions into their local congregational life.

In section three, the authors write their final pleas that are the most direct and missiological. In chapter 9, Spitters addresses why it is still important for the American church to be sending cross-cultural missionaries to the unreached. In chapter 10, Ellison turns to Revelation 7:9-10 and gives not only a picture of the future heavenly worship around the throne but a prophetic warning and invitation. "In the end, we will have no justification for our neglect of mission. What we have dismissed as secondary will be revealed as a central concern of God's redemptive plan."[6]

The last section includes several testimonials of pastors and churches who have seen fruit in both their local churches and global outreach. Almost all these stories are from those who went through the coaching and consulting program of 16:15. While encouraging, it was also slightly off-putting as it felt like an advertisement for 16:15's product.

Final Analysis

Overall, I applaud Spitters and Ellison for their tireless work in mobilization and helping American churches fully lean into their Great Commission calling and identity. *The Sending Shepherd* is a much needed and easily accessible book to encourage pastors who are either interested in missions but don't know what to do next or who are new to the idea of missions and wondering why it matters. The research itself is well done and very helpful in giving a realistic picture of where the American church is pertaining to missions mobilization. This alone makes it a worthy resource.

However, in its attempt to be accessible, the book at times comes across as too simplistic or formulaic. The action steps the authors give do not seem to truly answer the deeper underlying question of why the American church is becoming increasingly risk-averse and alarmingly isolationist. It may lie beyond the scope of *The Sending Shepherd*, but more work is needed on understanding why the gap exists in the first place.

In addition, while the audience is very clearly North American pastors and the authors are trying to keep the book short, the result unfortunately lacks depth. For example, when the topic of risk arose in the book, it was primarily defined as "getting out of one's comfort zone" and accepting that getting involved in missions work will be inconvenient and difficult. There was only a passing reference to persecution.[7] If Platt is correct, taking the gospel to the unreached will involve a lot more than merely getting out of our comfort zones. This book would have benefited from more depth on these issues without losing its accessibility.

In conclusion, to accomplish the Great Commission, American churches will need to continue to mobilize and send to the "gospel Sahara zones" of the world. While that may seem less likely on the surface, Spitters and Ellison remind us to not give up hope for what is still the largest sending nation in the world.

3 Spitters and Ellison, 21.

4 Spitters and Ellison, 13.

5 Spitters and Ellison, 39.

6 Spitters and Ellison, 93.

7 Spitters and Ellison, 47.

24:14—"Pursuing movements in every unreached people and place."

The Missing Piece in Pursuing Peace
Redefining Conflict in Missions

By **JEAN COLES** All Scripture references are from the NIV.

Jean Coles, Beyond's Director of Prayer Strategy (beyond.org), served 24 years in Indonesia with her husband, Dave. She is the founder of Freedom for the Captives Ministries (freemin.org) and author of *Becoming Whole* and other resources.

"Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11).

"The most common reason missionaries go home isn't due to lack of money, illness, terrorism, homesickness, or even a lack of fruit or response to the gospel. Regretfully, the number one reason is conflict with other missionaries."[1]

While serving in Southeast Asia, I saw, and experienced, multiple conflicts among missionaries. The most intense conflict our large team ever had was over whether to celebrate Thanksgiving together in a restaurant or home. Stress was high and triggers abounded. Thankfully, we navigated it well, and our unity survived.

Conflict abounds in our world, including in missions. Among the issues: assumptions and unmet expectations, miscommunication and cultural misunderstandings, stress and pressure, comparison and jealousy, power struggles and politics, differences in values and priorities, irresponsibility, insensitivity, sin, mission strategy, and more. A common stressor on our team was differences in raising children. This proved much harder to navigate than agreeing on our mission strategy and priorities.

Many helpful things have been written about addressing conflict. Multiple tools seek to help us identify the role of each party involved. Yet a major contributor to every conflict is rarely mentioned. Recognizing and addressing this factor is the missing piece in pursuing peace. Nowhere is this missing piece more needed than in mission efforts.

1 Paul Akin. "The Number One Reason Missionaries Go Home," *International Mission News* (June 15, 2017). thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-number-one-reason-missionaries-go-home.

Ken Sande writes in *The Peacemaker,* "A conflict generally involves two basic ingredients: people and a problem."[2] This overlooks a third basic ingredient in every conflict: spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:12 states,

> *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

If we don't address the role of spiritual warfare in a conflict, it's easy to assume that the people involved are fully responsible for the problem. For example, if one party is responsible for 20% of the problem, the other party (or parties) must be responsible for the other 80%. Often, both parties are willing to take responsibility for a percentage of the problem, yet continue to dispute who is responsible for the remaining portion. It might be the evil one. A few simple, biblical steps can overcome this missing piece.

Recognize

Conflicts are an invitation to curiosity.

> *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you"* (Jas 1:5).

Recognizing the spiritual dynamics involved is an essential first step in addressing conflict. To facilitate this, whenever possible, encourage all parties involved to pray together and invite God into the conflict resolution process. Help them find and celebrate foundational

2 *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict, 3rd ed.* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 231.

things they agree on, and move toward being on the same side—on God's side and in opposition to evil forces. Together, bind and rebuke any role of the evil one, in Jesus' name. Ask God to lead the process and reveal any spiritual dynamics involved. Pray his peace over these issues.

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 teaches,

> *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Ask God to reveal any strongholds involved, whether they be personal, group-wide, or location-specific.[3] Pay attention to patterns that emerge, such as both parties feeling betrayed or not valued. Be aware of the general context. For example, one party might live in a location with strongholds of division and trauma. Another party might live in a location with strongholds of miscommunication and fear. The combination of these factors can exponentially increase the complexity of any other issues involved.

Recognizing any root issues contributing to, or being triggered by, the problem is another important factor in pursuing peace. Ask God to reveal to each party what root issues might be involved for them. This will often include things each person or group fears or is seeking to protect.[4]

Redefine

Conflicts are an invitation to grow.

> *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"* (Col 3:12).

