

Welcome And The Core Tension

SPEAKER_01 0:10

Welcome to the Practical Missions Podcast. I'm your host. Today on the pod, we take a deep and personal look at what it means to live on the field long term, love your host country, be radically changed by it, and then realize when you go back to your passport country that you don't fit in anymore. I'll tell you what, I resonated with so much of what we talked about on today's podcast. My guest today is in Africa, and I'm in the Middle East, very different peoples, very different cultures, but still something so familiar. And I'm so glad I get to share this conversation with you today. I really do have the perfect guest for you, so stay with us.

From First Bible To Surrender

SPEAKER_00 1:11

When I was 14, I saw an advertisement on television for a Bible. And this was before Amazon. So I went to the store and I bought a Bible and I started reading it. And I was convicted over my sin, but I wasn't ready to change. Um, so I read my Bible for five years, and then I went to university in an area very far from where I grew up, and I was further exposed exposed to the gospel there. Going to evangelical churches and being involved in a Bible study. I woke up one day, I was 19, and I said, Lord, that's it. I'm done. Um my own way is not working. You can have me, you can have all of me. That's when my life changed really, really dramatically. Um, within the next three months, I remember going home at Christmas and I was I was totally different. So it was about a year and a half after that that one of my classmates at university befriended me, and she was a believer. She'd grown up in a Christian home and they kind of adopted me as like another kid into their home. So I would spend my weekends there and we'd go to church together and um got involved in a really good, a really good church with a lot of solid teaching. In

2006, my friend went, she went to Europe for for a couple weeks on a mission trip, and she came back and she told me about it, and I remember thinking, that is so awesome. Like I'm so glad for you that you did that. But I I will never do that. I will never go overseas, I will never do missions. Like, that's just not something that I'm gonna do. And then it was just a few years later that I had the opportunity to go on a mission trip as a team leader with some youth. It was on that trip that I I really fell in love with missions, and I remember coming home. We weren't even home yet, we were on the bus home. I said, Lord, I want to go somewhere hard. Send me, send me somewhere hard. And so the following year I went to the Middle East, and again, like God was just really developing that love and that heart for missions. I continued reading about different countries, and there was a country in Africa that I was reading a lot about. There was a lot of turmoil there, a lot of things going on, and so I was learning about it, watching documentaries, um, reading about it. And then one day in my community, I ran into a man at the store. He was looking at pants and I asked him where he was from, and he told me Africa, and I said, Where? And he told me the country. And I knew I knew a bit about that country at that by this time, so I asked him more, and he said, Yeah, yeah, I'm from there. I said, Well, welcome, welcome to our community. And I walked away. I was selling real estate at the time. I was a real estate broker and appraiser. And as I was walking away, not that I heard the Lord, but it was like it was pressing on my heart, go back. This is this is how you're gonna go to Africa. And so I I went back to this man and I gave him my business card and I told him I'd like to learn more about his country, and if he'd like to give me a call and we could we could talk. So a couple weeks went by and he called me, and it was Christmas time. I was having a Christmas party at my house, so I invited him and his household to my home for Christmas,

Finding A People And Moving

SPEAKER_00 4:08

and I befriended their community. So, over the next four years, I went back to his nation four separate times for a month each time. I loved it. I loved this nation, I loved the people, particularly his people group, particularly his area where he was from in the nation. They they just became my heart people. Like I knew I knew that I would live there someday. I didn't think it would be so soon. But after my fourth trip, it was like, if you want to see lasting change here, you you need to live here, you need to be here. So I prayed about it and consulted with you know lots of people. I uh I sold my house and I sold my car and I gave away all my things and I moved. I moved to Africa. Uh so this was this was 2014.

SPEAKER_01 4:51

And what was it like selling your house, selling your car and giving away everything you had?

SPEAKER_00 4:57

At the time, it just seemed like what I was supposed to do. God was calling me to go and I should go. Um, I remember thinking, if anyone should go, I should go. I would, I was young, you know, I was unattached, I didn't have children. It was much easier for me to go overseas than many other people. And, you know, people would ask me, especially my parents, they'd say, Well, what about your ministry where you are? What about all the people that you're helping there? What about the refugees that you are ministering to there? Because my life was very full. My life was, it was very full. It was a good life. It was very, very sweet. I just thought it would be much easier for somebody to step into my shoes here where I am than for them to go overseas. Why why don't I just go? At the

Comfort Shock And Lyme Reality

SPEAKER_00 5:40

time, selling everything, you know, I was already selling real estate, so it wasn't a big deal to sell my house. It pinched, you know, it hurt afterwards. Once I was in my new country and living in a mud hut with a thatch roof and calling work outside and going to the bathroom outside and bathing outside while people are trying to watch you, not having air conditioning, always eating the same things, not having a refrigerator, not having, you know, so many different things to eat at any time. So that's when it there was there was some hurt there. Um, and that was probably the biggest hurt, I think, was my house and just the comfort of that. And you know, how easy life really was as a middle class in a rural part, you know, I grew up in a rural area and just life was just so, just so good. So yeah, so it was it was difficult, not when I was doing it, but later.

