

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

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Good works beautify the gospel



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 **VMissions**

● Editorial

Good works beautify the gospel



BY AARON KAUFFMAN
PRESIDENT

Let's face it. Mennonites have a mixed legacy when it comes to doing good. On one hand, we excel at sharing our resources to help those in need. The recent outpouring of support for victims of the Albania earthquake is a prime example. We raised over \$30,000 in just a few weeks.

On the other hand, we sometimes turn goodness into a set of rules rather than God's path of life. It used to be restrictions about head coverings and radios. Now it might be looking down on others because of the car they drive, the political party they support, or where they shop. Either way, it's legalism.

In another context of legalism, Martin Luther found good news in Isaiah's pronouncement that "our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (64:6). Salvation is a gift, not something we earn. Thank God for the clarity of Luther's insight. If ever we are tempted to see our good deeds as a way to improve our standing before God, salvation by grace alone is a healthy antidote.

Yet some have misconstrued grace as a license for sin. God loves us no matter what, so why even try to be good? Writing in such a context almost a century ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned against this kind of cheap grace. "Cheap grace," he explained, "is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession" (*Discipleship*, p. 44). In other words, cheap grace is denying the seriousness of sin and living as we please.

Costly grace, by contrast, is recognizing the length to which God has gone to save us. In Bonhoeffer's words, "Above all, grace is costly, because it was costly to God, because it costs God the life of God's Son ... and because nothing can be cheap to us which is costly to God" (p. 45).

Knowing the price God paid for our salvation should evoke profound gratitude. Out of an overflow of thanksgiving, we strive mightily and joyfully to do good as God defines it. We also do good because we want others to know the goodness of God. As Jesus said, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

In his letter to Titus, Paul uses a cosmetic image to describe good works. He urges Titus to teach those in his care to practice self-control, kindness, and integrity so that they might "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (2:10) to the non-Christians around them. Of course, the gospel is beautiful already. But when we reflect the goodness of God in our actions, the gospel becomes even more beautiful—and believable—to a watching world.

That's what happened to me. At a crucial point in high school when I wondered whether I even believed in God, it was the dear saints of my home congregation who kept me in the fold. Their lives of service, generosity, and good clean fun made belief in God look not only plausible, but exciting. I decided that if people like them exist in the world, there's a good chance God does too.

May our good deeds intensify the natural beauty of the gospel we proclaim.

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/19 to 12/31/19

Special Projects \$556,019	Special Projects \$508,046
Mission Fund \$294,476	Mission Fund \$280,586
Revenue Total \$850,496	Expenses Total \$788,633

Mission Fund: undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries

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Cover photo: Brent Justice and Ahebwa Johnson repair a lawnmower at the mission compound in Bundibugyo, Uganda, where Brent served as property manager.

Training offered for local *Perspectives* class coordination team

Since 2008, VMissions has been privileged to work with an interdenominational network of local churches and mission leaders to offer the globally recognized *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course in Harrisonburg. The mission of the 15-week course is “to mobilize by educating the Body of Christ in the USA to strategic engagement in God’s global purpose.” It has been an invaluable training tool for both outgoing workers and persons who hope to sharpen their vision for how God wants to activate them locally in his mission. Steps are being taken to plan for a class to be offered again in Harrisonburg in the spring of 2021.

Perspectives MidSouth Regional Director Adam Hoffman will be in Harrisonburg Feb. 20-22. A drop-in breakfast information event will be held on Friday, Feb. 21, 8:00-10:00 a.m. at Faith Community Church (1660 South Main St, Harrisonburg, Va.) prior to a two-day training designed to equip local coordinators and coordinating teams. Interested persons may contact Carol Tobin at carol.tobin@vmmissions.org or visit perspectives.org for more information.



An E³ Collective in Jordan, 2019.