Encourage each person to invite God into every part of the conflict. Ask him to open their eyes to unseen realities and root issues and seek to understand the other party's (or parties') perspective. It's often helpful for each person or group involved to take turns sharing their perspectives. After each party shares, the other party (or parties) summarize(s) what they've heard. If there are any inconsistencies, the person sharing clarifies and the other party tries again. This process continues until the person sharing feels the summary of their perspective is sufficiently accurate.

Restore

Conflicts are an invitation to pray.

> *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up"* (Luke 18:1). *"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt 6:9–10).

Pray God's kingdom opposites over any strongholds contributing to the conflict, together whenever possible. For example, pray light over darkness, faith and love over unhealthy fear, hope over despair, faithfulness over unfaithfulness, healthy trust over doubt, truth over lies and deception, unity over division, clear communication over miscommunication, trust over mistrust, peace and security over trauma. Find Bible verses to fuel your prayers. Stand on God's promises.

Ask God to restore what was lost and bring more of his kingdom. This part of the process includes addressing root issues, wearing our spiritual armor (Eph 6:10–18), developing healthy boundaries, releasing offenses to God (Matt 18:21–35), and choosing to love and bless others.[5]

Rejoice

Conflicts are an invitation to worship.

> *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"* (1 Thess 5:16–18).

Work together, within healthy boundaries, to resolve the conflict. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Rom 12:18). Leave the rest with God. Wait on him. Worship. Continue to pray for full victory. Know that he is working all things together for good. *"And we know that in all things God*

3 For more information on strongholds and kingdom opposites, see "Prayer Strategy" (ent.freemin.org/prayer-strategy).

4 Wholeness Prayer (freemin.org) gives an excellent framework for identifying and addressing root issues with each person involved in the conflict.

5 Ibid.

works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Add the Missing Piece

Ken Sande's "A Peacemaker's Checklist" states:

> Whenever you are involved in a conflict, you may apply the four basic principles of peacemaking by asking yourself these questions:
>
> *Glorify God:* How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?
>
> *Get the log out of your eye:* How can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?
>
> *Gently restore:* How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?
>
> *Go and be reconciled:* How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict?[6]

6 Ibid., 261.

I suggest inserting an essential first question before this checklist:

Gain spiritual perspective: How can I help everyone involved address the spiritual warfare elements in this conflict?

Add this missing piece to every conflict resolution situation and model.

Conclusion

Conflict is part of life and can be a major hindrance in bringing the good news of the Prince of Peace to those who don't yet know him. Every conflict invites us to learn, grow, pray, and worship as we invite God in and, by his power, Recognize, Redefine, Restore, and Rejoice.

God calls us to pursue peace, including the often-missed piece of spiritual warfare. He is in us and we are in him. He holds the victory. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt 5:9).



Image from Magnific.com.

When Things Look Great—Be Watchful!

By **GREG H. PARSONS**

Greg H. Parsons and his wife have been on staff with Frontier Ventures since 1982. They live in Southern California.

We tend to be impressed by big things. We feel affirmed when a brand we like is liked by others. We want our investments to grow. More importantly, we want everyone to follow Jesus and see our churches grow in him. Usually, we don't fully understand the perceptions behind what we think we want and why.

My reflections here are prompted by reading a fascinating, detailed account of the rise of both the church and the leadership in North Korea. In his just released 751-page book, *Korean Messiah: Kim Il Sung and the Christian Roots of North Korea's Personality Cult*, author Jonathan Cheng chronicles this story in amazing detail.[1]

It describes the mission efforts in the late 1800s which led to the largest churches in Asia at the time. The sacrifice and commitment of these missionaries is profound. Those who first arrived in the 1880s were the early result of a mission mobilization thrust known as the Student Volunteer Movement, which produced commitments from some 100,000 young people—20,000 of whom were sent out to serve around the world, while the rest supported.

In the 1940s in united Korea, there was a surge of churches and new sects. After US General Douglas MacArthur captured Pyongyang, three thousand people packed into the Fourth Presbyterian Church there. It was known as "Jerusalem of the East." But things shifted as power moved into the hands of self-centered leaders who demanded complete obedience. The book describes things that are beyond painful to read. The leader who rose to prominence, Kim Il Sung, had strong family connections with Christian relatives. He saw their devotion and, at first, engaged with them because they were a force that he felt would help him. All of that changed and—it seems—faith and ultimate devotion became focused on Sung. One chapter in the book is "A Cult Without Parallel." Many Christians fled to the South.[2]

If you looked at the church in North Korea before things deteriorated, you would probably be very impressed. The missionaries and church leaders watched God pour out his Spirit and bless them. There are solid, suffering believers there now.

If you live in a place where the church has been established and looks like it is doing well, be grateful but also reflective. It is very easy to complain when we evaluate our churches. And because of my exposure to believers around the globe, I may critique too harshly at times. But we should also evaluate ourselves. I am learning to examine my own faith path and how I am passing that on to my family, community, church, and the world. I wonder: What is it that makes some people pursue the Lord and others not so much? Most of us cannot understand what those Korean believers were going through as the country's leadership shifted from persecution to protection to persecution again. I understand why thousands fled. I feel sure I would have also.

I also wonder what was imbedded in their cultural worldview that allowed so many to turn their affection to a charismatic, iron-fisted leader and treat him like a messiah? The social pressure in a collective society is beyond what most of us can understand—especially in our Western individualistic, freedom-focused culture. Amid the murderous leadership of a whole nation, survival must play into their motivations.

We should all be careful since this leadership mentality can invade any culture, church, and family. It is a part of every one of us since Adam and Eve chose to get God's wisdom in their own way. It is the opposite of the one man who walked a different path, lived a perfect life before God, and modeled the ultimate leadership characteristics of humility, love, and sacrifice.

Which one characterizes leaders in your family, church, business, or country?

1 Cheng is the bureau chief for *The Wall Street Journal* in China and worked in the same role in Korea earlier.

2 If you want to learn more about the growth of the church in Korea, watch the very impressive multi-media presentation, produced by Korean church leaders at the Fourth Lausanne Congress. lausanne.org/video/the-twelve-stones-of-the-korean-church.