SPEAKER_01 6:36

That's fascinating to me. Was there a honeymoon period before you were like, oh no, what have I gotten myself into?

SPEAKER_00 6:44

Yeah, I definitely had a honeymoon period. Um, when I first moved to Africa, I was actually very sick. I had I had Lyme disease and I didn't know it. I was very sick by all standards. Like, had I gone with an organization, they would have been absolutely not. You're not going overseas, you need to figure out what's wrong with you. But I just really felt like like God was calling me to go, even though I was ill. So I'd been ill three or four months, and then I moved to Africa, and then I got I got sicker really fast. And I remember thinking, I need to get on a plane and get out of here, or I'm not gonna walk out. Um, I was having um like RA symptoms. The Lyme was attacking my joints, and I was having a lot of inflammation.

SPEAKER_01 7:28

What is RA? Sorry?

SPEAKER_00 7:29

Rheumatoid arthritis. Yeah. So they they wanted to diagnose me with rheumatoid arthritis, but I was like, no, I'm not accepting that. Anyways, so I went to a neighboring country that is much more developed than the country that I was living in, and I was able to get diagnosed with Lyme there. So I did some treatment and and stayed in Africa for a couple months, but then I realized I've got to go to I've got to go home and see a Lyme specialist. So I did that and then went back to Africa after a few months. So I'm still within my first year, and yes, it was definitely honeymoon. It was definitely like, you know, looking back, I bathed out of a bucket for two years. And several years later, I I I somebody asked me like how long I had done that, and I couldn't believe it was two years. I I had forgotten it was two years because when you're doing it, it it's not so bad. And then there's so many things that I did in the early years that I look back and I'm like, I can't believe I did that. Um definite honeymoon period. Um, but your your body's going through so many adjustments and you're having to make so many decisions. I I formed an organization back in 2013 and I went to Africa underneath that organization because there was no established organization that was going to send a single woman to this area. I that was just not gonna happen. So I had to do it independently. Now, there were a group of missionaries that helped me get established in that first year. They're absolutely wonderful, they're still there. I still have fellowship with them. They're about an hour and 15 minutes from where I am. They helped me get established, and then it was after about one year of making having to make so many decisions on my own and so much troubleshooting and so much problem solving. Within within nine months of moving there, I actually left the place where I was, which was near to those missionaries, and I went to an area where there were no NGOs, there were no missionaries, there were no other white people. And I established a ministry there. And so I remember, you know, still still sick, you know, it getting a lot better with Lyme, but still not completely well. And then going out to a neighboring country

for some medical treatment and supplies and things like that. And I got together with um a girlfriend of mine, and she had recently married, and so it was me, her, and her husband, and we were moving around throughout the city. I remember he was driving, he was making the decisions, he was just like, just follow me and I'm gonna take you around. And it was like, whoa, I haven't had this in so long where I don't have to be the one making all the decisions. These kinds of things that I think that missionaries have to do or or get used to doing, or it's just it's just part of life. You don't even realize you're you're doing them or that they're affecting you so much until you step back or you know, you don't have to do them anymore, and you're like, wow, that that really did affect me.

SPEAKER_01 10:30

The unseen, it just becomes a normal part of life. Of course, I'm making all these decisions, but then when you step out and you get into another context, you're like, oh man, this is actually really hard and this is actually really weighing on me.

Healthier Rhythms For Longevity

SPEAKER_01 10:43

When you look back to all those years ago when you first came out, what do you think you would have done differently?

