

EDITOR/WRITER



EMMY DUDDLES

PORTFOLIO

2023

IF THERE IS ONLY ONE

God's goodness ignites one family's evangelistic fervor



by Emmy Duddles

For several years, Joe and Kate lived in Bangkok, Thailand, and had a thriving mushroom business with Kate's mother, Mrs. Jaan. However, their marriage was contentious, and the whole family was in despair, eventually believing that life was not worth living.

When a man tried to take advantage of the couple, Joe and Kate decided it was time to move away from Bangkok to a city in northeast Thailand. Their new home was across the street from a church, and Joe and Kate developed a friendship with the pastor because the church yard was a safe place for their children to play. Joe and Kate saw an opportunity to make some money by selling vegetables and fruit at the front gate of the church, and soon they began to follow Christ and attend services every Sunday while selling their wares. Within three months, Mrs. Jaan noticed a change in them. "They went from arguing and not speaking when they were upset to forgiving each other," Mrs. Jaan says. "It made me curious, 'Why is this God so good? Why is it that Buddhism can't change us but this God, Jesus, can?'"

*"Why is this God so good?
Why is it that Buddhism
can't change us but this
God, Jesus, can?"*

As Mrs. Jaan stepped inside their church, she felt a warmth and love she hadn't felt before. "I found true happiness surrounded by followers of Jesus," Mrs. Jaan says. At the end of the service, the pastor asked if anyone wanted to give their lives to Jesus, and Mrs. Jaan immediately responded.

The family dug deep into God's Word, ravenous to know more of Him, especially Joe. He would study his Bible late into the night, taking extensive notes and asking the pastor questions.

Soon, the family met Mark and Kitiya Murphy, Alliance international workers in Thailand. Joe and Kate needed jobs, so Mark and Kitiya connected »



Mrs. Jaan (middle) found true happiness in fellowship with believers.



them with their Moringa tree project, a business that makes medicinal products, soap, and cosmetics from the leaves and seeds of the Moringa tree. The two couples grew close as they worked together and chatted over lunch, and Mark started discipling Joe. He asked so many questions, always wanting to know and understand God better, and showed interest in being trained to be a church leader.

“He had a heart to share the gospel with the lost,” says Kitiya. “He would often go to his home village and stay there to work and share the gospel. If one person came to Christ, it was worth it to him.”

“Any time somebody has that kind of hunger and desire,” Mark adds, “it’s easy to invest in them and have that deeper connection. It was that genuine desire to seek God and know His Word that really drew us together. He was becoming one of my best friends. We were dreaming of the days when we would serve God together.”

*If one person
came to Christ,
it was worth
it to him.*

◀ Left: Mrs. Jaan and her family were wracked with grief as they processed their loss.

▶ Right: Mrs. Jaan and Kitiya (left) have a strong discipling relationship.



BROKEN GLASS

One night, the family was having their regular time of worship together, like they did any other Friday. As they prayed, sang songs, and studied the Word together, Joe felt compelled to pray over his family. He laid his hands on each of his children to pray over them and tell them how much he cared for them individually. Joe thought he would be around for a long time, but he gave Mrs. Jaan the extensive notes he had taken as he studied Scripture, telling her, “These notes are for you to use to lead our family in case I’m gone. If I am not here, you hold on to Jesus.”

At about 4 o’clock the next morning, Mark and Kitiya got a call—Joe was not breathing and was being taken to the hospital. “We prayed together,” Kitiya

says. “Prayed and prayed and prayed. It broke my heart. Joe dreamed of many things.”

“He was the foundation of our family,” Mrs. Jaan adds. “Before we went to the hospital, my daughter and I cried together because we didn’t want to lose our loved one who was the pillar of our family.”

Mark rushed to the hospital to pray with the family and comfort them as they asked for a miracle. The doctors performed CPR on Joe for a long time, but eventually they pronounced him dead. “When the family found out he had died, they were crying profusely, which is unusual for Thai people,” says Mark. “Kate was inconsolable.”

“The family was like broken glass,” says Kitiya. »

Visit cmalliance.org/choosingtostay
to watch the video.





THE ONLY WAY THROUGH

“At their very lowest point, in their brokenness, Jesus was their only way through,” Mark says. Despite her grief, Mrs. Jaan did not lose hope and took up the call she felt to continue Joe’s legacy and be the head of her family. She took in her grandchildren and started intensely studying Joe’s notes, asking the pastor questions whenever she didn’t understand something Joe had written down.

Even before Joe died, Mrs. Jaan would push her cart through the streets, selling her vegetables and fruit and sharing the gospel. She was a natural at striking up conversations with people and telling them about Jesus’ love for them as they purchased produce.

“Mrs. Jaan realized there were other people who were suffering and that she could be a voice and a witness to how Jesus changed her,” says Mark.

The more Mrs. Jaan saw people put their faith in Christ beside her vegetable cart, the more hunger she developed for evangelism. Joe had been interested in the Center for Leadership Development (CLD), a program that was started by C&MA missionaries 20 years ago to help train lay leaders in their local churches. He had filled out an application to join the CLD program and had even given Mrs. Jaan an application. “He built the foundation for my desire to study Scripture,” Mrs. Jaan says.

After he passed, she chose to go through the program, and now helps lead multiple house church groups in rural villages outside her city. These groups are filled with believers who want to be raised up in leadership and lost people who are still seeking out the hope Mrs. Jaan has found. Though many people are moving to Bangkok to find work, Mrs. Jaan is committed to creating gospel access in northeast Thailand so that local people and the poor can know Jesus without leaving their homes.

“I am concerned for the lost because they do not have the same opportunity to hear the gospel as I did, so they haven’t received this new life,” says Mrs. Jaan. “Even if only one person responds, it is worth it. My service won’t be done until I go to be with the Lord.” ■



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.

- ◀◀ Far Left: Mrs. Jaan selling vegetables with her granddaughter
- ◀ Top: Mrs. Jaan leads multiple house church groups in the surrounding villages.
- ◀ Middle: Many people have come to faith in Christ as they buy produce from Mrs. Jaan.
- ◀ Bottom: Mrs. Jaan has the joy of caring for her grandchildren and raising them up in the faith.



THE FATHER'S HEART

Multiplying gospel presence through coffee and conversations

With two liters of Coke, some hot chocolate, and a few pots of coffee, Alliance workers Chris and Jamie O'Dell opened Aroma Coffeehouse in Taiwan, a safe space where people could practice their English and have deep conversations about faith. In the last 14 years, this ministry has seen major success, establishing a church and also becoming a fully functioning business as Aroma Café, where they provide jobs and Christian mentorship to Taiwanese people.

In May 2022, Aroma Café was able to move into a new space in the heart of Taipei that offers significant opportunities for expansion. Being only half a block from the Taipei main station where trains from all over the city and country pass through, they are perfectly positioned to make an impact in the lives of hundreds of people a day on their journey through the city.

Not only is this the perfect location, but it is also twice the size of their original space, allowing them to host

▲ *Above: Through many different events and classes, Aroma Café is able to spread the aroma of Christ throughout Taiwan.*

▶ *Right: English classes provide a special opportunity for Aroma Café staff to engage in questions about faith with people in their city.*

more English classes, music nights, art classes, and other larger events as well as serving up to 100 people at Aroma Church on Sunday morning.

"We're thankful for the way that the building has provided," says Chris. "It's because of people's generosity in 2021 that we were able to finish this."

STRENGTHENING OUR WITNESS

The Aroma Café team goes to great lengths to serve residents and visitors to Taipei. But they don't work alone. As a ministry of Envision, Aroma Café facilitates short-term »

GOD IS MOVING

Among the many who have come to Christ through this ministry are two employees, Andrew and Angela, who now serve alongside the O'Dells. Andrew has a major role in discipleship, leading community growth at Aroma Church, and Angela is the cafe's manager who facilitated the move to the new building in 2022. They were each deeply moved by the love they received at Aroma Cafe and are now determined to do the same for others. "It's cool to see how Taiwanese people are stepping up in ministry with us and to see God moving in their lives," Chris says.

ANGELA:

I was looking for a part-time job in my freshman year of college. I didn't know what I was looking for, but then I found Chris. I had always wanted to work at a coffee shop, and it was a great opportunity to learn English. I wanted to be baptized and become a Christian, but I didn't have a church community at the time.

Not too long after I started working behind the bar, I started going to church and learning more about God's Word. I realized it's not just a religion—God is who I want to follow, and He has a purpose for me. The faithful people at Aroma helped me desire more of Him.

I worked at Aroma while I was in college and then attended Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry for three years. I always came back to help during summer break.

In September 2021, Chris invited me back, and I've been working here ever since.

My favorite part of my job is that who I am can change someone's life in the same way that others have changed mine by showing me their faith. I don't have a plan about what to do next. No matter what it is, I'll have to make sure I do it with God. I can't do it without Him.

ANDREW:

I met a missionary at my college sent from the Aroma Church in 2017. I loved the welcoming vibe even when I just visited the café the first couple times. I felt like I was an old friend to them.

My first job was as the interpreter for a short-term team doing outreach and vacation Bible school. While I was working with short-term teams that summer, I started attending the Aroma Church regularly, hearing God's words and joining the small group. We had a Bible reading plan with the manager, who helped me know who I am in Christ, and I was baptized in 2019.

For me, I love sharing the gospel with the customers who just come to the café. We become friends, and I'm able to share Jesus and my testimony with them. I started to go to Alliance Theological Seminary online in 2022 because God is calling me to be a pastor. I hope while I am helping people smell, become, and spread the aroma of Christ throughout Taiwan, I can also be equipped by the program in the seminary.





trips and internships that give Alliance people opportunities to be a part of what God is doing in this region.