VMissions announces 2020 E³ Collective trips

Consider serving on an E³ Collective this year. The following trips are scheduled:

- **May 8-25: Nazareth and Bethlehem**
Encounter the land of Jesus’ earthly ministry and relive the stories of Jesus as you meet, work, and pray together with Palestinian Christians.
- **July 18-August 1: Amman, Jordan:**
Serve at a soccer camp for youth and work at a local school.
- **August 1-15: Amman, Jordan:**
Participate in a medical fair and clinic with refugees in Jordan.
- **September 5-19: Lesbos, Greece:**
Serve refugees in the Moria camp.

Learn more and apply at vmmissions.org/e3collective.

Jason Showalter joins VMissions staff as Global Ministries Director



Virginia Mennonite Missions announces the hire of Jason Rhodes Showalter in the position of Global Ministries Director,

effective Feb 3, 2020. Jason brings with him 15 years of experience as a cross-cultural worker with a sister Anabaptist agency. His roles included orientation, mentoring, and developing strategic vision with cross-cultural teams.

As Global Ministries Director, Jason will give overall leadership to VMissions’ international and domestic ministries. “We are continuing to align our program with our strategic priority to equip and send workers from anywhere to anyone,” explained Aaron Kauffman, VMissions President. “I believe Jason is the ideal person to help us do that.”

Jason’s responsibilities will include oversight of the international ministries previously carried by Lynn Suter and Carol Tobin, both of whom have indicated a desire to reduce their workload.

Jason earned a Masters of Arts at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in 2002 and is a 1998 graduate of Goshen College. A study-service term in Costa Rica, followed by an internship in Mexico, opened the door for work after seminary with the Shenandoah Valley Migrant Education Program of Virginia and later in Chicago, where Jason taught ESL to recent immigrants. He speaks Arabic, Spanish, French and the local language of the Mediterranean country where he and his family lived for over a decade.

Jason and his wife Carmen have five children: Dara, Lydia, Luke, Elijah and Isaac. They are part of Mosaic of Grace Church, a church plant in the Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Savor: A Night of Chocolate a benefit for Steve Horst and Bethany Tobin, April 3



Come enjoy a spread of chocolate treats to eat and take home with you, as well as live music—all in celebration of the sweetness of God’s unfolding story in Thailand through the ministry of VMissions workers Steve Horst and Bethany Tobin.

Join us Friday, April 3, 7-9 pm at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church (1552 S. High St, Harrisonburg).

Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$8 for children 12 and under.

Dairy and sugar free options will be available. For more information, or to donate your best chocolate confection to the event, contact Horst MST member, Melissa Weaver at melissanweaver@gmail.com.

● What does it mean to “do good?”

Brent and Alisha Justice recently completed a term of service in Uganda, managing a malnutrition program and the property of the health center where they lived and worked. There was much to do and much to learn.



BY BRENT JUSTICE

It happened at the end of one of those days flooded with moments of existential questioning: “What am I doing here? Is what I’m doing even good?” Several attempts at deeply engaging Ugandan friends and neighbors had stalled, ministry initiatives had shrunk, and relationships felt shallow and perfunctory at best—and manipulative at worst.

We had moved to Uganda with the desire and intent to engage the community in Bundibugyo holistically. Yet Alisha was so busy fighting against a corrupt and broken healthcare system, on top of managing inpatient and outpatient malnutrition clinics, and I was so busy managing the mission station’s many maintenance and employee issues that our deep desire for meaningful, gospel-centered relationships seemed to have been left behind.

We were ostensibly doing good work in the community, but the lack of transformative spiritual engagement left us

feeling empty, dissatisfied, and questioning. This desire to see gospel transformation take root began, however, in a startling and unforeseen way: right in the midst of, and in fact, *through*, my brokenness.

We were in the middle of the “hungry season” in Bundibugyo, the dry season between cocoa harvests where there is no income, and when—because all available land typically goes to planting cocoa trees—there is no garden either. It had been a long and wearisome day of fielding endless requests, needs, and demands for assistance when yet another knock came to our door. I was right in the middle of some “important” task, and upon going to the door, my thinly veiled frustrations at the numerous interruptions throughout the day came spilling out.