SPEAKER_00 10:47

I would have ate better. I would have ate better, and I think I would be at a better place even today. So when I first moved there, there were some missionaries already already there, and I was learning from them. I thought the world of them, I thought, you know, these people walk on water, they'd been in, they've been in the country 10 years, and it was like everything they did, I wanted to be just like them. A couple of those things were they only ate meat once a week because the locals didn't eat a lot of

meat, and so I think they wanted to identify with them, and then also to buy our meat, you have to go early in the morning because they kill an animal, and you have to go get that meat before it sits in the sun and it spoils, you know. So, so you have to get up, get out, go and get the meat, and then and then cook it, you know. So it takes a little bit of planning, and you know, you have to get up and go do it. So I I didn't eat a lot of meat in my in my first many years, probably the first six, six or seven years, I didn't eat much meat. And I think I think that was wrong. I wish I wish I'd eaten more and I think I would be healthier today. Second, also these missionaries, they would only go out, they would only go out of our country every five months. And so I wanted to be like them. And in the beginning, I was ill and I was having to go out more frequently for supplies, for treatment, doctor's appointments, whatnot. And I I could never make it to five months. I could just couldn't make it. And so since then, there have been some times when when I have stayed longer than that, but I I try to at least get out of my area where I am every three months. That is better for me. Even if I go to the capital city of our country, um, the capital city is much more developed now than it was 10, 15 years ago. I can get a lot more things, I can do more fun things, I have really good meals at great restaurants, and that's that's really helpful. So those are some things I wish that I could have done differently, like more frequent visits out and then eating, eating better in the early years.

SPEAKER_01 12:42

What advice would you give to your former you? You know, when when when that younger version of yourself was looking at this other missionary family or couple and thinking, I want to be like them. What advice would you give to yourself now about maybe a healthier way to view them and then to view yourself?

SPEAKER_00 13:01

I don't know that I could tell myself anything. We we all do that, you know. Everybody, not everybody, but a lot of people, you

know, put missionaries on a pedestal. And, you know, I did that, I'm guilty of that. You know, we shouldn't put missionaries on a pedestal. Missionaries are just Christians that are sharing the gospel, evangelizing in a context not their own, to a language and a people group not their own. That's it. That's it. There's nothing, there's nothing else. But of course, when you see people, I mean, even other missionaries that are maybe in the city or maybe they're in a neighboring country that's not so difficult to live in, they even put us on a pedestal and they've been on the field 20 or 30 years. So we all kind of do it. I think, I think a lot of it is you you you just have to live. You know, looking back, what I had to learn so many things by trial and error. Wasn't like mentored, you know, because like even those missionaries that were there, they were of a different denomination than I was. It was just, you know, they they gave me some good advice, some good information, but I really I had to learn the language, I had to learn the culture on my own and just really learn the hard way.

SPEAKER_01 14:10

Yeah, it sounds it sounds incredibly hard. I think, you know, when I first uh joined the field as well, I kind of had those impressions. There were some people on the field who everybody looked up to them and they seemed amazing, and I wanted to be just like them. They were the hardcore missionaries, you know, and we wanted to be the hardcore missionaries like them. We even called ourselves HCMs, you know. And looking back, I think like, man, I'm a different person. I'm a totally different person than those people are, and God wants to use me as as I am with all my character differences in different ways. But but you are right, like those are just things we you know. If somebody would have told me, if I would have come from the future and I would have said, hey, look, uh, don't fall into the trap of trying to be like them, I probably wouldn't have listened to myself anyway, and just would have gone along with it. But I resonate with this being kind of left alone to yourself. When I was uh first in the Middle East,

we were kind of dumped, we were dumped off, me and this other guy, we were dumped off at a hotel in the entire district of a city of six million people or whatever it was at the time, and we were told, okay, you know, like go find a house to live in, and we wandered around like having no clue of the language or anything. Then we had to figure out how we were gonna study the language, and I really felt like I was reinventing the wheel. There was another uh missionary couple in our city from a different organization, and I tried to get them to mentor us and they wouldn't. They didn't have anything to do with us, and so I really felt like, man, I'm I'm reinventing the wheel here. Like, I I don't know how to evangelize, I don't know how to share the gospel with a Muslim, I don't know the right language to use. And I kind of did feel isolated, and I felt so thankful. There was a few people in a in uh in different cities who would, you know, every couple months would kind of take me out and help me answer some of my questions. I really felt thankful for those people.

SPEAKER_00 16:12

And I I love advice from other people. Like I'm I'm really thankful for the the little that I did get from from different people. Really thankful.

Boundaries That Keep You There

SPEAKER_00 16:20

One of the things, you know, that the missionary book says is don't build a fence. Don't build a fence around your home.

SPEAKER_01 16:26

Like a literal fence or a metaphorical fence?