"It's amazing how the whole Alliance family can get involved here," Chris says. "They're getting involved in mission as families and as individuals. People from different churches will come and volunteer, and it shows the unity and gospel presence that is here, seeing the Kingdom at work in the city."

Along with internships and short-term trips, individuals and couples sometimes come out to serve indefinitely. Two older couples retired early and moved to Taipei (one from Singapore and one from a Chinese Alliance church in California) to partner with Chris and Jamie, doing everything from picking up the O'Dells' kids from school to teaching English at the café. "The young townies coming to Aroma Café are so drawn to these two couples," Chris says. "They want those mother and father figures in their lives."

Whether it's short-term teams holding a vacation Bible school for one week or interns helping build the business and teach English to Taiwanese people, God is moving among them to share His love with the people of

▲ Above: Aroma Café continues to empower and mentor young Taiwanese people to be enthusiastic followers of Christ.

Taiwan. Many have felt welcomed in and loved by these teams and individuals, which continues to strengthen the witness of the gospel through Aroma Café.

HEALING DISILLUSIONMENT

The gospel presence in Taiwan that Aroma Café is building is needed now more than ever. From 2017 to 2022, the number of Christians in Taiwan decreased from 1.5 million to 750,000. Taiwanese people have generally had a good view of Christianity even though many weren't becoming Christians themselves. However, in the last few years, the pandemic created mass isolation, and some churches in the area used their influence politically in a way that left many disillusioned with the church.

In the midst of this shift, one of Aroma Café's most consistent outreaches, Coffee Talk, had to close down because of COVID-19. It had been running every Friday since 2009, teaching English through conversation and

They're coming back and saying, "We want to know more of this Jesus!"

sharing the gospel to roughly 50 people a week. Once restrictions had lifted, Coffee Talk started up again, but only 20 people attended every week.

A former Envision intern, Andre, who had served with Aroma Café many years ago, reached out to Chris about an idea he had for this outreach in March 2023. Andre had stayed in Taipei after his internship and had amassed a large following on Instagram and TikTok. He told Chris he wanted to do an advertisement on his social media for Coffee Talk.

When Andre put a 15-second video about the café up on his Instagram, it was viewed over 500,000 times. Within a few weeks, Coffee Talk had more sign-ups than they could manage. For several weeks, Coffee Talk saw between 60-80 people on Friday night, so they decided to expand into a second night on Thursdays. Even that wasn't enough, so they expanded into a lunch event on Fridays as well.

"There's gospel opportunities every week at those tables," Chris says. "Our goal now is to get a hundred people per week to come to one of these three events. We're hitting that goal some weeks. It's amazing to see that growth and expansion."

To serve all who want to come to Coffee Talk, Aroma Café started an online chat group for people to sign up

for one of their three weekly events, which now has almost 1,700 people waiting for a chance to practice their English in a Christian environment. Many of those who are coming are either Christians who fell away from their faith during the last few years or non-believers who grew up in a Christian home and never had a faith of their own.

"They're coming back and saying, 'We want to know more of this Jesus.' This is the gospel presence you are sending!" Chris says.

These people who were hurt by the church are being renewed in their faith because of their conversations at Aroma Café, and others are meeting Jesus for the first time in their adult life. After coming to Coffee Talk, some of them join a chat group for people who want to connect outside of Aroma Café. They go on hikes, hangout at the beach, visit museums, and do other activities together, which allows for more relationship building and more time to have deep conversations about faith.

"As we reach these people," Chris says, "we're engaging them and helping them to smell, become, and spread the aroma of Christ. And it's all happening right in the middle of our city! It's all about the world being reconciled to the Father's heart." ■



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.



LOVING A PEOPLE IN CRISIS



God's mighty hand is at work in Ukraine

by Emmy Duddles

◀ *Left: Alliance workers are remaining active in Ukraine amid the danger to share Christ's love with people like this man and his son.*

A Ukrainian woman feared for the lives of her two children while they stayed in their hometown due to the fighting. At the beginning of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, many were fleeing from her city to the next town over. She wanted to escape but soon found that "The Bridge of Death" was their only way out. Many had been shot to death on this bridge as they attempted to evacuate the city, but this woman could not let her children stay in such a dangerous place. They crossed the bridge.

People on the other side rejoiced and marveled as this mother and her two children stepped off the bridge unharmed.

"But where's the man?" they asked. "Where's the fourth?"

"There are only three of us," the woman replied.

"No, we saw you running across the bridge, and there was a man with you."

"The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:18).

God deeply desires to deliver oppressed people, walking closely beside them as He protects them from harm. This is exactly what He is doing among Ukrainian citizens caught in the crossfires of this conflict. At the time of this writing, over 8,830 civilian lives have been lost and more than 14,980 people have been injured. In addition to these tragedies, 5.9 million people have been internally displaced, and nearly 8 million have escaped to other parts of Europe.

Though many have been evacuated, there are still tens of millions of Ukrainians living in country. The lives of many who remain are difficult. According to a report from the United Nations in April 2023, about 12 million people have limited to no access to electricity, and water supplies have been disrupted for some. Cooking, accessing clean water, and heating their homes through the winter became monumental tasks.

Despite these overwhelming circumstances, God is dwelling among these desperate people, often shielding them from the worst outcomes. During the height of the bombings, a group of people were gathered in



“People are hungry for God.”

an Alliance-affiliated church to pray for peace and protection. Bombs were falling all around the church as they prayed. When they came out of their prayer meeting, there were unexploded bombs lying in the yard of the church. God is answering their prayers.

“We have the opportunity to see how God, in miraculous ways, saves lives,” says Maxim,* a Ukrainian pastor who partners closely with The Alliance. “In one case, we saw a rocket slam into a house full of people. One of them was killed, but how did it happen that the whole house gets destroyed and people walked away unharmed?”

HUNGRY FOR GOD

While God has been directly answering the prayers of His children with life-saving miracles, He has also been mightily using Alliance workers, partners, and Alliance-affiliated churches to share His love with a people in crisis.

Because of the overwhelming generosity of Alliance people through CAMA Services, Alliance workers and partner churches in Ukraine have been able to turn church buildings into refugee centers, pass out two tons of food every month, rebuild homes and churches, and build a center for distributing water, medicine, winter coats, sleeping bags, generators, and food to hundreds of people.

When one city was completely without water, a church retrofitted their van to become a water wagon with a huge tank. They drove out of the city, filled up the tank, drove back into the city, and people came with buckets to get water. The pastor told everyone about Jesus, the Living Water, as they waited in line. The outreach activities of these churches and workers have touched the lives of roughly 500–1,000 people every month. Many now know that God is the One who is providing for their every need.

“These are days in which people’s hearts are softened to God,” says Maxim. “It happens over and over again. People come to receive food, we pray with them, and they invite God into their lives. People are hungry for God.” In the eastern region of Ukraine, many people have evacuated due to the conflict. Suddenly the churches were losing their members, but in their place were nonbelievers hungry for comfort and peace from God. Now, on any given Sunday, 90 percent of the congregation in these churches are unbelievers and new Christ followers.

People have been so hungry for God’s love and hope that in the last half of 2022, Alliance workers were able to assist partner churches in Ukraine in planting five new Alliance-affiliated churches. One of these church plants started in November 2022, and by February 2023, they had already run out of room in their building.

◀ **Left:** Despite the dangerous conditions, many still gather in Alliance-affiliated churches to experience the hope of Christ. ▼ **Below:** Thousands of pounds of food, along with many other necessities, have been distributed among Ukrainians in need because of the generosity of people like you.

A church that CAMA Services helped rebuild was integral in planting one of these five churches. The pastor of this church wrote to Maxim, saying, “I’m driving around the villages just giving things out and preaching, and people are turning to the Lord in droves. I feel like John the Baptist. People are coming to Jesus like never before.”

These are the moments we hope for when we enter hard places like Ukraine. We expect that when we partner with what God is doing in difficult regions, He will open doors to those who have never experienced His loving embrace. We serve a God who is dedicated to transforming dry and barren lands into gardens overflowing with the fruit of His hope.

*Name changed



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.



**Many now know that
God is the One who
is providing for their
every need.**



ENTERING THE HARD PLACES

Bringing Christ's presence to the lost and oppressed

by Emmy Duddles

Despite being mentioned frequently throughout the Bible, a persecuted people group from the Middle East has gone largely unreached with the gospel. These people have a deep, rich history, but they have long suffered the effects of racism from other majority groups for hundreds of years—enduring exile, poverty, betrayal, and genocide.

In the midst of overcoming all of these obstacles and surviving violent discrimination, they've also experienced in-fighting and betrayal from within their own tribes and families. This has created a deep sense of mistrust within these people—mistrust of strangers and even of their own families. They still rely heavily

on their families and community for their livelihood and well-being, so even if they do hear about the love Christ has for them, they face a difficult decision. If they accept Christ, they risk being ostracized or even killed by their families and communities, the only support system they have.

The people within this group need to experience God's love and have a safe place to land when they've been rejected. Reaching groups like this is hard—it takes years to build trust and show these people that following Christ is worth the sacrifice and persecution they will likely experience. But God is faithful to open doors for His people to bring His presence to those who have yet to find Him.



