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**SUBVERSIVE
MISSION**

SERVING AS OUTSIDERS

IN A WORLD OF NEED



InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Taken from *Subversive Mission* by Craig Warren Greenfield.

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Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

www.ivpress.com.

INTRODUCTION

It takes a spider to repair its own web.

ANCIENT KHMER PROVERB

MY PHONE LIGHTS UP AND PINGS WITH A MESSAGE. I flick my thumb across the screen and an invitation appears. The backlighting on my phone illuminates my face as I read the invitation of a lifetime.

“Brother Craig,” it begins, as so many messages from my friends in India do. Relationships are everything in this part of the world. “Would you come and speak at our upcoming Christian event in Delhi? You would be our keynote speaker. There will be twenty thousand young leaders in attendance. We want you to challenge them to reach out and walk alongside children in their communities. You can really get your Along-siders message out, Brother!”

Twenty thousand young leaders! My eyebrows lift, and a whistle of amazement escapes my lips. For some, public speaking is their worst nightmare. Speaking to twenty thousand young leaders would be daunting for most people—and frankly,

it's daunting for me too. But I have been sharing about God's heart for the poor at conferences, festivals, and churches for years, and an opportunity to spread the vision like this is an amazing dream for me, a chance to use my God-given talents to grow the Alongsiders ministry and reach thousands of children.

I start thinking through logistics and imagining the potential impact. And if I'm honest, I begin to imagine myself on that stage, the audience in rapt attention. Some good photos of the crowds for my social media feed wouldn't hurt at all. I'm only human.

I press my forefinger on the message until it turns a darker shade, then hit the forward button. Before responding, I know that I need to submit the invitation to my mentor and South Indian friend, Paulus.

My connection with India goes back to my paternal grandparents, who were missionaries in South India for twenty-five years. My father spent his early years in Bangalore. My parents were also missionaries, so I guess you might say that being an outsider working for change in the world runs in my blood.

Paulus has been helping me navigate these types of situations in India for years, and as an outsider, I'm careful to listen to his insider advice. But as I wait for Paulus's response, my heart begins to sink a little as I anticipate what he will say. I know Paulus well.

His message eventually pops up on my phone. "Brother! Call me when you can." Relationships are everything in India.

I press video dial with trepidation, and within seconds, I am greeted by Paulus's smiling face and rich, baritone voice. A

Tamil by ethnicity, he has a very dark complexion, and he is wearing his thick, trademark black glasses. They frame the kindest eyes, which shine with spiritual wisdom and friendship.

I want to make sure he understands what this invitation means to me, so I almost start to say, “This is the invitation of a lifetime, Paulus!” But I hold my tongue and wait for my mentor to speak.

“Ah yes,” he smiles. “I don’t think this is a good opportunity for us, ahaha? This will put a big spotlight on you as a foreigner. If we want this discipleship movement to take off here as a local Indian movement, it would be better for it not to be presented by you. That will send the wrong impression, Craig.”

His words are understated but crystal clear. They immediately remind me of the ancient Khmer proverb, “It takes a spider to repair its own web.” My chest sinks, and I feel my lips curve into a slight frown. I know Paulus is right, but, frankly, I’m gutted. After I hang up, I sit for a while, letting the disappointment sink in.

Now, at this point in the story you may be thinking, *Needs are needs. Who cares who meets them? Get out there and make a difference! Seize every opportunity to use your God-given gifts to preach the gospel!*

But what if the greater invitation for many of us in this new era—particularly those of us who have power and privilege—is to use more wisdom in the ways we seek to serve others? I’ve had to learn this lesson the hard way as I have lived for two decades in slums and inner cities and made a lot of mistakes along the way. Though I’ve started ministries around the world, I am still learning.

As a white Westerner, I have always been taught to consider the words I speak on stage as if they stand alone—disembodied—as if I am a neutral messenger bringing the word of God. After all, it’s not like I would be up there on stage waving a Union Jack—the flag of India’s former colonial power (and the birthplace of my ancestors). And it’s not like I would be flashing wads of cash, implying that by joining this discipleship movement these poor youth could get connected to overseas money.