SPEAKER_00 16:29

No, no, no, no. A literal fence. Don't build a fence because then people are gonna feel like they can't come to you and that's

gonna separate you from the community. So these missionaries, they had built a fence, but it was like a chain-link fence. Like it didn't, it just kept people. People could still watch them and like yell things at them, but um, they weren't coming through the fence. They they could come over the fence and they did plenty. But, anyways, so when I built my house, I said, I'm not gonna build a fence because that's what real missionaries do. They don't have fences. And the community, the community was telling me, you need a fence, you need a fence, you need a fence, because even if they can afford it, they have fences. They do for security, for privacy. And after two years of not having a fence, and so much, you know, drama kind of spilling into my life because things are just going on in the community. And then people coming to my house, you know, like one night there was a man that came to my house after dark and he was looking for me.

SPEAKER_01 17:28
Terrified.

SPEAKER_00 17:29
That I had a watchman, I did have a watchman, and the watchman entertained him very well. And um, even though I was awake and I was like actually lying down on the porch because it was very hot time during the year when I would sleep outside. So, but he he entertained the guy, and you know, the guy eventually left, but that was that was the last straw, you know, and I built a fence. And I think, you know, we're all different, we all have different needs, we all have different thresholds. And, you know, this was actually another missionary that had said this to me do what you need to do in order to stay on the field long term. You want to be able to stay as long as possible, and so do what you need to do, and that's gonna be different for different people. We all have different capacities for time spent with the locals, as much interaction or contact with the locals as we can have, and that's and that's gonna be different for everyone. So,

so do what you need to do. I knew one missionary, she was in West Africa for man, I don't know, like 15 years or something. And then she was in our country for like 11 years. So, what is that? Like 26 years in Africa total. And she barely let people into her house. Barely. Even us, even other, other missionaries, barely. And that was just that that was one of her boundaries. But and some people would say, well, that's not right, or that's what, but you know what? She stayed for 26 years, and she and and she was really effective. She could speak the language, she didn't need a translator. I mean, she was she she was awesome, and she could stay for the long the long haul because she knew her capacity, she knew what she could handle.

Outsider Forever And Still Known

SPEAKER_01 19:06

That is super interesting. I I really appreciate when people know their boundaries, cross-cultural workers know their boundaries. I'm wondering if there was ever a time, you obviously like I don't look I live in the Arab world and I don't look like an Arab, but I think I can pass a bit easier than you can in Africa. Was there ever a time when you realized, okay, I'm not I'm not an African in an ever and I never will be?

SPEAKER_00 19:36

Oh yeah, from day one. I can speak the language, um, I can learn the culture as thoroughly as I possibly can, but I'll always be an outsider. And I think what when it's most painful or when it shows up the the most or is the hardest is when people have to take sides, when there's a conflict and I'm on one side of the conflict, you know, with with a local, and then my friends, my employees, my students, my whoever has to decide am I gonna stand with me, or am I gonna stand with the person that looks like me, that shares my culture, that shares um my values, my language, um, whatnot, because this culture that I'm in is extremely communal.

And they all know in the back of their head I will not be there forever. I will eventually leave. But their fellow countrymen, the people from their own clan, from their own tribe, will remain and they will need them. There will come a day when they will need them. So even if they know I'm on the side of truth or what is it right, sometimes they're extremely conflicted. And that's when I know the most, I'll never be from here.

SPEAKER_01 20:50

I think for me, it was a relief when I realized I was never going to be an Arab because I was I I wanted to be, I wanted to be like them. I didn't want there to be different. I I wanted to speak Arabic without an accent, I never will. I wanted to speak fluent Arabic, I never will. Uh I wanted to, I wanted to have like all my friends. I wanted to not need Western friends. And the deeper I get into the culture, the more I need Western friends. You know, the more I need people from my own background. I'm more in the culture now than I ever have been, and I feel my need for Western friendships more now than I ever have before. But you know, there was this time when I realized I'm never gonna be an Arab. I'm not an Arab. I'm a Westerner, you know, I can cosplay as an Arab, but I will never be from a collectivist society in my heart of hearts. Right.

SPEAKER_02 21:45

You know, yeah.

SPEAKER_01 21:46

I will never be from an honor shame society in my heart of hearts. I can kind of get in there a little bit, but when I realized that I'll never be an Arab, I actually felt a bit of freedom. Okay, it's okay for me to be. A westerner. It's okay for me to not be 100% an Arab. And I felt I felt a bit of relief, even though it's challenging, you know, when you are just constantly in the outsider category.