I lost the veil completely. I was rude, short, and inhospitable to a good neighbor and friend who came by to greet me. Because of my behavior, he was quickly and obviously wounded and soon left. After he left, I tried to brush aside the guilt and conviction I felt. I attempted to justify my anger at being interrupted, because, of course, I was so busy trying to “do” ministry—to do good. But, I had lost sight of the real purpose of ministry, and had fallen victim to this most dangerous distraction of ministry: busyness. Instead of valuing others and glorifying God by showing, telling, and bringing others closer to Christ through relationships, I had over-prioritized managerial tasks, project completion, and efficiency.

However, in a sweet mercy, the Spirit quickly brought to mind a statement I had read only a few days earlier: “My whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work.” (Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, p. 51)

Allowing myself to pause and ponder this understanding of ministry created space in my “busy” schedule for the gospel to flood my heart. I saw that if Christ—who “is before all things, and in whom all things hold together” (Col. 1:17)—was not too busy creating and sustaining the universe



Alisha Justice with a child in the malnutrition clinic program, where she served as manager in Bundibugyo. Photo courtesy of Brent Justice



Employees of World Harvest Mission after a Bible study: (from left) Happy Michael, Mugisa, Brent Justice, Kapu, Kiseembo Akleo, Kadema, Ahebwa Johnson, and Tibesigwa. Photo courtesy of Brent Justice

to come to earth to rescue, redeem, and reconcile sinners to himself, then who am I to think that I am too busy to invite others into relationship with him?

I then rushed towards the woodshop to find this dear neighbor, to confess and repent of the pride and anger of my heart, and seek his forgiveness for my unneighborly behavior. Amazingly, it was through this act of humiliation (culturally, the “boss” does not apologize or seek forgiveness) that a wide door for gospel growth opened—not only with this friend, but with the dozen other men in the woodshop who witnessed the outworking of the gospel as I confessed my wrongdoing and repented of my sins.

After our reconciliation, my friend and I were able to explain to these men (in Lubwisi, the local language) not only the gospel of Jesus, but how it then propels and motivates our relationships with others. It was out of the brokenness of my frustration and failure that God created a beautiful opportunity for me to share his love with others. From that day on, my relationship with this friend grew and deepened, and, through him, several relationships with others grew and deepened.

This incident served to teach me how—through busyness and aggrandizing “ministry”—I slowly and subtly drifted into a functional paradigm where my notion of “doing” good had been divorced from my notion of “being” good. My mind, heart, and actions had become compartmentalized. I struggled to balance a desire to be theological-

ly relevant, relationally engaged, and yet, still find time to do “good” work. My mistake was a wrong understanding, resulting in a wrong application, of what “good” entails.

We read in Micah 6:8, “[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” According to Daniel J. Simundson, this co-mingling of biblical concepts—doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God—results in what God calls good: not an unbalanced approach that over-emphasizes one component at the expense of the others, but rather, in a holistic union of work (doing justice, particularly for the weak and powerless), relationships with others (loving kindness), and relationship with God (walking humbly, being careful to put God first and live in conformity with God’s will).

Therefore, as I learned through this situation, doing good is simply the holistic overflow of being good. And the great news of the gospel is that while this goodness is not inherent within us, God freely offers us a new heart and new spirit by his grace. It is this that I want to preach to myself daily, so that my life can be shaped and reoriented toward this outpouring of good toward others.

Brent Justice served with his wife Alisha in Bundibugyo, Uganda, from 2016 to 2019.

● The hands and feet of Jesus

In the desperate tedium of a large refugee camp, Casey DeYoung and her husband Russell obey the impulse to be the hands and feet of Jesus in Lesvos, Greece.



BY CASEY DEYOUNG

You never know when an unexpected and life-changing journey is about to begin. Mine began one winter afternoon, two years ago when my husband Russell mentioned an email he had just received from Virginia Mennonite Missions. It listed several short-term mission opportunities available for the summer of 2018, among them work at a refugee camp in Greece. Like most of you, we had been aware of this ongoing humanitarian disaster via regular news stories, often involving the deaths of those attempting to cross the Mediterranean from North Africa. We looked at each other and said, “We have to go!” We had no idea what God had in store for us, that we would be pushed to our physical and emotional limits.