But I don’t need those props to send the youth a message about power and outside money. My very presence sends that message all by itself. Though twenty thousand young leaders would hear my words of love and goodwill, those words would be reinterpreted and misunderstood if I were the person delivering them. I knew in my gut that Paulus was right. The leaders would perceive my words as a foreign message, wrapped in a cloak of colonialism and cash.

The next day, I shoot Paulus a message. “You’re absolutely right, Bro. Who else could we get on that stage to communicate the message? Someone local, of course!”

Paulus replies immediately, “I know just the person.”

THE TEMPTATION TO PURSUE GOOD IN THE WRONG WAY

Have you ever noticed how the things that Satan tempted Jesus with during his forty days in the desert were not inherently evil (Lk 4:1-15)? Satan tried to goad Jesus into making bread from stones, but there’s nothing particularly bad about bread, is

there? Starving people need food, and the world is full of pressing needs. Only a heartless jerk would deny a starving beggar a yummy bread roll.

What about the promise of safety in the hands of angels? That's not evil either! Endangered people need protection. Vulnerable children need people to stand on their side when life is tough. They need someone to get up on a stage somewhere and advocate for their well-being.

And what about the opportunity to have the whole world bow before Jesus? That's not evil either. Imagine if people all over the world knew the love of God. Surely anyone pursuing that end, in any manner, is simply doing the work of God?

And yet, we know from this story that it was the bad guy—Satan himself—dangling all these good things, these valid and pressing needs, in front of Jesus. Still Jesus resisted. He resisted the shortcuts because he knew there was a better way: God's way, God's timing. He resisted the shortcuts because the end never, ever justifies the means.

Jesus could have overwhelmed Israel with his power and wonders—a one-man miracle machine. Instead, he chose the slow, difficult route of raising up a community of believers and empowering them to take his message to the world. He sparked a grassroots movement that has stood the test of time.

What if the temptation we face as people with power and privilege in a world of need is not so much the temptation to pursue evil—rape, murder, or pillaging? Instead, what if our temptation is to pursue good in the wrong way? This is a temptation I face every day because, as a Western missionary for more

than twenty years, I walk the streets with forms of power that many of my Cambodian neighbors don't have. I receive invitations and open doors that others don't receive. With that access comes the temptation to be their "savior," to use my power to create "miracles," when I'm really called to be something else—something more humble, vulnerable, and much, much better.

This challenge is for all those who serve as outsiders. It's for anyone who goes into the world seeking to change it while carrying more power than those whom you are trying to reach—whether through a passport or privilege, money or mastery. The simple fact that you have the ability to buy and read a book written in English means you have forms of privilege and power that most people in the world don't have. And that means this book is for you.

I've lived in slums and inner cities among the poor and marginalized for twenty years. I've led humanitarian organizations, a global missions agency, and now a grassroots youth movement that is truly making the world a more beautiful place. I have held the dying and walked alongside the desperate. My whole life is geared toward seeking change that will make the world a better place for everyone.

And, frankly, I'm impatient! I want a better world for my poor neighbors—and I want it sooner rather than later. I want to see more vulnerable children being reached and uplifted. I want bread for the hungry, I want safety for the endangered, and I long for people to know the boundless love of Jesus.

Yet, I've come to understand that there are lots of ways to seek what is good for the world. Over time, I've learned that

many of the short-term ways I've tried to pursue change—such as handing out money or food—have actually resulted in more deeply entrenched systems and structures, which continue to perpetuate poverty and injustice. At times, some of my “great ideas” have actually made things much, much worse because I've been trying to play God in the lives of the poor.

So, if we're no longer standing center stage as outsiders, giving keynotes to twenty thousand young leaders, how is God calling us to serve in this new era? Didn't Jesus call us to go out into all the world to make disciples and build his upside-down kingdom? Didn't God call us to bring good news to the poor, freedom for those in captivity, and comfort to those who mourn?