SPEAKER_00 22:14

For me, it's not that I feel like I want to like I want to be from them or need to be from them, but that I'm very well known there in the community. I am their white person. I am their missionary. I am I am theirs. They have adopted me. They have given me a name. They have given me a clan. They've given me a family. So I am really theirs. And everywhere I go, I am known, and people will shout my name. And so there is that sense of belonging. I definitely have that sense of belonging. And I think for me, that is enough. It is sufficient. Even if I know I don't truly belong, you know, I know that. And that's fine. But I think that the issue comes in where I also don't feel like I truly belong in my passport country anymore either. So yeah. So if my passport country is blue and the country where I now live is yellow, I am green, right? So I am no longer blue. I will never be yellow, but I I'm mixed, you know, I'm not your typical person from my passport country. And when I come back to my passport country and I see people that have known me all my life, especially, especially those that have known me since childhood, those that have known me since um before I came to Christ, and they look at me and I look like them, and my hair is like them, and my skin is like them, and I am from there and they know me, they know me really, but they don't know that my experiences have changed me. And on the outside, I look like them, but on the inside, I am so different now. We are we are all changing, we are all evolving, but at different rates. So somebody that has been in the community where they were born for their entire lives and they're now 50, 60, 70 years old, they might have worked the same job for 40 years and they might have lived in the same house for 40 years. They too have evolved because life has also shaped and changed them, but not at the same rate as somebody that has gone overseas and had to learn another language and had to learn another culture. Um, that person has changed it so much, way more, obviously. So the issue is when we come back and people look at us and they expect us to think like them, especially Christians, because I think for a long time, you know, and especially right now, there's there's a shift.

Returning Home Changed By Politics

SPEAKER_00 24:37

I don't know if we should talk about this, but we'll try to in a in a broad way. But there's there's a shift in politics. And for me, you know, my politics have shifted over the last 12 years that I have been overseas. And so when I come back, and the people that I was once, you know, kindred with are are no longer, I'm no longer. And so that is an issue for some, you know, for for a lot of Christians, you must believe like them, not theologically, not even when it comes to methodology, but politically. And if you don't, I'm what what I'm going through right now, I mean, there are people that are willing to break fellowship over politics. And that has been extremely, extremely painful because they cannot understand how you can not, you know, share my views or believe like me, or believe like you used to believe. But the fact is that living overseas, even if I weren't in Africa, even if I were in, you know, a Western European country, you would think wouldn't be that much different. But but these things they they shape us and they change us. And that's that that's what makes me realize I'm I'm not like I was when I left this nation 12 years ago. And I will never be like the nation, like the people of the nation where I now live. So I'm I'm this different color. I have um, I'm looking at the world through a different colored lens. And I guess, you know, if people are listening that aren't that aren't workers, but love workers and care for workers, to understand that and to and to be okay with that, that that people change. And that's okay as long as we are united with the gospel and the mission. That that is what matters. Yeah, just to be loving and gracious and and merciful.

SPEAKER_01 26:24

It sounds like there's some hurt behind those words.

SPEAKER_00 26:28

Yeah, yeah, there's some some fresh things that have happened just in the last few months. I I've lost a board member and it's uh it's been really painful, and it has not been over theology, it has not been over nothing like that. Um, it's because I'm no longer who I was when I left, and opinions have shifted and politics have shifted. Yeah, it is, it's it's hard.

SPEAKER_01 26:48

I think there can be an idolatry when it comes to politics and religion, especially uh in certain countries, certain cultures deal with it more than others. And yeah, it can be a kind of syncretism between the world and the church, bringing the two together. But when you're in it, you don't notice it. They get so connected. The message of the gospel or the message of the faith and politics gets so mixed together that the person doesn't even realize that what they're talking about is politics and not religion. Right. And that's one well, that's one thing, that's one blessing about being able to be out of your home country and in another context and culture. Sometimes I come back to my home country and everybody's talking about every couple years, there's like a new thing everybody's talking about. I usually I just don't care, and I love it. You know, everybody's concerned about this topic, you know, this is the biggest topic. And I'm like, man, when I'm sitting across a table from an Arab Sunni Muslim trying to explain the gospel in Arabic, this topic that you're so concerned about is the furthest thing from my mind. You know, when I when I've run out of water in my house and I'm like, oh no, it's three days before my water comes. Uh this topic that you guys are so concerned about is the is the furthest thing from my mind. And I think it's kind of refreshing uh to just kind of be out of the bubble a little bit sometimes.

SPEAKER_00 28:22

Yeah. In in the country that I now live in, in Africa, they they've seen pictures of the flag on the altar in in my passport country in church. And they can't believe that the flag of the country would

be would be on the altar. It's just not a thing, right? It's just not a thing. Um, and in this country, for many people, they wouldn't even think of it. It wouldn't be a thought. Like that it doesn't even cross their mind.