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An Unfiltered Look at Furlough

The Joy and Grief of Visiting "Home"

By **IRENE SPRINGFIELD** (Pseudonym) All Scripture references are from the NIV.

Irene Springfield (pseudonym) and her husband have been field workers in North Africa for eight years and team leaders for four years. Their ministry is focused on sharing the gospel with high-identity Muslims. They have three children.

As I'm writing this, my family and I are seven weeks into a nine-week furlough in the US For the last eight years, our family has returned "home" to the US every other summer from our other "home" in North Africa.

It's a gift to be able to return as often as we do—I think of how hard it must have been for my husband's grandparents, who left the US to serve in South America in 1954 and didn't return for seven years. How much would have changed while they were away! Modern travel makes it possible for us to maintain relationships and connections in a way that was unimaginable for previous generations.

Furlough[1] is a critical time of connecting with our family, friends, and support network. It gives our kids a sense of connection and belonging in their passport country. And ideally, it gives the five of us a chance to reconnect with each other, to rest and recharge, and to make memories.

But also... it's really hard.

I think most people reading this understand furlough isn't just a long, all-expenses-paid vacation missionaries take every few years—far from it! That's why our sending organization calls it "home ministry assignment"—they understand there's a lot of work to be done when field workers return to their passport countries—organizing meetings, speaking in churches, and raising support, all while trying to create space for rest and reflection.

Many field workers must stay at least somewhat engaged in their tentmaking roles while they're on furlough as well. My husband and I have participated in several regional prayer and planning calls over Zoom, and we try to stay connected to our teammates, who are currently spread across eight time zones.

The lack of normal rhythm and routine, frequently moving from place to place, and trying to cram in as many meetings, family vacations, and deep conversations as possible, can be emotionally and physically exhausting.

1 Furlough, as it is traditionally known, is also called Home Ministry Assignment (HMA) or Home Assignment (HA) by many mission organizations today, as is noted later in this article.

And then there's the grief.

As we spend time with our friends and listen to them talk about the opportunities their kids have—school sports, summer camps, youth retreats—we grieve for the things our kids have missed out on.

We are tickled to see that our nieces and nephews have grown to tower over us—but we're sad for the inches we didn't get to see.

We celebrate family birthdays and give thanks for the opportunity to be together, but we also mourn for all the special moments we've missed.

Grief was especially real on this visit. A few weeks ago, my grandmother passed away after several years of struggle with various ailments, including dementia. I was so grateful for the chance to visit her, to hold her hand and kiss her cheek, to see the joy of recognition in her eyes. I was so thankful her passing happened to coincide with several family members' already-planned visits, so we could all be together to celebrate her life. But it broke my heart to hear my grandfather say, "She loved you so much. We just wished you lived closer."

> **A lot of life happens while we are away, and as we meet with supporters, we've been very intentional to communicate that this is a two-way relationship.**

I'm so thankful for the stories of Jesus, who was acquainted with all types of sorrow and grief but is uniquely positioned to empathize with those of us who have left home, family, and friends for the sake of the kingdom. What a friend we have in him.

In addition to processing our own grief, we've tried to be a safe place for others to share their grief. A lot of life happens while we are away, and as we meet with supporters, we've been very intentional to communicate that this is a two-way relationship. We want to know what's happening in their lives because we care about them and want to lift them up in prayer.

Our friends had a lot of sorrow to share with us this summer. One friend is in the latter stages of a very painful form of cancer. Another friend recently discovered her toddler has a rare genetic mutation and will most likely need her parents' care for her entire life. Another friend lost a daughter while she was on vacation. And still others—really, everyone—are wading through the everyday sorts of grief that come with being human: fractured relationships, missed opportunities, life turning out differently than they hoped or expected.

It's a privilege to be able to bear these burdens with our community even as they hold out their hands to take on the weight of our grief. It's a beautiful example of what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, *so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God*." We pour out on each other what we receive from the Father.

Even though HMA is full of challenges, of days and weeks where gratitude and grief are twisted tightly together in my gut, it is invaluable to our continued thriving on the field. On the days when life on the field is especially hard, I think of the conversations I've had with our friends, family, and supporters, of their words of encouragement and commitments to pray for us, and it helps me keep going.

A week ago, we had a conversation with my husband's great aunt and uncle. They came prepared with a long list of questions—follow-ups to things she'd read in our newsletters or conversations we'd had on our last visit. They told us they pray for us every morning, and how lately they'd been praying for our visa situation—which has become increasingly challenging for field workers in our region. What a joy it was to share that their prayers had been answered as our most recent visa renewal attempt had not only been approved but had gone much more smoothly than expected!

When things get hard, I will remember their faces, their belief in us, and faith in the One who sent us, and give thanks that the Lord has invited us into this incredible journey.



Before We Ask Them to Go

By **DANNY MINKLER**

Danny Minkler serves with Frontiers in the UK, walking alongside Third Culture Kids, young adults, and those preparing for the field. His work focuses on helping people navigate identity, transition, faith, and life between cultures. substack.com/@dannyminkler

AI generated image by Magnific.com.

I have spent most of my life somewhere between cultures. I grew up as a Third Culture Kid (TCK), spending much of my childhood overseas before eventually moving to the United States. Now I live in the UK, where I work with TCKs, young adults, and people serving in missions.

That path has given me a particular interest in one question: ***Are we actually caring for the people we are asking to go?***

I think about this a lot when I think about Gen Z. There is plenty being written about this generation—that they are difficult to reach, anxious, hungry for authenticity, quick to question institutions, and slow to respond to traditional structures. Some of that may be true. But I wonder if we are sometimes asking the wrong question. Instead of, *How do we get Gen Z to engage with the Church?* perhaps we should first ask, *Do they feel known by the Church?*

People Before Projects

One of the strangest experiences of being a TCK is realizing how quickly people can become interested in your story without necessarily becoming interested in you. *Where did you grow up? Where are you from? How many countries have you lived in? What do your parents do? Where are you serving now?*

These are reasonable questions—even wonderful conversation starters. But there is a difference between being curious about someone's story and being curious about the person carrying it. I have felt that difference in churches, in mission settings, in ordinary conversations. Sometimes I can tell within a few minutes whether someone genuinely wants to know me or has quietly decided I am their next project. It is a strange feeling, especially when you have spent more of your life on the mission field than the person trying to explain missions to you.