The Greek Island of Lesvos is located only four miles from the coast of Turkey. Because of this fluke of geography, it has become ground zero for the European refugee crisis. Lesvos is the closest meeting point between Europe and Asia. The Aegean Sea provides an open area between Greece and Turkey that fills with dangerous rubber boats and rafts—the transportation of last resort for men, women,

children and babies fleeing the war-torn countries of the Middle East and Africa.

The refugees are passing through Turkey; here they hire smugglers to get them across the open water, nearly always in the dead of night, so as not to be caught by the Turkish Navy and returned to Turkey, occasionally to be incarcerated. Once they climb onto the rubber boats they are on their own. The smugglers take the refugees’ money (normally \$1,000 per person), point to the lights on the coast of Lesvos, and shove them out to sea. As many as 50 people can be crammed onto a large raft designed for maybe a dozen. With luck, the boat will make it across. Normally, at least half arrive somewhere along the coast where they are picked up and transported to the camp at Moria. This is the camp where we worked.

The first thing that greeted us upon our arrival at the gates of Moria on a scorching day in August was the smell of open sewage flowing under a grate at the gates to the camp. The gates are guarded by the Greek police and our VMMissions team had to show our ID badges to enter. The camp

(Below left) Marian Buckwalter holds a “burrito” clothing roll to be given to a new arrival at the camp.
(Below right) Martha Clymer (right) and another volunteer sort clothes for refugees in the warehouse onsite.





(Left) A view of the crowded Moria camp. Photo: UNHCR (Right) The author with a scarf she found tied to an inner tube in the junk heap. What story would these items tell? All photos courtesy of Marian Buckwalter

is spread across a former Greek military base, one square quarter mile with a steep hill in the center. Now crammed into this space—designed to hold 2,500 people for only several weeks—were 12,000 people, trapped there for months, sometimes over a year. Tents and storage units called ISO boxes, which would be uncomfortably small for a normal-sized family, routinely housed three families each.

We were entering a world where we would feel sorrow, joy, rage, exhaustion, frustration and happiness, all in a matter of a few hours. Every day. I have never felt more strongly that every minute we were trying to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

The first thing I noticed was something I wasn't expecting in such an overcrowded facility: the smiles. I was nervous and seriously questioning the wisdom of choosing this as our mission—so many people, so little space! However, as we made eye contact and simply smiled at people, the smiles were reflected tenfold. How could this be? In this sweltering heat, surrounded by chaos and constant noise, how could there be such smiles? These were the gifts we received every day in camp, a testimony that joy can be found even in such dire circumstances.

The camp's atmosphere was permeated by a sense of utter boredom. There is simply nothing for people to do. Everyone is waiting. Waiting for papers from the Greek government allowing them to resettle in Athens, waiting to see a doctor, waiting in long lines three times a day for meals. Waiting with no end in sight. Just waiting.

Because Moria was never meant to be more than a brief transit camp, there are no facilities for the children, no play area—much less schools—and there are hundreds of young children running all over the camp with nothing to do.

Because of the sheer number of refugees, every day was different for the volunteers. What sorts of things did we do?

We built tents and helped people move into them, distributed moving supplies, fed people, handed out clothing, made counts of the constantly changing camp population, helped people fix issues with their ID cards—the list was endless.

By far the most difficult part of working in the camp was constantly having to say no to perfectly reasonable requests. "Can I have a larger tent?" "Can I have an extra blanket?" "Can I have more water?" "My shoes have been stolen!" "My sleeping bag has been stolen!" "I need more diapers!" Because the supplies are mainly controlled by the Greek government and the United Nations, we simply had no capacity to address the simplest requests. It was beyond frustrating. We wore bright red vests in camp that identified us as volunteers; sadly, these vests implied an authority that we didn't have.