SPEAKER_01 28:49

I wonder when you think about uh just how you've changed, you've you've mentioned politics. Uh are do you do you notice any other ways that you've uh changed when you go back to your passport country and you think, wow, I'm a very different person than I was before?

SPEAKER_00 29:02

Um, yeah. And my son the other day, he said to me, you know, he really wants to be back. And he said to me, what is so interesting about this place? And he said it to me in his mother tongue, except for the word interesting, because there's no good word for interesting in his mother tongue. And it just, it just hit me. It was like, my son, like I I feel you, I I understand. And I think, you know, in in Africa, every day is filled with so many challenges and um so much problem solving and so much um troubleshooting. And if it's not my own problem, it's people coming to me with their problems. And so we're constantly trying to solve problems, real, like real, everyday life problems. And then I come back here, you don't have that. You know, whatever problem you have, it's pretty easy to solve. Like if anything gets broken, you're gonna call whoever needs to come and fix it and they're gonna fix it. I don't have to try to figure it out because there's no one else to do it, right? So I find it a bit dull here now, honestly. Maybe not as challenging. The the country where I live, um, the people there are wonderful storytellers. They love to tell stories and they do it well. You know, we can talk about really such interesting things, especially among the more educated population and those that have traveled a bit, and you can just have really amazing conversations. And I love to hear about the old days and I love to hear, you know, their stories of the war and

these kinds of things. And then you come to my home country and the conversations are so different. Um, we talk about mowing the grass and we talk about cars and we talk about health issues, um, you know, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot. So uh, and I find it's harder to have really interesting conversations here. Not that, not that you can't and not that I don't ever, but I think I think it's just a bit harder. I think that uh in my passport country, people are not naturally storytellers either. And so it's harder to get those stories out. You know, you really gotta dig for them. Those are some of the things that, yeah, I miss when I am back in my passport country.

SPEAKER_01 31:09

It's so interesting. I always I always think like when whenever I go back to my home country, I always think I've become such an adrenaline junkie living in the Middle East.

SPEAKER_02 31:19

Yes.

SPEAKER_01 31:20

When I go back to my home country, it's like the adrenaline just like goes down and everything's so easy and simple. And even like, you know, like crossing the street is hard here. You know, it's like, am I gonna die? Just crossing the street. And uh yeah, so I always think like, man, the adrenaline, the normal adrenaline levels, I'm sure living where you are, living where I am, are so much higher than they are in the West. It's probably not good for our bodies over the long run, but it's certainly something I feel when I'm back in my home country. I think like, whoa, just life is slower here. We praise, we praise God for all different circumstances.

Needs At Your Door Every Day

SPEAKER_01 31:58

I wanted to ask you, you mentioned needs, and I really wanted to ask you about that. I think one of the things that is so difficult, it never gets for me, it kind of never gets easier. I'm learning how to deal with people's needs. When people come to me and ask me for needs, I had probably a 65-year-old lady, I don't know how old she is, she called me up uh two days ago crying and said, I have no one, I have no one, I can I have no one left. Please help me. I'm in such need, I'm in such financial need. The person she was working for, she was cooking for somebody, and they didn't pay her the last like half month, and she was banking on that money coming in. And I didn't know what to do. And I'm sure uh you have to deal with the ask all the time. And there the the needs are real. That's the thing. They're real needs. You know, have you do you know Maslow's hierarchy of needs? It's like a pyramid of needs, and at the at the top of the pyramid is self-actualization, you know, and self-esteem. And at the bottom, it's like food, rent, safety, you know, just like the basic needs that you that you have. And here it's like everyone's at the bottom of the pyramid. What have you learned about dealing with people's needs and how you say yes, how you say no?

SPEAKER_00 33:12

In the country in which I live, the needs are very great. I I will have people at my door multiple times a day asking for different things. Sometimes it's things, small things like sugar and tea. And I can generally give those things. Um, they'll also come to me for medicine or like being doctored for you know various smaller ailments. Um, so these things I can I can easily meet. Now, I I don't give money. Um, generally, I I almost never give money. Alcoholism is a huge issue within the community, and so often when people are asking for cash, it's gonna go towards towards that. Now, sometimes people come to me and I remember one time a man came with two kids, and he's like, We are like traveling to the north and we don't have any food. And it just so happened I had some bread and I had some peanut