But I think this goes deeper than an awkward conversation. People are not projects. Gen Z is not a project. TCKs are not projects. Missionaries are not projects. The person sitting quietly at the back of church is not a project. They are people—and people need to be known before they can be meaningfully cared for.

The People We Send

This becomes particularly important in missions. We are very good at celebrating people who go. We celebrate the calling, pray over them, help raise their support, send them across borders, and celebrate the stories that come back. And we should—the Great Commission matters, the unreached matter, the work of taking the gospel to places where Christ is not yet known matters.

But somewhere between sending someone and celebrating what they accomplish, I think we can forget something important: The person still matters. The missionary who is struggling matters. The young adult who is questioning their calling matters. The TCK who does not know where home is matters. The person who has spent years adapting to everyone else's expectations, and has finally run out of energy, matters.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is stop asking what someone is accomplishing and ask how they are doing—not as a formality, not as a ministry check-in, but really ask. And then stay long enough to hear the answer.

Resilience Is Not the Same as Health

This is something I have had to learn personally. People who grow up between cultures often become remarkably adaptable. You learn to walk into new rooms, learn new rules, learn new languages, make friends quickly, leave them again, start over. Adapt. Repeat.

That resilience can be a gift. It can also become a hiding place. When everyone knows you as the person who can handle change, it becomes surprisingly difficult to admit when you cannot. I have done this myself—written openly about my struggles while being far less honest with the people standing next to me, telling people online that it is okay to need help while privately trying desperately not to become a burden. I suspect I am not the only one.

> The person sitting quietly at the back of church is not a project. They are people—and people need to be known before they can be meaningfully cared for.

Sometimes resilience simply means we have become very good at looking okay. That should concern us in missions, because if we only celebrate resilience, we may accidentally create cultures where people believe they must be resilient enough to never need anyone. That is not biblical community. That is isolation with good branding.

What If We Asked a Different Question?

I wonder what would happen if our starting point changed.

What if, before asking a young person what they believe, we asked whether they feel safe enough to ask questions? What if, before asking a missionary about their ministry, we asked who is caring for them? What if, before asking a TCK where they are going next, we asked where they feel at home? What if, before asking someone what they can contribute, we asked what they are carrying?

These questions do not replace discipleship, evangelism, missions, or the Great Commission. They simply help us remember the people at their center.

Jesus was remarkably good at this. He did not seem particularly interested in treating people as interruptions to the ministry. He stopped. He listened. He ate with people. He asked questions. He noticed people others had learned to overlook. He cared about bodies, grief, shame, loneliness, hunger, and belonging alongside matters of faith. If we want to reach a generation that is deeply skeptical of institutions but deeply hungry for authenticity, perhaps this is one place to begin—not with a better program, not with a better marketing strategy, but with people.

Before We Ask Them to Go

I still believe deeply in missions. I believe in going. I believe in the unreached. I believe there are people around the world who deserve the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.

But I increasingly believe that caring for the people who go is not separate from the mission—it is part of it. The missionary who knows they are loved regardless of their productivity is freer to serve. The TCK who knows they are seen is better equipped to navigate the complexity of life between cultures. The young adult who knows they can question, struggle, and still belong may be far more willing to remain engaged with the Church. And the person who has been taught that their worth does not depend on what they produce has a much healthier foundation from which to serve others.

Maybe that is one of the opportunities in front of us with Gen Z: Not convincing them that the Church has all the answers, and not convincing them to fit neatly into systems that already exist, but becoming the kind of church where people can walk through the door carrying their questions, their cultures, their doubts, their stories, and their exhaustion—and still hear, *you are welcome here.*

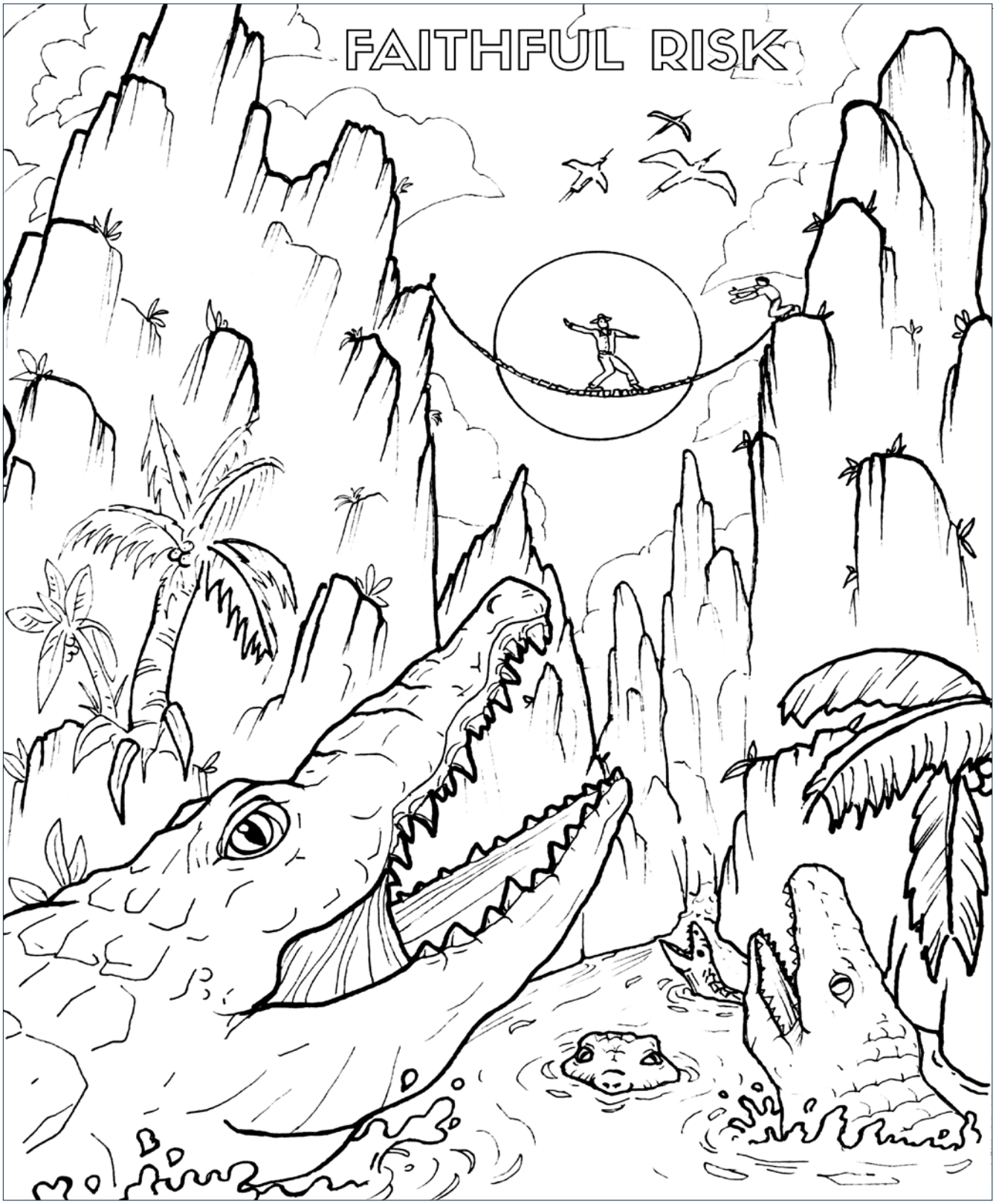
Not because we need something from you. Not because we have identified your potential. Not because we think we can fix you.