I asked two members of our last team what their most powerful impressions were. I was not surprised by their answers. Marian Buckwalter spoke of the beauty, resilience and dignity of the women. Martha Clymer commented on the gratitude expressed for the smallest things, such as a bit more room in an overcrowded tent. Many of the women wore lovely burkas—which covered everything but their eyes. But as Martha reminded us, "You can smile with your eyes."

Russell and I are returning to Moria for the third time in January. When people ask why, I must answer, "Because I have never been in a place where I felt so strongly that Jesus would be." It is a great privilege to serve these people, one for which we will be forever grateful.

Casey DeYoung served in Lesbos, Greece, on an E³ Collective in 2018 and 2019. She and her husband plan to return in 2020.

30 seconds that threw Lezhë into chaos

After a 6.4 magnitude earthquake shook their city of Lezhë, Albania, VMissions workers Rafael and Solange extended God's presence and love to their neighbors.

BY RAFAEL TARTARI

Have you ever imagined going out into the street of your city in your pajamas? In fact, that's what we did on November 26, 2019. It was 3:51 a.m. when we experienced a 6.4 magnitude earthquake. Though the initial quake lasted only a little more than 30 seconds, it seemed like 30 minutes. There was loud trembling—the noise of things banging in the house, the whole house crackling. There was nothing to do except to cry out for the mercy of the Lord. Even more frightening was the loss of power; we were instantly trapped in darkness.

We began to hear the sound of ambulance sirens, people calling us, telling us to get out of the house. We took the children and went to the city center to meet our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors. Our city was in chaos. We were all doing the same thing—going to the square dressed in pajamas, slippers, and jackets to withstand the cold. We stayed until the light of day. As soon as the electricity returned, we turned on the TV and only then heard of the sad destruction that claimed 51 lives, leaving hundreds injured and homeless, having lost everything. What pain in our hearts!

Aftershocks continued for days. With the people literally shaken, the scheduled Independence Day celebrations were cancelled. Across the city, there was beautiful solidarity in our sadness and mourning. The quake was all that people could talk about.

Because teammates Dan and Mary Hess and Norma Teles live in high rise apartments, and were impacted by the tremors much more than we were, we hosted them until the aftershocks passed. It was a joy to have them with us, especially for our kids.

As a church we gathered for a special prayer service for the families of the victims, the homeless, and for the government, giving thanks for those

Solange Tartari with Rudina, a neighbor in the shelter.



In the temporary shelter in Lezhë (left to right) locals Brahan and Petrit speak with VMissions workers Dan Hess and Rafael Tartari. Photos courtesy of Rafael Tartari

who were brought through danger unharmed. We also began collecting food and clothing, inviting our brothers and sisters in Christ to help make deliveries to a village outside of Lezhë that experienced more damage. Glory to God! Donations came from everywhere. The words of Psalm 46 were a reality and comfort to us all: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear."

Two weeks later, we started to help homeless Roma people in our town who were transferred from tents to the public sports gym. Initially, we were only helping to distribute breakfast. Wanting more than this superficial contact, we started going at night, just to do activities with the kids and serve espresso to the adults. This gave us the opportunity to listen to the stories of those being sheltered and to pray for their traumas. We had the opportunity to bring hope through God's Word. We ended up meeting a lot of people we either already knew or who were family members of friends and acquaintances. This was perfect!

We invited the church people to come with us as well, in order to make new acquaintances. In this calamity, I see that the Lord is revealing himself to the lost. We realize how much some people who did not even want to know about God have come to recognize his power and his greatness.

We are immensely grateful to God for everyone who contributed to the earthquake response, enabling us to help those who lost their homes. It was more than help; it was a gesture of God's love and presence.

Prayer: Keep praying with us that God will be glorified in the relationships built through the earthquake, that there would be lasting fruit for God's kingdom in Albania.



Rafael Tartari serves with his wife Solange and two children in Albania, with JMMI (Brazil), in partnership with VMissions.