A SENSE OF PEACE

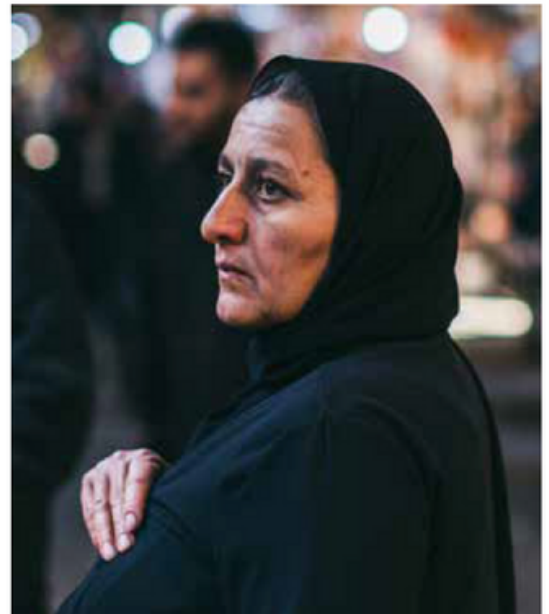
More than a decade ago, an Alliance team in the Middle East established a community center with the intention of building a strong, trusting community for this oppressed people group. Intentionality in fostering relationships as well as the variety of programs the center conducts, such as English classes, conversation nights, and community picnics, has resulted in a meaningful presence for this team.

“When people walk through the front door of the community center, they say this sense of peace comes over them,” says Jeremiah,* an Alliance international worker serving on this team. “We attribute it to the Holy Spirit that when people come here, they can share their lives, and they have a level of comfort with us.”

Through these programs, Alliance workers are able to have conversations and build trusting relationships with people who have grown weary of their own religion. Even though it is difficult for these people to trust, they are often open to having religious conversations, offering many opportunities to share the gospel and bring more people to Jesus.

“The community center is not our ultimate purpose for being here,” Heather says. “That is how we’re able to have a meaningful, impactful presence here. Our ultimate goal, however, is to help build up the Church, to help raise up local leaders, and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ among a people who don’t know Him.”

Because of the relationships this team has built, they have been able to start Bible studies where those from this people group now pray and worship in their own language. There have been many



◀ Opposite: Young men and women from this Middle Eastern people group, like Zakary, are being changed by the love of Christ because of this Alliance team. ▲ Above: This team will be launching a new presence in the city pictured above to reach even more from this mistrusting people group with the steadfast, faithful love of Christ.

barriers, as people, especially women, are scared to be associated with anything Christian for fear of retaliation from their families. Despite the obstacles, these Alliance workers have still seen many people come to faith and grow deeper in their relationship with Christ because of this Bible study.

When this Alliance team first landed 15 years ago, there were hardly any believers in a city of almost 1 million people. Now, there are 150 known believers, some of whom are leading their own Bible studies and small groups to share the gospel among their own people group.

"It has been a huge encouragement to see that the Holy Spirit is working in this city," Jeremiah says. "People are coming to faith, and we pray that the Holy Spirit continues to work and multiply."

Jeremiah began talking to Zakary about faith. Through this conversation, it became clear to Jeremiah that Zakary had a deep interest in learning more about who Jesus is. "I could sense there was a longing in his heart for a relationship with God," Jeremiah says.

They lined up a time to meet outside of the community center so they could continue their conversation. This quickly turned into weekly meetings where Jeremiah would lead Zakary through different passages in the Old and New Testament, discussing everything from the purpose of church to the importance of faith in Jesus. Zakary was also meeting a local pastor, and soon he committed his life to Christ.

When Zakary had to move to a neighboring city in order to find work, Jeremiah started trying to find a local believer there to continue having Bible studies with Zakary. Though this new city is twice the population of where Jeremiah and Heather currently work, Jeremiah could not find a locally led Bible study or even a single local believer to meet with and disciple Zakary.

An international worker was able to connect with Zakary, but this search showed Jeremiah what a great need this new city had for more gospel access. The Alliance team back at the community center began having discussions about who they could send to the neighboring city to bring the gospel so that these people would have a chance to hear about Jesus.

Heather and Jeremiah started praying about whether they were the ones who should be sent. Because of the life they've built in their current city, they weren't sure if they should uproot themselves and their children. "But after taking a trip to that city ourselves," Heather says, "the Lord wouldn't allow us to close the door. He really burdened our hearts, and we knew deep down that He was asking us to take this new step of obedience."



A LONGING OF THE HEART

One night as students filed out the door after Jeremiah dismissed his English class, one of his students, Zakary, stopped by his desk. Zakary started sharing about his struggles in the country and about the different barriers he had to finding work and establishing a good life because of his ethnicity.

LAUNCHING PRESENCE

In this new city, the people group Jeremiah and Heather work among are even more closed off than where they live now. There's more devotion to the majority religion and less opportunities for Christian community, which means an even greater risk to following Christ.

“We feel honored to work among this people group,” Jeremiah says. “When we do see people come to faith, we feel like we’re in the first century of the church because we are seeing people who literally have to reject their entire lives to follow Him, like Jesus’ apostles. It challenges us daily to follow Jesus with more passion and with everything that we are.”

There is one area of the city that has no gospel presence at all—as far as Heather and Jeremiah know, there is not a single believer from this people group. Their plan is to establish another community center in order to meet felt needs and have opportunities to build relationships.

Among the 50 workers being commissioned at Council 2023, five of them will be joining Jeremiah and Heather to launch this project and create a gospel

presence where there isn’t one. Pray for these workers as they create a brand-new team and as they search for housing and a building for this community center.

“It’s our hope and prayer that the people of this new city will be transformed because they experience the hope and joy we have in Jesus,” Heather says. ■

*All names changed



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.



RISE UP LIKE PAUL

Empowering young Thai pastors to follow God's call

by Emmy Duddles

When Sittichai traveled hundreds of miles from his tribe in the mountains of Thailand to a Bible college in Bangkok, he struggled with confidence about where he should serve God. Three years into his degree, Sittichai attended an Alliance church plant in Baan Paeo, which aXcess workers Ed and Sue Danneker had recently helped plant.

"We liked him immediately," Ed says. Ed and Sue were looking for a Thai leader to pastor Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church and thought Sittichai was just the man they had been praying for. "We saw all the qualities you need in a pastor—he loved God, loved people, and was eager to serve in whatever capacity was needed."

FROM THE FARTHEST CORNERS

The Dannekers began mentoring Pastor Sittichai, encouraging him and giving him space to sense the Lord's direction. Sittichai started by serving in weekend ministries at the church and then did a nine-month internship. Once he graduated from Bible school, he started

servicing as the full-time pastor of the church. However, he still wrestled with whether or not he was called to preach the gospel in this distant place and even considered going home to help his parents with their coffee orchard.

One day, Sittichai was reading through Isaiah. When he got to chapter 41, these words jumped off the page:

I took you from the ends of the earth; from its farthest corners I called you. I said, "You are my servant." I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:9–10).

For Sittichai, this small city more than 300 miles away from his home in the mountains might as well have been the ends of the earth. He excitedly came to the Dannekers and said, "God called me!"



◀ *Opposite: When we are invested in raising up young leaders, God's Kingdom reaches the farthest corners.* ▼ *Below: The Dannekers are partnering with local Thai churches to see more people come to know the Father.*

"That was June 2021," Ed says. "We have seen a clear difference in him—new confidence, new anointing in his preaching, new boldness in his leadership, and new vision for the church."

Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church is thriving under Pastor Sittichai's leadership. Even before he felt truly called to stay in Baan Paeo, Pastor Sittichai partnered with Ed to start a center for leadership development to train lay leaders in Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church. In 2022, two young women graduated from this program and started teaching adult Sunday school once a month. The church is now completely self-sustaining and cares for about 35 members every Sunday.

"We have an even wider, more positive reputation in the area," Sue says. "Even though we're only a church of 35, people know where we are now."

This wide reputation is due in large part to Baan Paeo's annual agricultural fair in December 2021. Over 1,000 people attended this event, and Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church was given 30 minutes every night for three nights to share the gospel and worship God for everyone to hear. They also had a booth just beside the stage where they were able to pass out donations and more than 800 packets of Christian literature with the name of their church. "God just opened the doorwide," Ed says.

FLOURISHING GIFTS

The Dannekers have been church planting and raising up Thai leaders, like Pastor Sittichai, for many years. Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church was the fourth church they have helped plant, always working with local Thai churches to determine the next region to plant in and usually finding young Bible students, like Sittichai, to disciple to become the lead pastor.

"We have tried to be like Barnabas, the encourager," Ed says. "We want our Thai pastors to rise up like Paul."

"God has just been answering prayers," Sue adds. "And we have loved seeing the giftings of these young men flourish over the years."

Ed and Sue have also been working on soul care with these men and other lay leaders in the churches they serve.

"Soul care has really helped people because there is such a spiritual darkness here," Sue says.

"In the Thai culture, saving face is a big issue," Ed adds. "It's very hard for people to admit they have sin. They hide it deeper and deeper in secret, and they carry all this shame." »

*I took you from
the ends of the
earth; from the
farthest corners
I called you.*

Photography by Olivia McCash





A PERMANENT RESIDENCE

Mahapawn Living Water Church, the mother church of Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church, previously rented a small storefront that was only large enough to fit around 40 people. The congregation was growing, and people were crowding inside to come worship every Sunday morning.

In the January/February 2021 issue of *Alliance Life*, we asked you to consider giving toward the purchase of a new building for Mahapawn Living Water Church. Because of your generosity, the project was soon fully funded!