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul describes five different types of giftedness for serving God in the world and the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors), and teachers. I believe that these five types continue to provide a promising framework for how we can serve the world even in our post-colonial era, but we need to examine them through different eyes. We can't simply transplant them into crosscultural situations that have deeply embedded power dynamics, or we run the risk of disempowering local people.

For example, perhaps you are a gifted pastor or church planter in Portland. Does this mean you should be a pastor or church planter in Bangalore, India? After all, you will eventually return home, and your foreign ways will be hard to replicate by local people with fewer resources. Perhaps a more effective role would be to come alongside local Indian Christians as a midwife, supporting them as they lead and give birth to

what God has already planted in their hearts. During the journey to India, the gifted pastor needs to become a midwife.

Or you may be an apostolically gifted entrepreneur in San Francisco. Does this mean you should initiate new projects among African Americans in inner-city Detroit? Perhaps a wiser approach would be to serve as a catalyst, helping local leaders create new initiatives that reflect their own understanding of their local needs so they will have ownership of them going forward. Sometime during the journey to Detroit, the gifted apostle needs to become a catalyst.

Or perhaps you are a prophetic social justice activist in Toronto. Does this qualify you to lead justice work in Nairobi, Kenya? Perhaps a more helpful role would be to come alongside local activists as an ally, amplifying the voices of those who will continue to live in the local context after the struggle. After all, you can leave at any time, escaping the consequences that local people face after a confrontation. Sometime during the journey to Kenya, the gifted prophet needs to be transformed into an ally.

Each of the five ministry gifts outlined in Ephesians 4—apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher—needs to be reframed for crosscultural contexts, especially in places of poverty, or where there is a significant power differential. The fivefold *ministry* types become *missional* types. Otherwise, we run the risk of playing benevolent gods—taking power away from those who need to be inspired to look to Jesus, the one true Savior. In every context, we need to ask ourselves whether we are ministering as an *insider* or an *outsider*.

In the urban hubs of Asia, the slums of Haiti, the inner cities of North America, and the rural villages of Mexico, those of us who come as outsiders with access to resources tend to hold dramatically more power and money. We often wield that power in heavy-handed ways, knocking over the carefully arranged banquet set before us by our local friends. This lack of self-awareness leads to the sins of colonialism and the “white savior” label, no matter what color you are.

By rethinking these five roles from Ephesians with a cross-cultural perspective, we retain the original meanings, which were meant for insiders, but in ways that don’t leave us, as outsiders, hogging the limelight. In place of the traditional translation for Paul’s ministry roles in Ephesians, I propose the following five missional types for outsiders in a crosscultural context: *catalyst* (for apostle), *ally* (for prophet), *seeker* (for evangelist), *midwife* (for pastor), and *guide* (for teacher).

As we broaden our thinking about how we might go into the world, we also need to be wise about the minefields that we’ll be crossing so we can avoid making the same missteps as those who have gone before us. Not doing so would be a tragic irony. When it comes to vulnerable people’s lives, our good intentions do not matter as much as the eventual outcomes.

Rethinking these roles in our own contexts will require some serious self-reflection. Following each chapter outlining one of these five new ways of engaging with the world as outsiders, I’ll provide a chapter identifying one of the five major dangers that we urgently need to address: power, complicity, secularism, money, and individualism. Each of these corresponds loosely

to one of the fivefold missional types, though we can all fall prey to any of these dangers because they come with the territory of ministering as outsiders. The following is a description of each of the five missional types.

Catalyst (Outsider) / Apostle (Insider). Catalysts are wired as pioneers for the kingdom, not just the church. In their commitment to God's people around the world, they are self-disciplined and mature enough to say, not "my kingdom" but "your kingdom come, Lord." Catalysts refuse to build their own empires but seek to help spark something new in partnership with those insider apostles who will lead the movement going forward. By nature, they are future oriented and want to work with local people in new and uncharted contexts.