Because you are a person. And people are worth knowing.

Before we ask them to go, perhaps we should make sure they know they have somewhere to come home to.

Color the World: Faithful Risk

Kody Friesen is an artist who especially enjoys using Middle Eastern and Persian art forms to highlight the beauty of Jesus. He and his wife Amy are creators who have spent 20 years among Middle Eastern communities. They now live in Canada with their four children. You can find their work at www.akfriesen.com.



River of Life

By **CHRISTINE MESIAS**

After serving for three years in the Middle East, **Christine** now coaches and trains field workers, and enjoys praying and painting.

As faithful risk-takers, those who know the lamb look forward to a future where every tear will be wiped away, and we will experience the fulfillment of all nations being healed and worshipping! This piece was digitally created in Canva depicting scenes described in Revelation (7:9, 21:33, 22:1-2). The image of the lamb as the light, a vibrant textured river of life, trees on either side with leaves for the healing of the nations, and the nations represented as colorful paint blobs with palm branches over their heads. Looking forward to this coming future brings hope amid trials.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. —Revelation 7:9

The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God give it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. —Revelation 21:33

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. —Revelation 22:1–2



Consider these prayer points for each of the following people groups, and perhaps earmark this page to refer back to these suggested prayer points.

- Pray for the specific circumstances that hold these people back from welcoming the gospel and experiencing the fullness of God's love for them.
- Make the Scripture reference your prayer for this people group.
- Pray for spiritual hunger and a desire for the "oil" of the Holy Spirit to guide their communities.
- Pray for the Lord to send loving and dedicated ambassadors of Christ to these people.
- Pray for teams of workers to preach the good news to communities in their various languages.
- Pray for new believers to have mercy and love for those who may come against them for their new beliefs.
- Pray for an unstoppable movement to Christ among these people.

For more in-depth prayer guidance, visit:
joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday

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1 Hindu Teli in India and Bangladesh

Telis once extracted cooking oil but now run small shops or work as merchants. These changes brought modest economic mobility. Strong community ties remain. Many Telis see Christianity as divisive or foreign, making it difficult for them to view the gospel as beneficial or family-strengthening.

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you … —2 Thessalonians 3:1

2 Muslim Teli in India and Pakistan

Muslim Telis traditionally pressed mustard and sesame oil, but many now rely on farming, trade, or small businesses. Though some still press oil, most have little understanding of a loving Creator who offers forgiveness and abundant life through Christ.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. —2 Thessalonians 3:5

3 Ulumanda in Indonesia

Ulumandas live in mountainous Western Sulawesi, an island rich in natural resources. Villages govern themselves, settling offenses through compensation. Bride-prices are high, causing many young couples to elope. Strongly Muslim, the Ulumanda rarely question Islamic beliefs, making gospel breakthroughs difficult.

… and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. —2 Timothy 2:2

4 Larantuka Malay in Indonesia

The Larantuka Malay tongue, influenced by Portuguese traders, is now endangered and not widely taught. Most speakers are Sunni Muslim, with a small Catholic minority. Fishing and rice farming provide limited income on Flores Island, which offers little outside contact or ministry opportunities.

Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. —2 Timothy 2:25-26

5 Byansi in Nepal and India

Byansis (Humlas) live in remote areas, preserving their distinct language and culture. They speak Tibetan-related languages but have low literacy and almost no gospel witness. Strong identity and isolation require intentional, prayer-based outreach to reach them with Christ's message.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you … —Titus 1:5



6 Shifir in Sudan

Shifirs farm and raise livestock in the war-affected Nuba Mountains. Schools and clinics have collapsed due to conflict. Water and medical needs are urgent. Almost all Shifirs mix Islam with traditional beliefs, and very few have ever met a Christian.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. —Hebrews 1:1-2

7 Hadendoa Beja in Sudan and Eritrea

Hadendoa Bejas are pastoralists speaking Bedawiyet and Arabic. Drought and conflict have pushed many into farming or labor. Strongly Muslim, they have almost no exposure to Christ and often view Christians as enemies. Only sustained prayer can open doors among them.