Ed and Sue Danneker worked with Pastor Sukprasan to scope out a new building. They found a 25-year-old building right in the middle of Mahachai, but the place had not been taken care of properly by the previous owners. The building and its necessary renovations were still within budget, so they decided to purchase it, knowing the location was exactly what they needed to share the love of Christ with this city.

After several months of renovations and a new coat of paint, the building was dedicated in March 2022. Mahapawn Living Water Church now has space to seat 80 congregants every Sunday and host community outreaches, such as Christmas events and clothes donations. They are also hoping to continue planting churches like their plants in both Baan Paeo and Baan Bo.

► *Opposite: As more Thai leaders are empowered to lead, more and more people are opening their hearts to let the King of Glory in.*

However, as they have worked through soul care, Ed and Sue have seen great amounts of breakthrough. A young Bible student, Attapon, said to Ed and Sue, "In Bible college, we're supposed to be talking about spiritual formation and aligning your life with what the Bible says, but nobody has been able to talk to me on this level."

"Attapon's the kind of guy who wants to be 100 percent for Jesus," Ed says. "We were able to be really transparent with one another, and I saw him get free and experience healing, cleansing, and deliverance. It's powerful."

Soul care has also led to greater transparency between Ed, Sue, and Pastor Sittichai. When Pastor Sittichai has experienced hurt from them, he feels comfortable enough to tell them what happened and seek reconciliation.

"I love that we're on that level," Sue says, "where we can be vulnerable and honest. If he had kept his hurt in, he would have had a bitter heart. Instead, we left for home assignment as friends and at peace."

As Ed and Sue have walked alongside these young men, they have taken great ownership over their congregations and have discipled others. Pastor Sukprasan of Mahapawn Living Water Church, the third church Ed and Sue helped plant, was instrumental in planting Mahapawn Baan Paeo Church and took a large role in developing and mentoring Pastor Sittichai.

Pastor Sittichai and Pastor Sukprasan are now partnering together to plant a new church in Baan Bo, a small town of 30,000 with no visible church presence. Sittichai, Sukprasan, Ed, and Sue, all went on a prayer walk in the town with Attapon, who they will all disciple to become the pastor of this new church. "We prayed a blessing on the people that they will open their hearts to let the King of Glory in," Sue says. This church plant will be launched this year, and Ed and Sue plan to partner with these three young men when they return after home assignment in June 2023.

*Lord, pour out
Your Spirit on
this town. May
the wind of
Your Spirit blow
across this land.*



“As I’m walking over the bridge near our church,” Ed says. “I often pray, ‘Lord, pour out Your Spirit on this town. May the wind of Your Spirit blow across this land.’” Please join Ed and Sue in prayer for the continued growth of the church in Thailand. ■



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.





DO YOU WANT TO SEE A MIRACLE?

*Believing God still
works wonders*

by Emmy Duddles

*“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”
—John 11:40*

“Do you want to hear a miracle story?” Di Ullrich asked me as we sat down to talk about her ministry with CAMA Services in the Balkans. I leaned forward, eager to hear what she would tell me next.

In 2021, Di was hospitalized with COVID. The hospitals were so overrun that each room was packed full of patients, and Di was so close to the women on either side of her that she could easily reach out and touch them.

At the same time, the room was crowded with friends and family members. Nurses don’t take care of the day to day needs of their patients, so family members are expected to come along to bathe them, take them to the bathroom, change catheters, etc. Because Di doesn’t have any family living in the country with her, the students from the school where she teaches as an occupational therapist took turns taking care of her.

When Di had been in the hospital for more than two weeks, a woman two beds down to Di's left, Maria,* passed away. Her sons were crying over her, and the older son took a napkin to cover his mother's face. Di clearly heard the voice of the Lord say, "I want you to pray for Maria." She thought, *We don't pray for the dead, so the only reason to pray would be for God to resurrect her.*

Now, Di had double pneumonia, so she could barely speak. But she mustered up her strength and asked in a hoarse voice, "Excuse me, I want to pray for your mom. Can I have your permission?"

When the son agreed, the voice of the Spirit came, and Di spoke God's love and life over Maria and her family, telling them how much He cares for them and the desires of their hearts. As soon as Di finished, Maria sat up and started talking. Her sons ran to her side and rejoiced.

Di doesn't remember which student was with her that day, but she does remember saying to them:

I want you to remember what you've seen. God is alive, He is close, and He cares. He still does miracles today. He still heals today. When you are struggling with something, I want you to remember this and go straight to Him.

A few days later, the woman between Di and Maria, Helga,* died. Her daughter and daughter-in-law were trying to get her to respond, but she was completely unresponsive. Once they realized Helga wasn't breathing anymore, they wept. Again, the Lord said to Di, "I want you to pray for her."

Di reached over to the daughter and said, "Excuse me, I want to pray for your mom. Can I have your permission?"

The daughter said yes, so Di put her hand on Helga and prayed the same prayer she prayed over Maria. As soon as Di prayed that Helga's eyes would open and that she would start speaking, Helga woke up and spoke. Her family rejoiced.

When we hear stories about the miraculous, it's easy to be taken aback, surprised that God would do something so outrageous, like raising two women back from the dead. Di says:

It's sad to me that when we pray, we're not praying with the belief that what we're praying for is actually going to happen. We're always praying, "Lord, if it is Your will," or "Lord, will You please?" But the Book of Acts still applies today. Instead, we should be praying, "Lord, show us who You are. I am partnering with You because I know You can do this. You have brought people back from the dead throughout history, and I know You can do it again."

WHO ARE WE TO DISOBEY?

Maria progressively got better every day. Every time someone came into the room, the oldest son would point to Di and say, "That's the American who prayed for my mom, and God brought her back to life!"

"He was declaring God's glory to everyone who would listen," Di says. Maria eventually returned to her life in good health only one day after Di was released from the hospital.

Helga, on the other hand, had been very sick. They were taking her out for dialysis every day, and she was in so much pain. A few days after Helga came back to life, she passed away again. Di thought, *Lord, why did You keep one alive and not the other? All You did was bring breath back to her. Her quality of life was so poor. Why?*

Di felt God respond immediately, "Your job is just to be obedient to what I'm asking you to do. All of the results are up to Me."

Sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers the way we expect Him to—an illness lingers longer than it's meant to; a family member dies after a hard-fought battle with cancer; a company lays off its workers right after a prayer for better financial health. The results don't always seem to match what we know is true about God's heart for us. However, He knows the whole story—the wisdom we will receive, the love and compassion we will give, and the lives that will be changed forever.

"If God wants to reveal Himself and meet people on their journey through me, then who am I to disobey?" Di says.

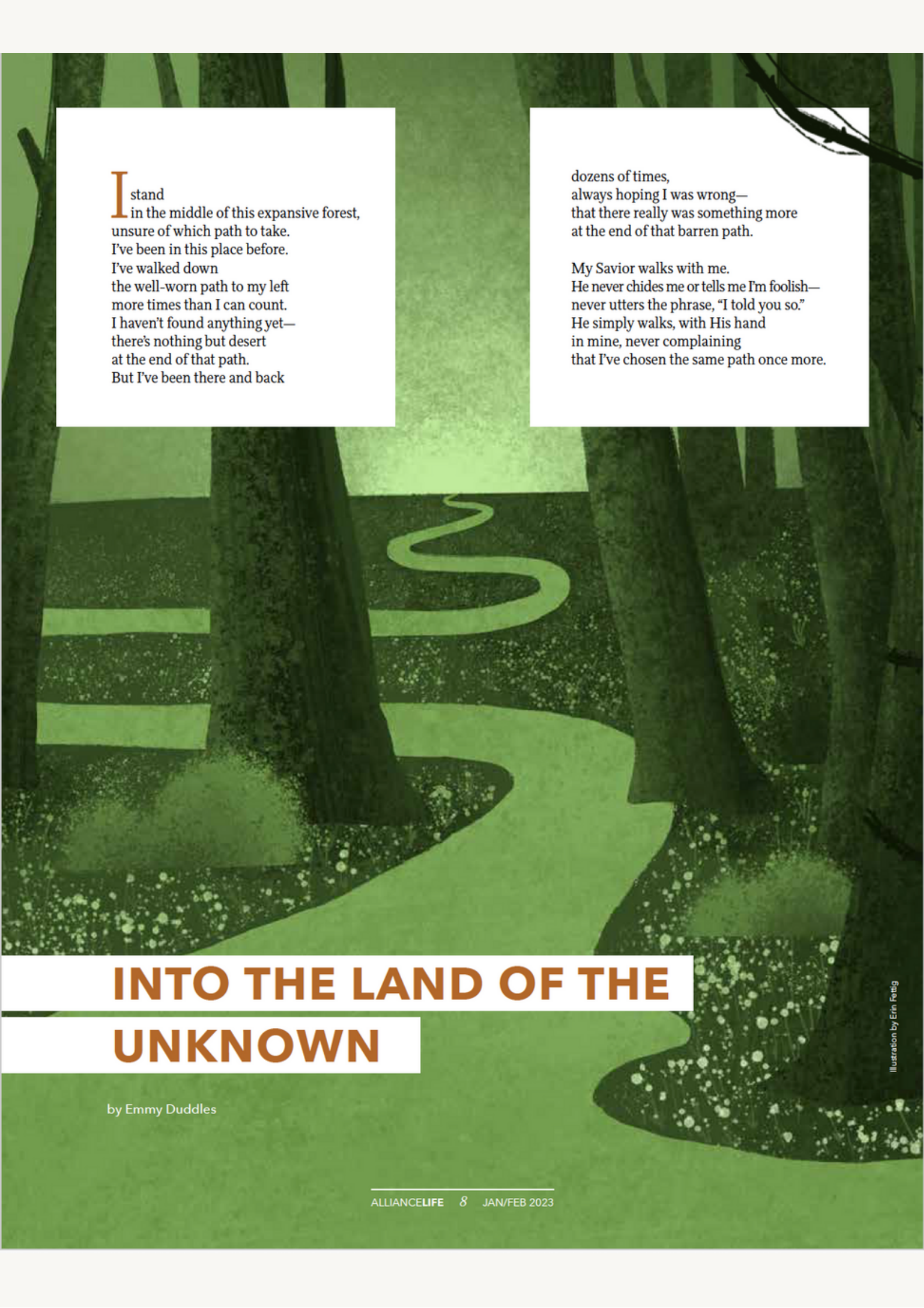
When we are met with difficult outcomes to our prayers, may we trust that God's purpose in those moments is still to bring reconciliation and redemption to our world. May we believe that when we ask in faith, He will rescue the oppressed, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead to life. ■

I want you to remember what you've seen.