Ally (Outsider) / Prophet (Insider). Allies know God's heart for the marginalized, so they seek to come alongside and use their privilege to amplify voices that are struggling to be heard. They care deeply about justice and mercy and are bold enough to speak truth to power in situations of injustice. As outsiders, they are uniquely positioned to question the status quo and call the global community toward God's kingdom on earth, using their privilege (access, training, and resources) to support the causes championed by local prophets.

Seeker (Outsider) / Evangelist (Insider). Seekers search for cultural touchpoints as a way of bridging the universal truth of the gospel with local understanding. They are enthusiasts for contextualization, storytelling, and creativity. As outsiders, they arrive as students of language and culture and are more likely to ask questions than to offer answers. They work with

insider evangelists to understand and communicate what the kingdom of God looks like in each new context.

Midwife (Outsider) / Pastor (Insider). Midwives are pastorally gifted leaders who nurture and protect the people of God, helping insider pastors birth, shepherd, and care for communities of faith. As outsiders, they are passionate about cultivating the local church and developing disciples without needing to be in the limelight. They are careful to use church-planting approaches that can be replicated without outside resources.

Guide (Outsider) / Teacher (Insider). Guides are gifted teachers who can not only understand and explain truth but can guide local people to discover the truth for themselves. Guides communicate God's wisdom in all kinds of ways as they help local people discern God's will. Rather than offering pre-packaged answers, guides creatively help people work together to discover solutions for themselves.

CHALLENGE TO SERVE AS AN OUTSIDER

Each of us will find ourselves inhabiting different missional types at different times and in different situations, so don't skip to the chapter you think most applies to you. If you do that, the unfolding story won't make sense, and you'll miss valuable information. Instead, engage with each posture as I've had to do, working outside my comfort zone in places of great need.

This book is the story of my own experiments—and failures—as I have tried to grapple with my place in the world and embrace the gifts God has given me. Too often, I have come in as an outsider and taken over from insiders. Too often, I have

blundered ahead and trampled on people's toes. Too often, I have failed to empower those on the inside of a local culture. I hope you can learn from my mistakes as the story unfolds.

This book is for every person who has a passionate longing to see God's love change the world but a distaste for the negative baggage of traditional colonial missions. It is for every globally minded follower of Jesus who recognizes that the world doesn't need more "white saviors"—or saviors of any color—but it also doesn't need more apathetic or disengaged Christians. It is for those who know that our guilt and tears, our "thoughts and prayers," mean nothing to the poor and marginalized in the Majority World, unless they are matched with action.

As followers of Jesus, we are all called to be ready to follow Jesus to the ends of the earth right where we are—from Vancouver to Nairobi, from Chicago to Phnom Penh. This is an invitation for each of us to wake up and start acknowledging our weaknesses and humbly composting our crap so that it can enrich the earth wherever we are.

The world needs each of us, but we can't afford to isolate ourselves any longer. Before we head out to change the world, we must first be honest about the power we're carrying. As I share my journey, with all its flaws and mess-ups, I hope you will join me in seeking a better way, a more beautiful vision for how we can all bear the light we have been given into the world.

1

CALLED AND CONFUSED

*If you want to change the world,
you have to change the metaphor.*

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

AFTER LIVING IN THE SLUMS of Phnom Penh for seven years, my wife, Nay, and I had become disillusioned by many of the ineffective missionary efforts we saw in Asia, so we decided to try something new. We wanted to practice “reverse mission,” taking the things we had learned about radical hospitality from our Cambodian neighbors and bringing them to the West.