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard … —Hebrews 2:3

8 Turk in Turkey

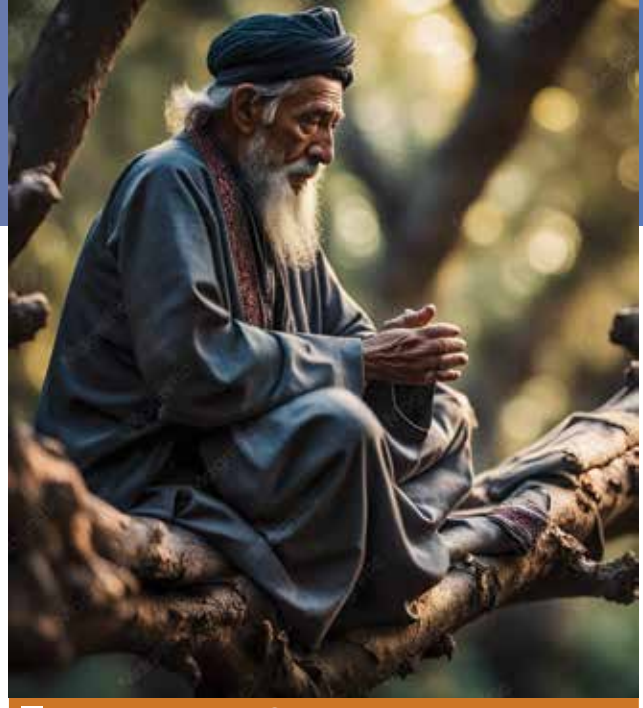
Many younger Turks adopt a secular lifestyle, seeing Islam more as a heritage than a practice. Political and economic pressures have shaped a modern identity emphasizing culture over faith. Despite openness to modern ideas, spiritual hunger remains largely unmet without Christ, and they remain Sunni Muslim by culture and tradition.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil … —Hebrews 2:14

9 Middle Eastern Turkmen in Iraq

Turkmen of Iraq descended from Central Asians and are divided by Sunni and Shia alignments and clan loyalties. Many experience hostility, displacement, or cultural rejection. Their beliefs mix Islam with superstition, and gospel access remains extremely limited.

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. —Hebrews 3:3



10 Pashayi in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Pashayis, once animists and Buddhists, are now nominally Sunni but rely on charms and amulets. Feuds are common, and honor defines social life. Their economy depends on farming and livestock. Accepting Christ brings ridicule and loss of reputation.

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? —Hebrews 3:18

11 Laoseng in Laos

Laosengs (Tarengs/Tariangs) are animists who depend on spirit rituals for protection. Living in northern Laos near China, they farm and carve symbolic drum patterns. Few have ever heard the gospel, and language barriers mean they need outside workers.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. —Hebrews 4:16

12 Tengger in Indonesia

Tenggers live around Mount Bromo. They practice a form of Hindu Dharma centered on offerings thrown into the volcano crater. Tourism and tradition reinforce their religious system. Education is limited, and gospel access is scarce.

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. —Hebrews 5:9

13 Hindu Patwa in India

Patwas are weavers living in northern India with strong clan traditions regulating marriage and preserving identity. Traditional ceremonies and folk Hindu practices, including Vedic rituals, shape daily life. Their region is highly resistant to the gospel; we know of no Christian presence.

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain … —Hebrews 6:19

14 Pong in Laos

Pongs live in extended families and follow strict ancestral rituals. Funerals involve symbolic stone-throwing to appease spirits. Entirely animistic and very isolated, almost none have heard of Christ, and their community structure limits outside influence.

This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. —Hebrews 7:22

/15 Uyghur in China and Kazakhstan

Uyghurs, historically once Christian, are now strongly Muslim. Many in China face severe repression and re-education, while those in Kazakhstan retain more freedom. Their identity is deeply tied to Islam, though understanding is often shallow, and only a tiny number follow Christ.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. —Hebrews 8:6

16 Northern Uzbek in Central Asia

Northern Uzbeks descend from Turkic and Mongol groups shaped by centuries of shifting kingdoms. After Soviet atheism ended, many returned to Islam while others continue to embrace secularism. They need clear gospel teaching to recognize Christ as Savior.

He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. —Hebrews 9:12



17 Southern Tati in Iran and Azerbaijan

Southern Tatis are part of the Talysh people with ancient roots and a distinct language. Almost entirely Shia Muslim, they have very limited gospel resources and few, if any, believers. They need culturally sensitive laborers for effective outreach to them.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. —Hebrews 10:23

18 Massalat in Chad

Massalats maintain strong family structures where men meet in communal clearings and women gather at wells. Bride-price includes building a house near the bride's family. Divorce is common. Few Massalats are open to Christ.

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. —Hebrews 11:6

19 Gazi in Iran

Gazis farm in semi-desert regions using wells and canals but often face drought, forcing many into urban labor such as construction and weaving. With no believers nearby, they have almost no exposure to the ways of Christ.

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. —Hebrews 12:2

20 Hasalaru in India

Hasalarus moved from forest life to plantation work and now labor as agricultural workers. Poverty and low literacy hinder development. They make honey and rice alcohol and worship protective Hindu deities, lacking awareness of a personal relationship with God.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. —Hebrews 13:2

21 Borana-speaking Ajuran in Kenya

Ajurans are Somali pastoralists living in semi-arid regions with seasonal grazing. Conflict with neighbors over pasture is common, though they now permit others to share land. Islam defines their identity, and gospel access is limited in their part of Kenya.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. —James 1:5

22 Southern Uzbek in Uzbekistan

Southern Uzbeks maintain strong patriarchal social structures and village councils. Nearly all remain Muslim, and families discourage evangelism. Very few know Christ, and strong community structures resist religious change.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. —James 1:12

23 Hindu Vaddar in India

Vaddars, traditionally earth-workers, migrate often for work. They face low literacy and low social status. They follow several Hindu deities and need the gospel in simple oral forms that connect with their daily struggles.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. —James 1:22