*Name changed



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.



Istand
in the middle of this expansive forest,
unsure of which path to take.
I've been in this place before.
I've walked down
the well-worn path to my left
more times than I can count.
I haven't found anything yet—
there's nothing but desert
at the end of that path.
But I've been there and back

dozens of times,
always hoping I was wrong—
that there really was something more
at the end of that barren path.

My Savior walks with me.
He never chides me or tells me I'm foolish—
never utters the phrase, "I told you so."
He simply walks, with His hand
in mine, never complaining
that I've chosen the same path once more.

INTO THE LAND OF THE UNKNOWN

by Emmy Duddles

Every time I come back
to the place where two paths divide,
He invites me to walk
the path on the right with Him,
the one so full of thorns and undergrowth
that it can hardly be seen.
I can never say, "Yes."
There is more wildness
about the path on the right—
much more to fear.
Why wouldn't I continue to walk
on the path I've already traveled?
I know it like the back of my hand.
I know the emotions I'll feel
as I pass each tree and flower.
I know where I tripped the first time
and how to get back up.

I know what lies at the end of this trail,
though I hope it will be different every time.
But what lies at the end
of the path on the right?
How do I know there's not a lion
waiting to devour me?
So this is where I stand today,
in the place where two paths divide,
my Savior's hand still holding mine
as He beckons me softly
into the land of the unknown.
His bright eyes speak of heaven,
and His voice surrounds me with peace.
Where can I go where He will not come?
My faith rests in Him,
and I know His glory will be revealed
as I venture beyond these thorns.

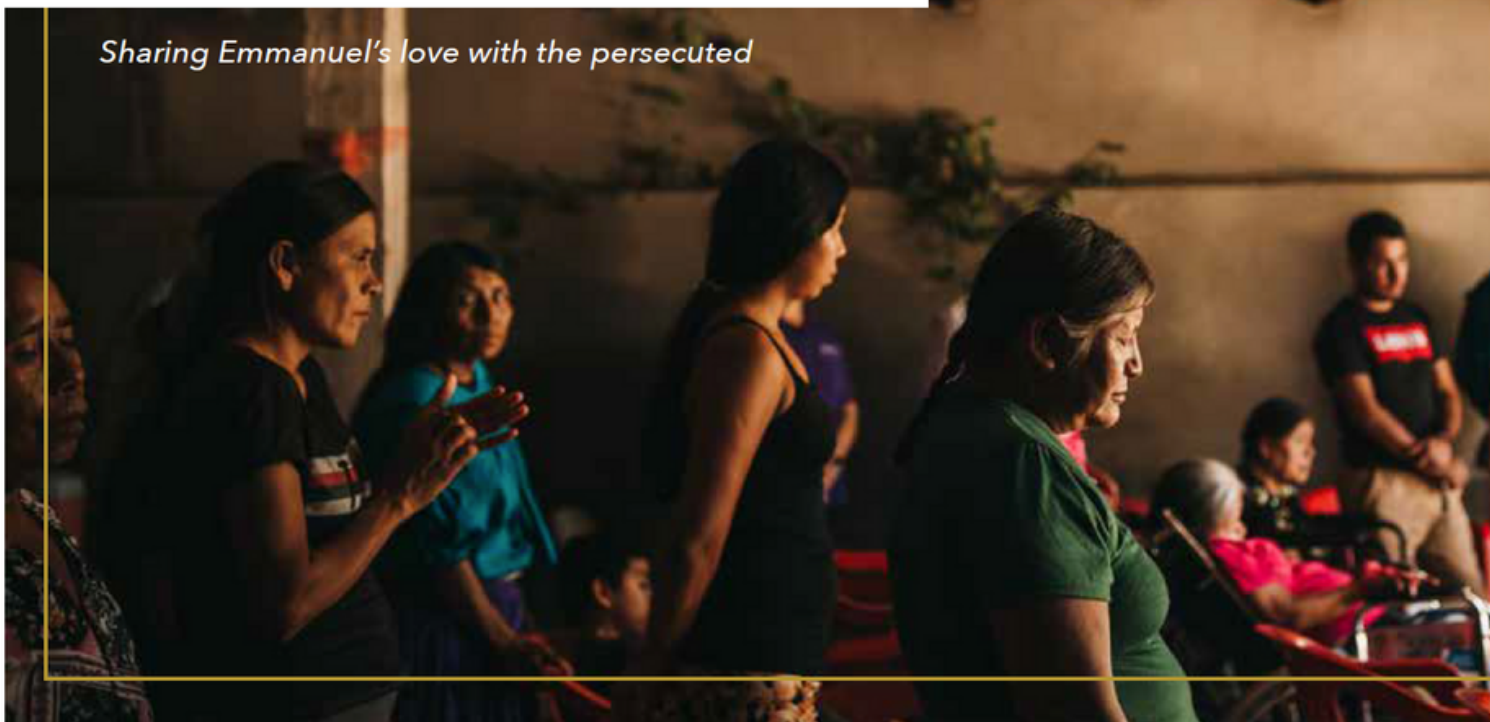


Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, live in Columbus, Ohio.

2022

NEVER FORGOTTEN

Sharing Emmanuel's love with the persecuted



by Emmy Duddles

Deep in the mountains of Mexico, a group of indigenous Christians lives ostracized from the community that once offered them love and support. Much like the early Christians in Acts, these believers have endured extreme persecution due to their faith. They have been beaten, jailed, and exiled from their homes. Yet with the help of local and international Alliance workers, these persecuted believers have continued to travel great distances to share the love of Christ with the forgotten and unreached.

HOPE IN EXILE

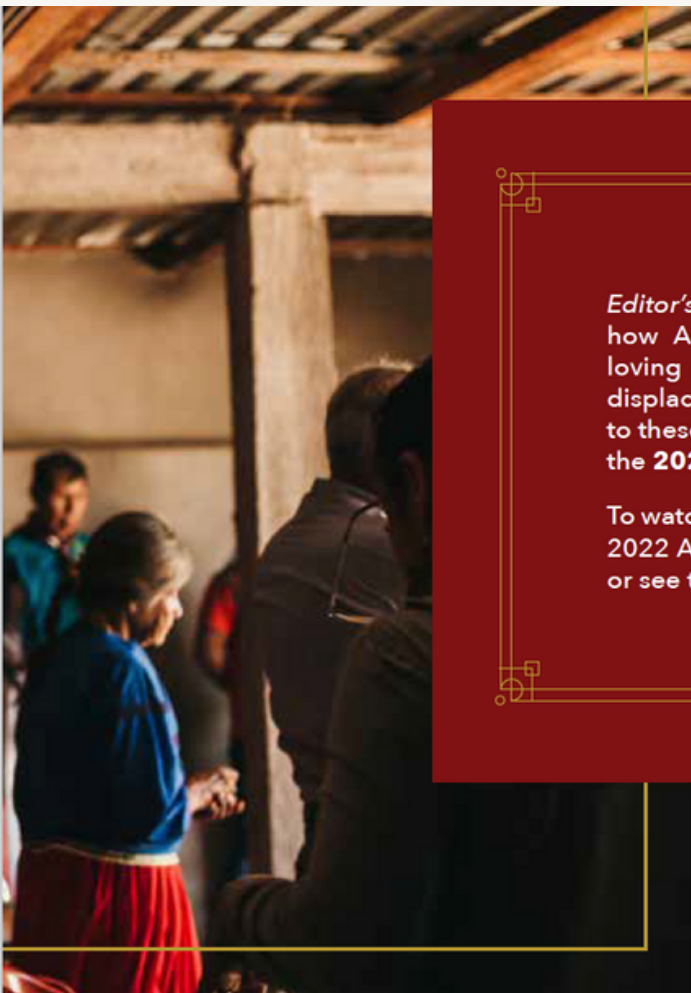
In 2002, a young boy from this indigenous tribe became dangerously ill, so his father, Fernando,* took him to the nearest hospital a few hours away. Fernando met a missionary while they were there, and the missionary offered to pray for his son. Despite all of the predictions from the doctors, the boy was healed, and Fernando became the first in his tribe to put his faith in Jesus. He returned to his community, publicly renounced all

of the animistic practices of his previous religion, and shared the gospel with his neighbors.

When 13 families came to Christ through witnessing Fernando's transformation, the shamans who control the village began threatening their lives when they refused to renounce their faith. Fernando was thrown in jail, had his land and livestock taken away, and eventually was dumped outside of town.