butter and I gave it to them, and they sat down and they ate it right there. Like they were legitimately hungry, and I was like, wow, like this was a legit, like immediate need. And I was thankful that I could meet it. Now, there was one time I had just come back from traveling, I had not been home. I got home and somebody met me at the door, and they're like, I'm really hungry. And like I said, I almost never give cash. And because I just got in home, I had no food, I had nothing to give him except cash. So I gave cash. And later on that day, my neighbors came to me and they're like, you know, I saw that guy and he was hammered in the market. You know, so he he did. He he went and drank it. It makes you very cautious about giving, but it you also gained some wisdom as well. I'm more likely to give to people that I know that I have a relationship that I can follow up with if they're lacking in something because, well, maybe they weren't careful with their finances. Maybe they they didn't cultivate, you know, they should have been working when they weren't working. Well, we can talk about those things, you know. So um I try to help the people closest to me, and then people further away, I'll probably give food if that's what they're asking for. Like if I'm going through the market and people are like, give me some money, I'll say, I can't give you money, but I can buy you a meal and let's sit down or take them into a restaurant and here's a meal. You know, that's what I can do. So, yeah, it takes wisdom, it takes establishing boundaries, and you just do the best you can by the grace of God.

SPEAKER_01 35:29

I say I think for me, this is one of the biggest issues I have. So many needs all the time, everywhere, real needs. One of the things I have to remember is that these people didn't die before they met me. They're not gonna not die. Now, I I'm not uh I'm not the savior. And also, I don't know what it's like for where you are, but in the where I live, it's a tribal collectivist society. So if they don't get it from you, they're gonna probably get it from somebody else.

SPEAKER_02 35:58

That's right. Yeah.

SPEAKER_01 35:59

Maybe it's just easier trying to get it from me. They have other people, you know. They have a brother in Dubai or an uncle in Canada as well. They can also ask, uh, and maybe those people will help them. I guess where you live is a it's collectivist, is would you call it a power fear culture as opposed to like honor and shame? Or is there giant overlaps there?

SPEAKER_00 36:21

There is the idea of honor, shame. Do not shame the family, do not shame the clan, that those kinds of things, um, which I think are actually very helpful to curbing um bad behavior. Power, fear, I mean, I mean, definitely. People do respect authority. You know, the big man is definitely respected and you show honor to him, whether he's deserving of it or not.

SPEAKER_01 36:44

When it comes to faith, is there like this idea of trying to appease? I don't know, is it an animistic? How do you say that? What's the kind of general religious atmosphere of the like the village or the place where you serve?

Syncretism And Gospel Clarity

SPEAKER_00 36:58

The tribe that I work with was an animist tribe. And so God is in the sun, God is in the trees, God is in the animals. So they're worshiping the created rather than the creator. Now, Catholicism has been there in the area now for many decades. And so they no longer have their idols. You know, they burn most of the idols. If there's any, you know, witchcraft still going on or animist worship, um, it's hidden. Uh, it's not out in the open. That's in my

specific area. That's not in all the areas. The prosperity gospel has crept in. Um, so so there's a lot of that. Yeah, so that has come from other African nations, and most of the evangelical churches, the Pentecostal churches, would be very heavy prosperity gospel. Um, and there is a lot of syncretism where animism, some idea of evangelical Christianity, prosperity gospel is all kind of mixed together. And then in other areas, it's Islam is mixed in. There's a lot of syncretism, there's a huge need for good teaching.

SPEAKER_01 38:02

What are the barriers for these people in this context to come to faith in Jesus?

SPEAKER_00 38:08

It's very accepted or popular, I would say, to identify as Christian. So most people will identify as Christian, they will go to church on Sundays, but live like the world all week long. Um, so so I think that is the main obstacle right now that we are facing that one must repent and believe. They must turn from their sins. It's not church attendance that will save, it's true faith in Jesus Christ. And so I would say that is that is the main barrier is are people going to church because God is worthy of worship? Or are they going to get a blessing? So if you sit in a church service on any given Sunday, you will hear the word blessing again and again and again. Not all, there are some true believers, but for many, they are going to church to appease God so that He will be happy with them and He will bless them. He will give them what their heart desires. You know, the idea of Christianity is predominantly if you don't smoke, you don't drink, don't sleep with your neighbor's wife, and don't quarrel, even if your husband wants another wife, um, God will be happy.

SPEAKER_02 39:23

Oh boy.

SPEAKER_00 39:24

And you will obtain what you want and you will also go to heaven. This is the idea that we as missionaries are struggling to combat.

SPEAKER_01 39:33

Yeah, no gospel, a gospel-less Christianity.

SPEAKER_00 39:36

Yeah.