24 Pandaram in India

Pandarams, a Scheduled Tribe, are herbalists and mendicants with unusual customs like burial of the dead and flexible wedding locations. Though speaking Malayalam, a language spoken by thousands of Christians, they have historically resisted the gospel.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. —James 2:8



25 Patani-Maba in Indonesia

Patani-Mabas practice shifting agriculture and rely on mutual cooperation for community tasks. With limited education and no Christians among them, they remain deeply rooted in Islam and unlikely to hear the gospel without outside workers.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. —James 4:8

26 Ayyarakam in India

Ayyarakams are landowners and village heads, speaking Telugu and Odia. With Hindu traditions and no known believers, they need compelling encounters with Christ to recognize Him as the one true God rather than another deity.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead … —1 Peter 1:3

27 Cotabato Manobo in the Philippines

Cotabato Manobos farm using shifting cultivation and face pressure from modernization. They fear losing their traditional languages and beliefs. Social structure is patriarchal, and there is polygamy. Reaching eight subgroups will require multiple teams.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. —1 Peter 2:2

28 Bhulia in India

Bhulias are weavers with distinct marriage customs and origins traced to Odisha. They live in areas with few Christians and tend to resist unfamiliar beliefs. Low gospel exposure keeps them spiritually unaware.

For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you. —1 Peter 1:24-25

29 Hindu Valmiki in India

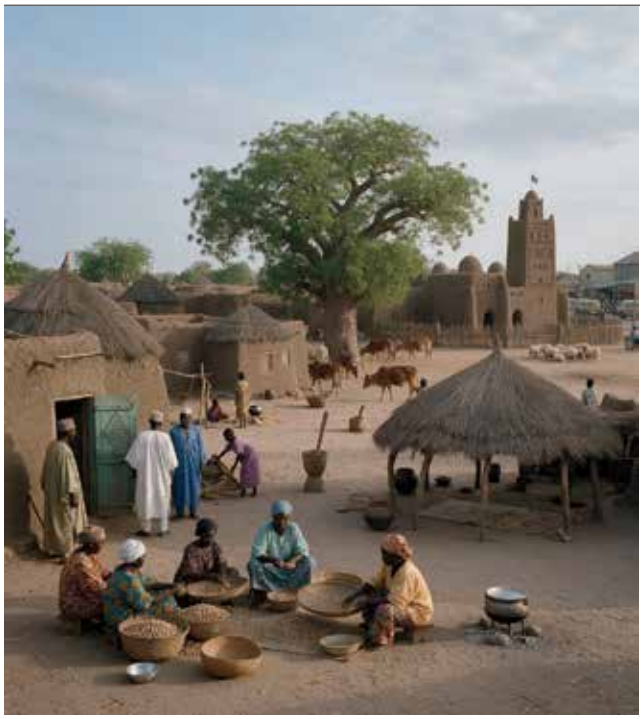
Valmikis, named after the author of the Ramayana, have served militarily but remain in low-status occupations. Barriers to education and healthcare persist, especially for girls. Deep Hindu devotion makes them resistant to the only Savior.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. —1 Peter 2:10

30 Wolof in Senegal and the Gambia

Wolofs are a major West African group shaped by peanut farming and urban migration. Villages center around communal squares with mosques nearby. Islam is deeply tied to identity, with strong social pressure against leaving it.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. —1 Peter 3:14-15



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DECEMBER

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1 Nyahkur in Thailand

Nyahkurs, known as "people of the forest," preserve an ancient root language linking multiple cultures. They face deep poverty and a cycle of borrowing that strengthens dependency. Misfortunes are blamed on evil spirits, and many rely on charms and amulets for protection, leaving them spiritually vulnerable.

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect … —1 Peter 3:15

2 Gaahmg in Sudan

Gaahmgs (Tabis) live in the isolated Tabi Hills, practicing a blend of Islam and pre-Islamic sun worship. They value dreams for guidance, maintain strong cultural identity, and have never been conquered. Their hostility toward outsiders keeps both refugees and potential gospel workers away.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. —1 Peter 4:12



3 Muslim Yadav in Pakistan and India

Muslim Yadavs descended from Hindu Ahirs who converted under Muslim rule. They remain deeply tied to Islam and view the Bible as corrupted. Living in hard-to-reach regions, they receive little gospel exposure and often equate Christianity with cultural betrayal.

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. —1 Peter 5:5

4 Tereweng in Indonesia

Terewengs live on Gili Trawangan, reachable only by boat. Tourism provides income, along with fishing and farming, but imported goods make life expensive. They maintain their own language and traditional religion. There are no known believers and no scriptures available in their heart language.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. —2 Peter 1:2-3

5 Hindu Badhi in India and Nepal

Badhis historically juggled, wove baskets, or carved stone grinders. Today many farm, labor, beg, or work as carpenters. They practice arranged marriage, dowry, and suffer unusually high divorce rates, with strict remarriage restrictions. Poverty and broken families create deep spiritual and social need.

By which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. —2 Peter 1:4

6 Hindu Yadav in India

Yadavs are cattle herders, farmers, laborers, and professionals across India. Strong family identity means conversion is seen as rebellion if individuals come to faith alone. Effective outreach requires elders coming to Christ so entire families can follow without social rupture.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. —2 Peter 3:17

7 Gaoli Yadav in India and Nepal

Gaoli Yadavs descended from herdsmen and remain involved in dairy, farming, labor, and professional fields. With few believers among them, they rarely hear about Christ's kingdom or His blessing. Their identity is strongly tied to Hindu tradition.

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. —2 Peter 3:18

8 Logol in Sudan

Logols of the Nuba Mountains speak their own language but use Arabic widely as a trade language. Constant conflict brings hardship, hunger, and fear. Some turn spiritually hungry; others grow bitter. With no known Christian presence, they have no exposure to the hope that only Jesus can offer.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. —1 John 1:5

9 Mpi in Thailand

Mpis fled China centuries ago and were later resettled in Thailand. They now resemble Northern Thai culturally and linguistically, though older generations retain the Mpi language. Almost all are Buddhist with animistic beliefs. No churches exist in their villages.