Another man, Alfredo,* wanted to stay in the community despite their threats. However, after he spoke with the leaders to find a way to still live in his home, two men attacked him with knives and almost beat him to death. Alfredo's teeth were shattered, and he had multiple serious wounds from the assault. A man nearby saved Alfredo in the nick of time and brought him to a hospital, where he spent several months in recovery.

Eventually, all 13 families were stripped of their possessions and expelled from the reservation with nowhere to go. They received refugee status and were given land right outside of the reservation from the



Editor's note: This is just one of the many stories demonstrating how Alliance international workers are extending Emmanuel's loving presence among the world's overlooked, oppressed, and displaced. You can join your workers in proclaiming **Love Is Here** to these and other suffering and marginalized people by giving to the **2022 Alliance Christmas Offering**.

To watch a compelling video of this story and learn more about the 2022 Alliance Christmas Offering, visit cmalliance.org/christmas or see the letter that was enclosed in the back of this magazine.

▲ Above: A house church run by local believers

Mexican government. With what little they had, they created a new home. The first building they constructed was a church so they could regularly gather together and spur each other on with hope in their new reality.

Even while in exile, these believers continued to share the gospel with people from their tribe and created a safe place for people to land when they were expelled from their communities as well. Fellowship Church* is now thriving with 75 to 100 believers every Sunday.

PROVIDING SUSTAINABILITY

About five years ago, The Alliance found out about this remote people group and sent in Heather, a Canadian Alliance international worker, to start helping this community of believers. Bob, an aXcess worker serving with The Alliance in Mexico, says, "I was astounded to find 60,000 people living so close to the United States border who have never heard of Jesus Christ." Since then, the Mexican Alliance national church and a few Alliance international workers—including Heather, Bob

and Cheryl, and Phil* and Rebecca*—have been working hand in hand to offer tangible help and discipleship to these isolated believers.

One of the main ways The Alliance has helped Fellowship Church is by providing them with the resources they need to start microbusinesses that can sustain their village. The workers bought bread ovens for a bakery, farming equipment for small farms, and materials to create beadwork like jewelry and other decorative items.

As they have done for other indigenous groups in the area, the workers also plan to hand out reading glasses they receive from Alliance donors to many of the artisan women. These women learn beadwork as young girls and are often working on their projects into the night by the light of a fire. By the time they are 40 or 50 years old, they struggle to see the small beads, so these reading glasses would allow them to continue to provide for themselves with their beautiful artwork.

Discipleship has been another important part of The Alliance's ministry to Fellowship Church. The Mexican Alliance national church and Phil have been conducting basic discipleship classes once a month for the whole church, with most workers traveling 11 hours to care for the village. Phil is also in a one-on-one discipling relationship with the young pastor of Fellowship Church, whose family was expelled from their village in 2005.

The Alliance hopes that these indigenous believers will grow deeper in their understanding of their faith and be well-equipped to continue sharing the gospel with their tribe. »

CREATING PRESENCE

The areas surrounding Fellowship Church are still difficult to traverse, as the mountains of this region are underdeveloped, and the leaders of these villages want to scare away any outsiders, especially Christians. The reservation is also able to make their own laws and has now outlawed Christianity.

Our Alliance workers have encountered many obstacles as they have been reaching out to people who still live in the tribal villages. One group of workers was left without guides or food on the trails just because they were suspected to be Christians; Bob has been threatened with being thrown in jail; and the shamans who lead this indigenous tribe have tried to tail the workers who come in.

When Mexican Alliance President Tomas Bencomo was traveling into the villages, a group of armed men stopped him on the road. They held Tomas at gunpoint and told him they were going to assassinate him.

Before they could do anything, he asked if he could talk to them for just five minutes, and they agreed. By the time Tomas was done sharing the gospel, they were in tears and said, "We need your help. You have a free pass. You can come and go as much as you want." God gave him favor in that moment, and this has given Tomas much more access to the area than before.

"Pray that God will keep the doors open so that we can maintain these ministries without being chased out," Bob says.

Despite the danger, the villagers often ask questions because of the boldness of Alliance workers and local believers in dealing with the shamans. When Bob first arrived, the villagers thought that he was also a type of shaman. They could tell that Bob carried something spiritual with him but they couldn't figure out what it was. They named him "He who talks with the spirits."

People have pulled Bob to the side and whispered,

"Who is the God you worship?" Bob has been able to share with some of them that our God is the one true God and is more powerful than any other gods or spirits. "We get the most beautiful opportunities to quietly share about the Lord because they are seeing Him in us," Bob says. "That is all part of us being present."

Our Alliance workers are hoping to create several strategic communities of believers who live in "frontier towns." These towns would be established on the reservation's edge so that new indigenous believers can live freely and safely while also being strategically placed to go into the reservation for evangelism. These communities would also provide safe places for other new believers to live when they are kicked out of their homes for their faith in Jesus.

Breath of Life Church, where Bob serves in another region of Mexico, is hoping to create one of these safe places by planting their fourth church campus in a city close to this indigenous tribe. "We want to continue to create

◀ *Bottom Left: A woman makes fresh tortillas with the flour she was given by Alliance workers on a recent evangelistic trip to the mountain villages.*

▼ *Below: The Mexican Alliance national church president, Tomas Bencomo, leads a caravan through mountain roads and across rivers to deliver gifts and the gospel to the surrounding villages.*

▶ *Opposite: A woman from this indigenous tribe sells her beadwork and embroidery at a market in the major city a few hours away from her home.*



THE
PEOPLE
WE SERVE

presence,” Bob says. “If someone comes to Christ, we celebrate. At the same time, we know what they’re facing. Our desire is to provide faith community for them as they navigate the change.”

Because of the prayers and financial support of people like you, local and international Alliance workers have created an incarnational presence in these communities. More people who never knew of Christ before are coming to Him, and current believers are able to continue sharing the gospel with their indigenous brothers and sisters. “There is hope for these people,” Bob says. “They have not been forgotten.” ■

*Name changed



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life*. She and her husband, Lucas, relocated to Columbus, Ohio, in June 2022.



Eastern Europe

My name is Barry.* I am the old man on the bench outside my apartment building from morning to night. There is nowhere else for me to be, nowhere else I am wanted. My body has been riddled with health problems that, seven surgeries later, make me too weak and frail to do meaningful work. My family hates me for all the pain I’ve caused them. Our apartment is a place to sleep not to call home. I don’t trust anyone anymore, so I have no friends to speak of either. As I often say, “I can rely only on myself.”

Recently, a new neighbor is quite the exception. He actually seems interested in me and has been willing to help. I call him my hope and one true friend. He seems to be the religious type, and he’s rubbing off on me. Whether it’s to please my new friend or convince myself, I regularly credit God for helping me now.

I know my time is running out. My body makes that clear every time my blood is checked for a resurgence of cancer or I fall on the ice during this long winter. Winter is a fitting description for my current season—cold, dark, and not much life. But one thing I’m truly thankful for is when my neighbor stops by and sits with me awhile. It’s like a warm wind, a ray of hope.

*Name changed





THE GIFT OF HOSPITALITY

Creating community for the lonely

by Emmy Duddles

When we talk about bringing gospel access to the world, the image that often comes to mind is serving people groups who have had no opportunity to hear of Jesus tucked away in jungles or living under oppressive regimes. What we sometimes fail to remember are the cultures that have heard of Jesus but have been so deeply wounded by the corruption of the church that they have rejected God.

Not only are the locals in these countries in desperate need of a true expression of Jesus' love for them, but the nations are coming to them in droves. Millions of refugees from Africa, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East have flocked to countries in Europe in the last 5–10 years to escape war and poverty. There is tremendous opportunity for our workers to reach the whole world while living in one place.

LOVE THROUGH HOSPITALITY

This is the culture that Dan and Lisa Lawrence stepped into when they began their ministry in Paris, France. Wanting to reach both French and international people with the love of Christ, the Lawrences decided to take a simple approach—hospitality.

“When I read the Scriptures, the table is present all the way through,” Dan says. “That’s where Jesus’ ministry so often was. If we can get people to join us at the table, the love of Christ will be palpable.”

Dan and Lisa’s ministry is all about hospitality—meeting people organically at parks, their kids’ school, or through a friend. They often visit the same grocery store, flower shop, café, or bakery in an effort to build meaningful relationships with people in their everyday lives. In their first five years, Dan and Lisa have been able to bring hope, love, and community to people who have never experienced it before.

A VACANCY OF GOD

For French people and Europeans in general, the subjects of God and church are difficult, which means inviting them into relationship instead of to a church service is far more impactful. For hundreds of years, France was run by monarchs who were required to be Catholic. “When governments and the church align themselves, it rarely turns out well,” Dan says. “In the French Revolution, they were revolting against power. And because the church was so closely tied with the monarchs, they

became one in the same. The French people didn't want anyone to be king over them anymore, including God."

Because of the brutality of their kings, who claimed to follow Christ, the concept of the loving benevolent King remains hard for many French people to grasp. Though their churches are empty, French people are flocking to other forms of spirituality in order to fill the void. There are more licensed spiritual healers than licensed pastors, and crystal shops are filled to overflowing, including the one below the floorboards of the Lawrences' apartment.

"It's just a vacancy of God," Dan says. "They've been so anti-God that they believe something else has to be the answer."

Many are also desperate for relationship. Suicide rates in France have always been high, and they were worsened by the pandemic. There is a deep need for true connection and love in Paris, which is why Dan and Lisa are committed to creating meaningful community for all the people they meet. "People often must first encounter the people of God before they can encounter the Person of God," Dan says.