Our family relocated to Vancouver, Canada, with a dream to extend the welcome of Jesus to those who were not always welcome in Canadian society. “Cook too much food, invite too many people,” became our dinner mantra, and we invited the people who didn’t fit in anywhere else—the lost and the overlooked, the homeless and the addicted, those who struggled to measure up or toe the line, those living in the shadows of the world’s “most livable city.” Some nights we had as many as thirty or forty people crowded into our house to share a

home-cooked, family-style meal and get some respite from the streets.¹

When my friend Kevin showed up one night for a meal and a game of pool, he proudly announced that he wanted to become a missionary in Cambodia.

“Two weeks ago you were hunched over a crack pipe on the corner of Main and Hastings, and now you’re telling me you want to be a missionary?” I asked as I leaned across the pool table and used the triangle to scoop the balls into position for the break.

“I want to give back, do something good in the world,” Kevin told me. “God showed me a picture of me digging ditches in Cambodia.” Kevin handed me the pool cue so I could take the first shot.

Kevin had recently quit a crack cocaine addiction after hitting rock bottom in a dingy, Downtown Eastside Vancouver hotel room just down the road from our house.² After years in construction, Kevin was now dreaming of using his handyman skills to help the poor in Cambodia. Looking at Kevin’s blond hair and pasty white skin, I didn’t ask if he had considered that Cambodian handymen might be more suited to the task of digging ditches in the searing Cambodian heat.

Frankly, I was cynical. And, practically speaking, I knew that very few people from Kevin’s background could jump through all the hoops to join a missions agency: fund raising, psychological tests, seminary studies. The missions industrial complex is large, expensive, and exclusive.

Then Kevin asked if he could keep coming by for dinner and missionary training.

“Well, everyone is welcome here,” I grinned. “But keep in mind, the first time you come, you’re our guest. The second time you come, you’re a part of the family—and that means helping with the dishes and anything else that needs doing.”

Over the next few months, Kevin became a regular fixture in the house, sharing meals and helping us wash up. Eventually, he moved in and began helping with our drug outreach in the neighborhood.

By the time Kevin had been living with us for a year and a half, we could see his rare ability to reach out to folks struggling with addictions in a cut-through-the-crap way that flowed directly from his own experiences. People on the streets called him “the Weeping Preacher” because he got choked up every time he started sharing his story of freedom. He was a key leader in our little Vancouver community, and while I felt that Kevin could do a lot more good in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, where he was an insider, Kevin continued to feel that God was calling him to move to Cambodia and serve as an outsider. Though I remained dubious, Kevin persisted, and several months later, I found myself hugging him goodbye outside Vancouver’s international departure terminal.

THE WAKE-UP CALL

Shortly after Kevin’s departure, I was seated in my doctor’s office, waiting to hear the results of some tests I’d had after a particularly bad bout of bleeding. I’d been half sick most of my adult life, an ongoing illness I had written off as “parasites” from years of drinking dirty water in Cambodian slums.

I usually tried to ignore it, but the symptoms had been getting worse, and I'd been working with a specialist to find the right treatment.

The doctor shuffled the papers on his desk, then looked up at me with a concerned sigh. "I'm afraid the results aren't good," he said. "You have colon cancer. We're going to have to operate immediately."

My mind began to spin, and I gripped the arms of the chair, trying to retain control. As my mind threatened to slip into chaos, I pretended to listen to his instructions, then stumbled from the room in a daze.

I don't really remember the bus ride home, but I got back right at dinner time. As usual, the house was full of a boisterous assortment of neighborhood characters, homeless friends laughing it up and messing around. But I just couldn't face anybody that night; I kissed Nay and whispered that I was going to take an early night. I crept up to my room and lay on my bed in the darkness.

After years of serving the fatherless in Cambodia and welcoming those without a family in Canada, there was a good chance that my own two children might now be left without a dad. I had dedicated my life to serving vulnerable children. Now my own would be at risk. "How could this be fair?" I asked God. "How is this your will? What will my future hold?"

Over the coming months, these questions occupied my thoughts and haunted my prayer life. I was in and out of the hospital, and recovery took much longer than I expected, but one question began to dominate my thinking: If you only

had five more years to walk this earth, how would you spend those years?