A new roof for Rosa*

AS TOLD TO CAROL TOBIN BY SHARON SHENK

The story began in the summer of 2017 in the parking lot of Springdale Mennonite Church. The gift arrived in the form of Rosa, an outgoing, enterprising, yet very needy young woman. She pulled into the parking lot that morning prepared to make an unusually direct appeal to whomever she might encounter there: “Can I be part of your church?” In asking this, Rosa didn’t realize that she was giving a timely opportunity for the church to join Jesus in “doing good,” and to engage a core element of their identity as church.

Rosa was raising her three children who had been abandoned by their father. She and her live-in boyfriend struggled to pay her mortgage. Though the children’s grandmother wanted them at Catholic services on Sunday mornings, weekly Kids Club at Springdale became a place for the children to connect. Rosa also found her niche in the church community, by helping in the kitchen.

As the months passed, Sharon recognized the gift that she herself had to give—that of simply accepting others and being willing to relate across significant differences.

Pressures mounted. Rosa’s undocumented boyfriend was arrested, jailed, and deported back to Mexico. Her twin brother Manuel* moved in, bringing along his issues with alcohol. But hospitality between the two families began to flow.

Sharon and her husband Allan made it a practice to open their home to the family, despite the children not being particularly easy to manage. Sharon was both blessed and stretched when Rosa threw her a birthday party in which the women were occupied in the kitchen making tortillas and the men were occupied in the living room, drinking.

The roof work volunteers share a lunch prepared by Rosa.



Volunteers from Springdale Mennonite Church and Iglesia Shalom Nuevo Comienzo put a new roof on Rosa’s house.

Photos courtesy of Sharon Shenk

The church community began to function as a broad community of love. Networking led to an employment opportunity for Manuel. More costly commitment was needed to provide him with transportation to and from his work. Another member of the congregation incorporated Rosa into a regular Bible study she hosted for a number of other single mothers.

In February 2019, VMissions church planters Armando and Veronica Sanchez conducted the first meeting of the new church plant, Iglesia Shalom Nuevo Comienzo, in Waynesboro. Sharon invited Rosa to the meeting, enabling a new Spanish-language discipleship relationship to begin between Rosa and Veronica.

When it became apparent that Rosa’s house needed a new roof, Armando was ready to add his roofing skills to the energy already present in the Springdale and Waynesboro Mennonite churches. This led to a productive work day in which these congregations came together to give the house a new roof. Here was a literal sign of the strong new covering of love being offered to this vulnerable family—God’s love extended through a community beautifully prepared by God for the task.

Sharon is quick to note that all who have become connected with Rosa have been given the joyful opportunity to be part of a story of transformation. When the fall brought another challenge into Rosa’s life, Sharon was thrilled to see things she never could have anticipated: honesty, trust, courage, deep conviction, and gratitude.

At a recent Latino Ministries celebration, there was Rosa, with a smile on her face, cooking and helping to serve the dinner as a gift to the community that reached out to her in a time of need. This story is about more than people helping people. It is about God doing the more important kind of good work—transformation—that only God can do.

* Names changed for privacy

Carol Tobin is Mission Advocate for VMissions.

Call to Prayer: Soaking and Leaking

Sometimes, when we think about “doing good” in our natural human ways, we forget that God likes to do good deeds as well. What if we first get in touch with the good that is on God’s heart and then step out to serve with authority?

BY RUTHY HERSHEY

One of our core values as a team in our South Asian Muslim neighborhood was to “hear and obey.” We knew that God had good plans for our neighbors. We also knew intimately the hard details of their lives. We spent a lot of time praying and listening for a sense of God’s dreams for them and what God was specifically guiding us to do. Many mornings, we would have a “soaking and leaking” time slot. We gathered to worship and soak in God’s presence, like sponges; we then went out to share his goodness and love with those around us.

One morning, as we worshiped, a few different people had the impression of God healing blind eyes and even re-creating body parts that had been destroyed. Someone saw the image of a damaged hand that grew anew in the power of our Creator God.