BECOMING FAMILY

When they first moved to Paris, Lisa decided to go to the park to let her toddler get out his energy on the playground while she rested on a bench. A couple sat beside her when her son came up and spoke to her in English. The man turned to Lisa and asked in French, "Are you an American?"

"Yes, I am," Lisa replied, a little startled because she wasn't sure if that was a good thing.

"I've never met an American before," he said. "I'm so excited to meet you!"

The man and woman, Sebastian* and Evelyne,* started peppering her with questions about the United States, and when they needed to leave, Lisa and Evelyne exchanged phone numbers. In the days to come, they all met at a café, and Sebastian and Evelyne met Dan for the first time. They spent four hours together that day.

"God just kept opening doors for us to meet with them," Dan says. "We'd see them almost every week at the park or a café or our house."

A few months into their friendship, Dan and Lisa invited Sebastian and Evelyne over for Thanksgiving. At the end of the night, Dan and Lisa said, "In American culture, we go around the table and ask, 'What are you thankful for?'" Dan and Lisa went first and then asked Sebastian and Evelyne to share.

"No one has ever asked us that question before," Evelyne said. "I don't know what to say." She started to say that she was thankful for Dan and Lisa, but before she could, she started to weep.

"We entered a place in their lives that few had en-

tered, into a soul care realm," Dan says. "From that moment, they started introducing us to people as their best friends."

Their relationship continued to deepen, to the point that Dan was Sebastian's best man when he and Evelyne got married. When Dan was helping Sebastian clean up after the wedding, Sebastian looked at him and said, "Thank you, Dan."

"No problem," Dan said. "That's what friends are for. We're happy to help."

"I'm not thanking you for helping," Sebastian said. "Thank you for who you are—in my life you have always been kind and have always been present."

"This is why we do what we do," Dan says. "It's the presence of the Holy Spirit in us that he is experiencing. As we strive to have an impactful presence in the lives of the lost, God is opening doors. Our hope is that our hospitality ministry will allow strangers to become neighbors and neighbors to become the family of God. Sebastian and Evelyne aren't quite in the family of God yet, but they are family."

BRINGING REFRESHMENT

Along with the relationships they've made with French locals, Dan and Lisa have developed friendships with people from all over the world. Paris is an international city, serving millions of tourists every year and accepting thousands of immigrants. Immigrants make up about 10 percent of France's population, mainly from Africa and the Middle East. "You go on the metro, and you'll hear 10 different languages being spoken at the same time," Lisa says.

Many of the friends Dan and Lisa have made are immigrants, like Carlotta* and Ashraf.* Lisa met Carlotta, an Italian immigrant, while at a birthday party. Because they were both foreigners, they connected quickly and started going to coffee and out for walks. When Carlotta asked what Lisa does for a living Carlotta quickly shut down the conversation, saying, "I'm an atheist; don't you dare talk to me about God."

However, they continued to get together, and Carlotta started to bring her partner, Ashraf, an African immigrant, over to Dan and Lisa's. They kept up their friendship for two years, when Carlotta messaged Lisa, saying, "I really need to talk to you." They met for coffee, and she said, "It's been bothering me, but I need to know why you are one of the only people who loves Ashraf and me for who we are. You don't treat us differently because I'm

*We're present,
and God is
opening doors.*

white and he's black. You care about us. Why? Why are you different?"

Lisa responded, saying, "Because God loves you. God loves everyone. He doesn't care about your color. He has unconditional love, and we love you with His love."

As they continued talking, Carlotta received access to the gospel message for the first time in her life. When the conversation was coming to a close, Carlotta said, "This is the most refreshing conversation I've ever had, and you are the most refreshing people I have ever met."

"When we build relationships, we build bridges that can withstand the weight of the gospel," Lisa says.

REPLACING LONELINESS WITH LOVE

Sometimes the people Dan and Lisa meet are in the middle of a crisis. When Dan met Karim* at a community center, Karim was struggling with deep loneliness. "Karim is probably the loneliest person I've ever met," Dan says.

Karim had moved from the Middle East to France for a woman. They got married and had a son, and several years later she walked out on him and took their son with her. "Karim became a citizen, so now he's trapped in France," Dan says. "He doesn't get to see his son, and it's really hard on him. He has no one in a foreign land with a language he doesn't fully understand."

Karim and Dan bonded over sports, and Dan invited Karim and another man from the community center to their house one Sunday night so he could teach them about football. Lisa cooked them dinner, and it went so well that soon they were hosting Sunday night football weekly at their apartment for a dozen to two dozen peo-

ple. Karim never missed a game.

Their friendship continued to deepen, and one day, Dan and Karim went to a concert where the man had written music for the Psalms of Ascent. At the end of the concert, Karim asked, "Daniel, could you explain to me the difference between Judaism and Christianity?"

"The difference is Jesus—the Messiah," Dan said. Karim had many questions because it was the first time he had heard any of this. "To be in that moment with somebody when they're hearing about the gospel for the first time is a powerful, sacred place," Dan says.

Before they left on home assignment, Karim helped Dan and Lisa move out of their apartment, and he said, "I want to tell you something. In my culture, we don't ever say this unless we really mean it—and I really mean it. I love you. You are my family."

Because of Dan and Lisa's presence in this place, people who have been lonely, hopeless, and in need of community are experiencing the hope and love of Jesus. "We have had thousands of conversations, and they're all Spirit-filled," Dan says. "When we're able to give people the gift of hospitality, God opens doors." ■

*Name changed



Emmy Duddles is the managing editor of *Alliance Life* and has worked with the National Office for more than five years as a writer and editor. She and her husband, Lucas, currently live in Denver, Colorado.

2021



TOUCHING HIS CLOAK

Healing is a sensitive subject. Many of us have been disappointed either by unanswered prayers for ourselves or those we've prayed for. In those moments God can seem distant and cold, as though He doesn't know the pain we carry.

As someone who has dealt with chronic pain for the last 14 years, I know healing is a difficult, and often painful, topic to wrestle with. The endless unanswered prayers can add up and lead us to wonder why God hasn't moved for us.

But we have not been overlooked. Jesus will never leave us to bear this alone. He took our wounds, emotional and physical, to the cross with Him: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Jesus has entered into this pain with us, and we are more deeply known and loved than we can fathom. Rest assured, you have not been forgotten.

We serve a God who deeply loves to heal His people, whether emotionally, physically, or spiritually—a God who knows our pain and suffering intimately. In the Incarnation, Jesus chose to enter into our brokenness, grieving with His people and stepping into their hurt with power and compassion.

No matter what He was doing, Jesus interrupted Himself to bring both hope and healing to those who had been waiting for their prayers to be answered for years. Think of the woman who had suffered from bleeding for 12 years (see Mark 5:25–34). On His way to heal a dying girl, this woman touched His cloak because she believed even that small act would bring her healing. And it did!

After years of doctors' visits that continually made this woman worse and drained her financially, she was healed before even speaking to Jesus. He could have kept moving, and she still would have experienced that healing. However, He chose to stop what He was doing and acknowledge her: "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from suffering" (Mark 5:34).

Because of the illness she had, she would have been ostracized from her community and considered unclean. When she encountered Jesus, not only did He end her physical suffering—He also recognized her in a way that no one in her community ever would. She was finally seen and known.

In this issue, you will find beautiful testimonies of healing, practical ways to walk with those who are sick and wounded, and hopefully a reminder that despite how your prayers have been answered, your God is still walking closely with you and has a plan for your healing.

Emmy Houk, Managing Editor

ALLIANCELIFE

VOLUME 156 | No. 04

FOUNDER

A. B. Simpson

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Peter Burgo

MANAGING EDITOR

Emmy Houk

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Caylie Smith

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Julie Daubé

STAFF WRITERS/EDITORS

Julie Daubé

Janet Root

CIRCULATION FULFILLMENT

Julie Connon

© ALLIANCELIFE

ALLIANCELIFE is published by The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 8595 Explorer Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80920. Member, Evangelical Press Association and Associated Church Press. Printed in the U.S.A.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ALLIANCELIFE, 8595 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

When requesting a change of address, please give both the old and new addresses. Direct all correspondence and changes of address to ALLIANCELIFE, 8595 Explorer Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80920. Toll free: (877) 284-3262; email: alliancelife@cmalliance.org. Website: www.alliancelife.org.

The Alliance is committed to world missions, stressing the fullness of Christ in personal experience, building the Church, and preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth. ALLIANCELIFE carries on the tradition of 139 years of publishing stories of God at work through Alliance people in the United States and throughout the world.



www.alliancelife.org

COVER: In an interview with Alliance Life staff, National Office chaplains, Keith and Kathy Davis, explain the necessity of grieving our losses well. Photo by Stephanie Reindel and Olivia McCash

2019

God's Tattoo

After years of abusing drugs and stealing money from the federal government, Kevin Niebuhr lost everything—he even nearly lost custody of his daughter. In desperation, he cried out, “Lord, if you do something decent with my life, you can have every day from here on out.”

Hearing Kevin's heartfelt cry, God is making good on Kevin's promise—developing a desire in him to create a place where men like him can be reached with the gospel. He started learning to cope using body building workouts instead of drugs and decided he wanted to open a gym and plant a church through the connections he made.

And that's exactly what he did. Kevin opened a Metroflex gym in his town, Jefferson, Wisconsin, in November 2016. Soon after, it became the meeting place for Forge Church, a group of 30-40 new believers, all unchurched. Five months later, Forge Church had outgrown the gym and moved into a new building that it's already outgrowing.

On December 9, 2018, more than 100 people packed into a building meant for 80 to celebrate the baptisms of 14 men and women. By God's grace, the lives of people from all backgrounds are being changed through this ministry, including Tim's.