Five years was not so short a time that I would simply spend my final days saying goodbye to family. And not so long that I would lose any sense of urgency. Thinking about those five years helped me focus my thoughts on something meaningful. What would I do with five more years if I were lucky enough to have them?

As I lay in that hospital bed, barely able to move, barely able to get up, every day seemed more precious, every moment more significant. I realized that all the other questions that had been buzzing around in my head were complaints and uncertainties that I was addressing to God, but this question was one that God was asking me. Even as my body was failing, my vision began to focus, and I knew how I would answer this critical question. If I only had five more years to walk this earth, I'd want to spend them doing what God had already called me to do: working for the well-being of the world's most vulnerable children.

As I held this revelation, I sensed that God was inviting me to leave Canada and become an outsider in a crosscultural context again. But the world had shifted since we'd moved to Vancouver, which made this revelation seriously troubling. Public opinion had tilted firmly against outsider efforts to bring change in foreign countries.

Take the cases of two famous missionaries: Jim Elliot and John Allen Chau. In 1956, Jim Elliot was killed by a spear while attempting to make contact with the Huaorani tribe in Ecuador.

He was immediately hailed as a hero and a missionary martyr on the cover of *Life* magazine.³ His death galvanized and inspired Christians around the world.

Just over sixty years later, in 2017, John Allen Chau was also killed by a spear as he attempted to make contact with the Sentinelese in the Andaman Islands off the coast of India. But this time the worldwide press almost universally labeled him as a fool and a flag-bearer for colonialism. The *New York Times* quoted critics, who called Chau “uninformed, arrogant and self-serving.” His death divided Christians around the world. Even *Christianity Today* grappled with Chau’s death, lamenting, “For many, missions is a story of heroes and gospel advance. For others, missions is a story of colonialism, genocide, triumphalism, and cross-cultural disasters.”⁴

After years of living in Cambodian slums and watching outsiders parachute in, I too had grown discouraged about the role of missionaries in bringing change. Some foreigners arrived, their pockets bulging with money, to set up unsustainable projects in a circus of good intentions. Some planted flashy Western-style churches that couldn’t be maintained or replicated by local people without fundraising campaigns, and their bumbling presentations of the gospel were often tainted by foreign culture and values.

In my analysis, there were too many white saviors and not enough wise servants—too many wannabe superheroes and not enough willing sidekicks. It seemed that the whole system was built on a house of expensive cards. The missionary efforts I had observed required raising a ton of financial support,

which excluded people from less-resourced communities, such as my friend Kevin. There were also lengthy missionary training requirements, and while this process is good, it tends to exclude those who don't have the resources to take the time out for study.

I wasn't surprised that a growing number of Christians and even church leaders were discarding the traditional model of missions. Many were asking, Why shackle ourselves to an over-engineered system that creates so much animosity, excludes so many people, and closes so many doors? I knew I didn't want to participate in such an enterprise, but I wondered if there might be a different path.

FIGHT, FLIGHT, OR FREEZE?

During my early years living in the slums of Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, I came face to face with the fact that I often slipped into the role of a white savior.

A false savior, of any race, plays the role of a benevolent god in the lives of vulnerable people. Of course, our poor neighbors were often grateful for the concrete help we provided. At least it was better than languishing under the jackboot of the malevolent gods in their lives—local loan sharks, traffickers, and corrupt politicians. But those playing the role of god do not transform people's place in the world. The vulnerable people remain dependent on the rich and powerful, both the benevolent and the malevolent. Yet God's beautiful plan is for people to look to *him* so they can become agents of their *own* transformation.

In my high school biology class, I had learned that the natural reaction to any challenge tends to be fight, flight, or freeze. I found myself swinging between these unhealthy responses as I grappled with my place in the world.