Whoever says I know him but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. —1 John 2:4



10 Jomang in Sudan

Jomangs (Talodis) speak a fading minority language, with most using Sudanese Arabic. They live amid hostility between Muslim and Christian groups, often perceiving Christians as enemies. This prevents them from hearing or considering the gospel.

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. —1 John 3:10

11 Mekongga Tolaki in Indonesia

Mekongga Tolakis of Sulawesi blend belief in spirits with Islam. A small Christian presence exists but group loyalty and shame-based culture make conversion difficult. Their unity and obedience can become powerful assets if they turn toward Christ.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. —1 John 4:4

12 Hindu Bawaria in India

Bawarias claim Rajput origins but became outcasts after a legendary dishonor. Now marginalized, many hunt, gather, or labor. They retain devotion to Hindu gods and lack exposure to a God who offers relationship and forgiveness.

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. —1 John 5:11-12

13 Gola Yadav in India

Gola Yadavs, part of the broader Yadav caste, have a strong sense of status and connection to cattle. With no believers among them, they need gospel messengers from outside. They must come to see Christ not as another guru but as Savior.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. —2 John 1:4

14 Hindu Gualbans Yadav in India

Gualbans Yadavs historically cared for cattle and sold dairy products. Many now farm, work professionally, or study at universities. Living in regions with few believers, they seldom encounter Christianity, and Hindu tradition strongly shapes their worldview.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting … —2 John 1:10

15 Kolhati in India

Kolhatis, once heroic boar hunters, are now marginalized and nomadic. Their religious practices revolve around transactional offerings for protection and prosperity. Their worldview makes relational faith in Christ difficult to grasp without a patient, compassionate witness.

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. —3 John 1:11

16 Chidimar in Nepal

Chidimars ("bird hunters") live in harsh poverty, working as rickshaw drivers, masons, weavers, and laborers. They value education as a path to better opportunities. Though Bhojpuri language resources exist, geography limits gospel access.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. —Jude 1:24-25

17 Hindu Bansphor in India

Bansphors traditionally split bamboo to make household items but now do varied labor. Denied access to temples, they rely on priests who intercede on their behalf. Living in spiritually resistant northern India, they rarely encounter believers.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. —Revelation 1:7

18 Chenna Dasar in India

Chenna Dasars live as beggars devoted to Hindu gods like Venkateshwara and Hanuman. Some have escaped begging through agricultural labor but remain spiritually bound to deities who offer no relationship or forgiveness. As far as we know there are no believers among them.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. —Revelation 2:5

19 Raute in Nepal

Rautes, once nomadic forest-dwellers, were resettled by the government but lost their land and returned to the forest. They craft wooden bowls and live at society's margins, often mistrusted. With no known believers, they need trusted outsiders willing to bridge cultural gaps in a loving way.

The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. —Revelation 3:5

20 Hande Jogi in India

Hande Jogis raise pigs—an occupation seen as unclean—causing deep discrimination. Living in poverty, they worship deities for protection but experience spiritual bondage. They need dignity restored through learning how valuable they are to God.

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. —Revelation 3:8

21 Ao Biao in China

Ao Biaos, a subgroup of the Yao, preserve flood stories like what we read in the Scriptures. They live in isolated mountain areas, owning good land and surviving through farming. There are very few believers, and their isolation prevents access to gospel resources.

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. —Revelation 3:15-16



22 Lafofa in Sudan

Lafofas in the Nuba Mountains follow Islam while blending with Arabic-speaking neighbors. Lacking Christian resources, they view Islam as Allah's perfect law and Christianity as corrupted, leaving them without openness to Christ.

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. —Revelation 4:9-10

23 Hamar in Ethiopia

Hamars are nomadic herders living in moving camps arranged around livestock. Farming yields are low, and conflict in their region restricts access. Very few believers exist among them, and mobility makes outreach extremely difficult.

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. —Revelation 5:8-10

24 Kudur in Sudan

Kudurs (also called Fandas) live in remote villages of South Kordofan, farming sorghum and corn. They lack schools and clinics. As Muslims, they see Christianity as opposition, making gospel access nearly impossible without divine intervention.

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! —Revelation 5:13

25 Saek in Laos and Thailand

Saeks live along the Mekong River, raising livestock under their homes and farming with monsoon rains. They trade with Lao and Thai neighbors and rarely move to cities. Harsh discrimination in Laos discourages interest in Christianity.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! —Revelation 7:9-10

26 Ganak Brahmin in India

Ganaks are astrologers, consulted for weddings, journeys, and planting seasons. They face aversion to any perceived religious propaganda and see Christianity as foreign. Their Brahmin heritage creates strong barriers to considering Christ.

And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. —Revelation 11:16-17

27 Bidio in Chad

Bidios endure semidesert hardships, hauling water and crafting goods from palm fronds. Though many converted to Islam, belief in spirits remains strong. With no scripture in their language and low literacy, they have little access to the gospel.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. —Revelation 12:7-8

28 Amdang Mimi in Chad and Sudan

Amdang Mimis farm grains and keep livestock but face water scarcity and famine during droughts. Strong Islamic roots and limited resources make accepting Christ difficult. Few gospel materials exist in their language.

And he said with a loud voice, Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water. —Revelation 14:7

29 Samaritan in Israel

Samaritans descended from ancient northern Israelites mixed with other peoples. They retain distinct religious traditions like Judaism but have historically rejected Jesus as Messiah. Their small community lives in Israel and the West Bank.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. —Revelation 14:12

30 Khavar in India

Khavars claim Rajput-origin prestige and follow Vaishnav Hinduism, with shamans mediating before each clan deity. Gujarat's history of persecuting Christians creates fear of exploring the gospel.

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. Revelation 15:4

31 Gongduk in Bhutan

Gongduks were unknown to the world until 1991. They hide their identity, posing as ethnically Kheng, though they have a unique language and culture. Isolated in remote Bhutanese villages, they practice a Buddhist-animist religion.

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful. —Revelation 17:14



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