SPEAKER_01 39:37

How does living in this context, living overseas, living in a more isolated from maybe good teaching or whatever, how does this affect your own spiritual life and how do you keep yourself healthy over the long run?

Spiritual Health And Real Community

SPEAKER_00 39:51

Being in the word, I think is number one, being in God's word, um, teaching my son, the word of God, prayer. Also, I have many people that advise me, getting together with missionaries as as regularly as possible, even though that might just be like once, twice a month. But I have many people that I reach out to daily, even some that are able to advise on different things, different issues. Thank God for technology and being and being able to do that. Because if it were, you know, even 50 years ago and we were just writing letters, I think it would be much, much harder.

SPEAKER_01 40:24

What about for community in general? What do you do for community? How do you keep yourself from going crazy? Or do or maybe you get enough community from the local people you're with?

SPEAKER_00 40:35

I really do, I do enjoy my local friends. Our watchman is a believer and he's got a wife and six kids, and he has stood with me through thick and thin. He has been so wonderful. And if he wasn't there, I don't, I don't think I would still I would still be there. So I do have that Christian fellowship where, you know, anything that comes up, I can run things by him and he can give advice. And there are others within the community that I've been able to do that with over the course of, you know, 12 years. Early in my time there, I would miss the family that had adopted me. And I would, I would go back to see them and the children especially. Um, sometimes when I'm like, oh, I just need to get out of the house. I need to go do something. I just need to go be around some kids and let them jump on me. And and that has been really helpful and really kind of like rejuvenating. And then also sometimes I'm just tired of talking about malaria. I'm tired of talking about gardens. I'm tired of talking about hunger. I'm tired of these kinds of everyday things. And I'm like, okay, let me go to the city, which is an hour and a half away, and let me go sit down with some uh people from that nation that have lived abroad and you know, know both were worlds and, you know, let's go talk about other things. Or, you know, for for that group of people, also there's nothing that they need from me or expect from me. You know, they're not asking. I can I can just be, I can just be normal, you know, I can just kind of blend in and listen to some stories and laugh. And and so sometimes that's really helpful too. I I'm the type of person I I need to get out. I cannot stay in the house for a week or or more. I need to be out, I need to be traveling, I need to be talking with people. Um so yeah, when I start to get star crazy, I just get out, go see people.

SPEAKER_01 42:16

Over this 12 years that you've been living in, I mean, you love it, obviously, but it for me it sounds like a very challenging place to live.

Staying Power And Closing Words

SPEAKER_01 42:26

Have you ever felt like, man, I don't want to do this anymore?
Have you ever felt like like giving up and uh not going back?

SPEAKER_00 42:32

Oh yeah, yeah. There's been plenty of times when it's like, wow, is this is this the end? Like, am I am I supposed to go home? Is God calling me out? So there's been um a few times when I've really had to wrestle with that, but ultimately he's kept me there. He's he's just kept me there. And I think if I were to come to go back to my my passport country, you know, I I could go back if he called me to do that, I would go back. But at this point, it it's not now. When I moved overseas, I wanted 10 years. That's what other missionaries were doing. And it was like, who could make it 10 years in this place? You had done well. And so I made it 10 years, and then everybody back in my passport country was like, okay, you did 10 years. Are you ready to come back? And I was like, Well, no, not really. I don't really feel like God is calling me back. Um, and the work is not done, and the work will not be finished in my lifetime. I I could stay till 80 and the work will not be finished. So now trying to, we're trying to relocate to another area um within the country. And people are asking, well, how long do you expect to stay? How how long are you gonna be there? I say, well, if you would give me another 10 years, I would stay another 10, you know, and then re-reassess at that point. So I don't know. At this point, it's a day at a time, a week at a time, a month at a time, a year at a time.

SPEAKER_01 43:46

I love it. I love it. I feel like I never want to go back to the West. I want to live here. I I want to live in the Middle East uh for the rest of my life. I pray to God, you know. I pray to God, please let me live here until I die. And my my my thought is that I'm most likely to die by getting hit by a car crossing the street. So it's very likely

that I will be here until I die. Oh man, I it's been fantastic hearing some of your heart and some of your stories. Man, I feel like we've barely scratched the surface. And uh maybe maybe one day we can uh have another conversation again. But for now, thank you so much for being with me.

SPEAKER_00 44:27

Thank you for having me.

SPEAKER_01 44:29

Amen. To that, I really do feel like we've only scratched the surface. I have so much fresh insight, but also so many more questions. So Lord Wheeling will have her back on. But until then, I just want to remind you that it's okay to be normal.