Fight response. The fight response is the defensiveness that flares up and refuses to acknowledge that I have more power and privilege in this world than others.⁵ I carry a passport that allows me to come and go easily from almost any country in the world and gives me greater power than others who can't easily move around. In much of Africa and Asia, certain skin colors and nationalities are believed to have more authority, which is a privilege from which I directly benefit. I didn't earn this privilege, but I have it. I didn't seek it out, but I can't escape it. If I'm honest, I will admit that my first response to new information about the history of race and injustice tends toward the fight response. I'm a slow and stubborn learner, I guess.

Flight response. The flight response, by contrast, is the act of ignoring—burying our heads in the sand when we're confronted with the world's needs. But whenever we withdraw, whenever we turn our backs and walk away from the global poor, we walk away from Jesus himself.

Freeze response. Finally, many who want to engage cross-culturally are paralyzed by the fear of getting it wrong. The freeze response is characterized by guilt and inertia. It's that paralyzing sense of frustration that keeps me from engaging with the poor because I'm no longer allowed to engage on the terms that I had always imagined. The books and movies I

consumed growing up, where (mostly) white saviors swooped in and saved the day, are now seen in a new, less flattering light. There's grief and shame over that because those people were my heroes growing up.

Each of these responses is also a form of denial. Each refuses to recognize that God is still calling us to be engaged—though perhaps not in the ways we had imagined.

As I thought about it, any of these three—fight, flight, or freeze—would not be a fruitful or mature response to the reality of my position in the world. My tears and enlightenment mean very little to those who have been sidelined and marginalized unless they are accompanied by wise action. As Desmond Tutu says, “If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”⁶

I reminded myself that Jesus made it clear that we'd be judged harshly for taking the road of disengagement when he said, “Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Mt 25:45). If I were to move back overseas, I knew I had to find a way to engage with wisdom, courage, and humility. I had to identify the ways that injustice continues to thrive and, frankly, benefit people like me. Then I needed to redistribute that power, even at my own expense.

Jesus was calling me to move beyond both fight and freeze by engaging with the world on new and different terms. Global peace and justice—the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10)—cannot be achieved by any one race or group of people. Our destinies are inextricably tied together.

THE BASIC COMMISSION

When I broached the idea of returning to Cambodia with Nay, we smiled to think that our buddy Kevin was already there, immersing himself in a local community and trying to find his way as an outsider. Nay is a Cambodian-New Zealander, so you might think she leaped at the chance to return to the place of her birth, but she was hesitant as well—though for different reasons.

As a white man moving through the world and navigating life in Cambodia, I was used to being welcomed with open arms and wide smiles. Opportunities naturally flowed in my direction, and I was often pushed into a white savior role without even trying.

When Nay and I had visited local churches in Cambodia together, the local pastor would rush over to greet me and lead me by the arm to the front pew. He might even invite me to preach the sermon right there and then. Meanwhile, Nay would be left to fend for herself, dismissed because of her ethnicity and gender. This scene, repeated over and over again throughout our initial seven years in Cambodia, captured in a snapshot the difference between being a white male missionary and a non-white local believer. One was thrust into the role of star of the movie while the other was always an extra.

I wanted to give Nay space to consider the call and to hear from God for herself. I knew she wouldn't make the decision based on how easy or difficult the future might be; she had resisted choosing comfortable options for her entire life. But I knew this decision would cost her far more than it would cost me.

As we prayed and talked about how to serve cross-culturally as outsiders, we both wanted to be part of a new era of

crosscultural servants who were seeking wisdom and insight instead of the limelight. Shortly after one of these conversations, Nay sat me down and looked at me with searching eyes. “I think we should move back to Cambodia.” I knew she was right. We were being called to live our lives for God, no matter where he called us: to go into all the world, including our own neighborhood; to take crossing the oceans as seriously as crossing the street; and to respond to God’s guidance, regardless of the cost, or the obstacles.

After months of cancer treatment and surgeries, I was given the green light by my doctors. And we began to prepare for the move back to the place and calling we thought we’d left behind. To a city we’d already bid farewell. And to a people we loved dearly. We were ready to discover a new way of serving as outsiders.

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