We knew two different men in our community who subsisted by begging. One, whom we called “Uncle,” had his hand destroyed when the propane tank for his cooking stove exploded; the other man, Nur, was blind. They were our friends, and we longed for them to experience the healing power of Jesus. Feeling led by the pictures we saw in worship, we set out and found them in the places where they normally sat to beg.

While explaining to Nur how God had led us to pray for him that morning, another man who was walking through the narrow alleyway stopped and listened. He observed us until we were finished praying and then asked what we were doing. He had a large beard, a turban, and was wearing a type of robe which signified to us that he was a Muslim from another country.

We again shared what God showed us in worship and prayer, explaining in Urdu that we were trusting God to lead us, and that God has the power to heal.

He then shared his story: “I have come from Afghanistan with my son. His eyes were destroyed in a bomb blast and I was hoping to find medical

You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Acts 10:37-38

help for him here. But no doctor has been able to help. We are returning to our country tonight. Please come with me to the room where we are staying!”

As we followed him through the winding alleyways, I marveled at his faith. In their culture, it is not common for males and females who are not in the same family to interact, and here he was, trusting three foreign women and inviting us to come into his space to pray. When we entered the room where his son was, he explained to his son what was happening and we spent



Christ Healing the Blind, painting by Nicolas Colombel (1644-1717), 1682. Wikipedia

quite some time praying for him. They were both very grateful.

I wish I could say that something miraculous happened right in that moment. And yet, I suppose something miraculous did happen—God showed us so clearly that he wanted to heal eyes, and even cause ones that were destroyed to be restored. Then he led us to the very alleyway where that man was walking on his last day in our city. That man expressed his faith in God by inviting us to come and pray. And he and his son experienced the God who sees. God knows more intimately than we do what they need and cared enough to come and visit them by sending us.

Only God knows the end of the story. Over time we rejoiced to know that Nur’s eyesight in one eye greatly improved. Perhaps the reader can pause and say a prayer for this Afghani man and his son. May God continue to make himself real to them.

Ruthy Hershey is a former VMMissions worker in South Asia, 2009-2019. She lives in Millersville, Pa.



Sarah and Mark Schoenhals with daughters Hannah (left) and Heidi. They have served in northeastern Thailand since 2009, in partnership with Eastern Mennonite Missions. Courtesy photo

Worker profile: **Mark and Sarah Schoenhals**

Service program: transForm

Assignment:

We serve with Life Enrichment Church (LEC), a network of house churches in a wide rural area, with the goal of multiplying disciples of Jesus and house churches. We help disciple new believers, train emerging leaders, and advise and help sharpen the vision of existing leaders.

Biggest challenge:

Managing multiple schedules and a long and diverse list of responsibilities always keeps us on our toes! There are always surprises in ministry. This, in addition to living in a very spontaneous culture, means that we can expect to encounter the unexpected any given day. We frequently need to regroup, rearrange, and make challenging decisions about how to prioritize our time.

Biggest joy:

Our biggest joy is seeing lives transformed by the Lord Jesus! Sometimes, we see baby steps, other times, massive turn-arounds. In our current term, a particular joy has been to walk alongside a family as they have found freedom from addiction and other forms of bondage. They now have loving family relationships, new priorities, and readily give themselves to mentoring, evangelism, and other forms of ministry. They are increasingly able to lead in the church. It gives us great joy to see people walk into healing and freedom that only Jesus can give.

A typical day:

The most predictable part of our days includes schooling routines, with one child home schooling and one in a local Thai school. In the evenings our family exercises at a local park whenever we can. Beyond that, our days may

include worship in various locations, discipleship meetings, lengthy church meetings (with relationships prioritized over agenda), visiting people at their homes, responding to emergencies, house work, office work...or preparing for any of the above. We travel frequently. That fact combined with Sarah having numerous dietary restrictions, necessitates spending a lot of energy on planning for meals, travel, etc. We take advantage of the early-to-bed schedule that is still largely the norm in this mostly rural area. Morning and evening times of Bible reading and prayer—either individually or as a family—are our lifeline!



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