When Nothing Satisfies

Shortly after Kevin became a Christian, he met Tim. Raised as a Jehovah's Witness, Tim wasn't allowed to salute the flag or attend birthday parties—even if they were during class time at school. This led to significant isolation for him and his sister, and he was picked on constantly by the other kids. It didn't take long for Tim to start acting out in violence against his peers and even his father.

The older he got, the more Tim felt like he didn't belong anywhere—in or outside his family's faith. Tim finally felt he belonged when he met a Satanist in high school and started practicing the religion even though he didn't believe in it. “I just wanted to be accepted and feel loved,” Tim says.

Tim started smoking marijuana around this time. He eventually started abusing alcohol and drugs daily—overdosing multiple times. “I had a suicidal drug habit,” Tim says. “Death seemed like a release to me. There was an insane darkness in me, and it followed me wherever I went.”

Nothing satisfied Tim. He had a decent career as a tattoo artist, a wife and daughter, and lived a life of material abundance—yet he could not overcome his habits of promiscuity, drug abuse, and violence. “The first thing I would do if there was any sort of quarrel was assert dominance over them,” Tim says. “I was very quick to start a fight.”

He was jailed multiple times and faced five felonies. When all the charges against him were inexplicably dropped and he was released from prison, Tim decided he wasn't going to go back to

his old way of life. But as soon as he finished his probation, he started selling drugs to supplement his income.

A Seven-Layer Burrito of Bad

Soon after his release, Tim went back to using a variety of drugs, spending roughly \$4,000 a month on a toxic mix of cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, steroids, and more. He worked nonstop, often going 40-50 hours without sleep. He and his wife were on and off. They were emotionally and physically abusing each other, and Tim continued cheating on her with multiple women.

“Everything was about consuming things, about being angry,” Tim says. “I was like a seven-layer burrito of bad.”

Throughout this difficult time in Tim’s life, Kevin and his wife, Sam, reached out to Tim, inviting him over for dinner, working out with him, getting tattoos from him, talking to him about Jesus, and taking care of any needs he had. “God kept putting him in my life at pivotal points,” Tim says. “Anytime I cried out, Kevin was there.”

“But the more Tim was presented with the gospel,” Kevin says, “the worse this guy became.” Tim was still heavily involved in the occult, and it significantly affected the way he related to people, including Kevin. After five years, Kevin couldn’t handle being around Tim anymore. “Tim wasn’t simply immersed in the world—he was immersed in spiritual darkness,” Kevin says. “I walked away, thinking I failed.”

From Death to Life

Tim fell so deep into despair that he was ready to kill himself. He thought he heard his recently deceased grandfather tell him, “It’s not so bad—just die.” This scared him and gave him a desire to seek after spiritual things, though he was still turned off by religion.

One day, while he and his wife were high together, they started talking about a Satanist song he loved that referenced Revelation. His wife had never read the Bible. So Tim looked up Revelation in his Bible, and they read almost the entire book together that night.

That moment began a turning point for Tim. He started listening to Bible apps on and off while he was tattooing. “I thought Scripture was really angry, but I learned it’s a love story between a father and his children,” Tim says. He started giving his clients a discount if they read the Psalms to him while he gave them tattoos.

Slowly but surely, Tim began to change. He realized that the more he talked about Jesus and the more he prayed, the less he had a desire for violence, drugs, and women—in fact, he was growing repulsed by everything from his old life.

He soon felt convicted to stop selling drugs and get rid of all drug paraphernalia and everything he bought with his drug money. Tim filled the dumpster behind his house to the brim four times with nearly all his possessions.

After some time, Tim called Kevin—“Will you come down to my shop and read me the Bible? I want to receive the Holy Spirit.”

“Bro, you’re high,” Kevin replied. “This is a joke.”

“No, I’m serious. I’ve been reading the Bible,” Tim said. “If you tell me about Jesus and pray with me, I’ll tattoo you for free.”

Kevin couldn’t believe what he was hearing. But he went down to Tim’s tattoo shop to talk. “Cognitively, I knew God could save anyone, but there’s often a disconnect between our heads and our hearts,” Kevin says. “I knew in my head, ‘God, You can do this.’ I just didn’t think it was possible.”

However, as soon as Kevin saw Tim, he knew that something was different. As he lay in Tim’s tattoo chair, Kevin asked him questions. They talked about the gospel for hours. Once he realized that Tim was truly repentant and understood salvation, the two prayed together.

“We were sitting there and I just broke,” Kevin says. “Man, I didn’t even cry that hard when my dad died. I was bawling as I was praying for this guy because it’s something I couldn’t believe would ever happen.”

Tim was baptized at Forge Church shortly after and has continued to grow in his faith. He tells everyone he can about Jesus. “I don’t know where God’s going to take Tim,” Kevin says. “But God knows what He’s done in Tim’s life, and it’s a beautiful thing.”

The Forge Church is truly a family. The members have vastly different backgrounds, ranging from those like Tim who are completely unchurched to others who have attended church since infancy. But their shared, passionate love of Christ makes everyone who enters Forge’s doors feel like they’ve come home.

2018

A Symphony of Brotherhood

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “I have a dream that one day . . . the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope . . . [and] transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”

Though the United States has come a long way from the days when Dr. King spoke these words, the Equal Justice Initiative seeks to close the remaining divide through their memorial and museum on former slave trade sites in Montgomery, Alabama.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice depicts the horrors of the 4,400 reported lynchings that occurred between 1877 and 1950, while The Legacy Museum provides more than a decade’s worth of research on the connection between the slave trade, Jim Crow laws, and today’s racial inequalities, namely the projection that one in three black boys will be incarcerated in their lifetimes.

This hope for racial reconciliation is impossible without the work of God through His Church. I was excited to speak with four Alliance church leaders about their raw emotions after attending the dedication of this memorial. I couldn’t include the entirety of my conversations with them but tried to capture both their fears and hopes for the future in an authentic way.

—Emmy Houk

Alliance Life: Describe how you felt as you walked through the memorial.

Jelani Pinnock: A thousand feelings rushed at me. I actually found myself drowning in my emotions—a feeling I can’t remember ever experiencing.

Jonathan Schaeffer: There was a hushed silence among the hundreds of people who were walking through the memorial grounds. It was sobering to read all of the names of those who had been lynched and to see cities I’ve visited among the places where the atrocities occurred. There was injustice upon injustice. I felt similar emotions to when I’ve walked through holocaust memorials.

Kajavius Wilson: I was very angry. Multiple generations of people were treated like they were less than human and died not ever being free. It made me see even more how the system of slavery is from the pit of hell. When the enemy does something, it’s like chess—his one move does multiple things. The chess move of slavery created division and hostility between races, systematic oppression, and broken family structures.

Calvin Dorsey: My first feeling was utter disbelief. Being educated in predominately black school systems, a lot of my teachers, as well as my parents, took it upon themselves to educate

me extensively on the history of segregation and racism in America, but this was different. There is an immediate visceral response that happens when history leaves the pages of books and becomes visible.

As I made my way through much of the museum, my most pronounced feeling was sadness. Every advertisement for humans being sold, every story of families being ripped apart, and every video on false imprisonment compounded the fact that America has come a long way but also has a long way to go when dealing with the issue of equality.

Why is this memorial important for our country at this time?

Calvin: This museum and memorial serve as an invaluable resource that can be used to educate current and future generations about the struggle of equality in America and in the Church.

Jonathan: In too many places in our country, there's a lingering racial divide. Adding to the problem are polarizing voices that push people further apart. Followers of Jesus have an opportunity to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (Js. 1:19). A memorial like this gives us the opportunity to grieve together what many in our country endured.

Jelani: Jesus left heaven because He could not bear to see the weight of judgement fall on us, deciding to take the punishment of death so we could have freedom from our past sins. Why should we, as believers, avoid sharing in that same suffering? Why should we not bear with one another in love?

As polarized as we are, if we claim to be called by His name, then we have no choice but to share each other's burdens. We are compelled—better yet commanded—to move toward a holy empathy. This memorial is our chance to barter an ugly, hidden history and trade it for revival.

How might this memorial help heal the wounds of racism and set a new trajectory for racial reconciliation?

Kajavius: To heal, you have to speak truth. That means looking at your past, being challenged by it, and taking a stand. That's what this memorial is allowing us to do. It's acknowledging that black history is our history—it's not separate from white history but should be integrated into the bigger picture. This will help us take the next step forward.

Calvin: The memorial helps heal wounds in two specific ways. First, it gives a visual to the history of America that many people would like to forget. It is difficult for a wound to be healed if we don't first acknowledge any injury has taken place. Second, the museum serves as a reminder to never repeat the sins of mankind and keeps us from consistently agitating the wound of oppression and discrimination with more prejudice and bigotry.

Has this memorial changed the way you approach your life and ministry?

Jelani: It grounded me deeper in thankfulness for where God has placed my family and encouraged me to remain reconciled. Without a church like Grace, I do not think I could survive the harsh realities within our nation today. However, I am supported on every side, which helps me to know I am not alone in this battle toward reconciliation.

If I do not constantly desire reconciliation, I may miss out on the change God desires to take place in me, and people may miss out on the life the Lord has given me to share with others. It has not been hard for me to bring up these issues—the hardest thing will be remaining in the fight for equality and justice. I cannot be tempted to “grow weary in doing good.”

Jonathan: The overwhelming visual images were a compelling reminder of how people were mistreated even in our nation’s recent history. I gained more compassion for my black brothers and sisters.

What are your hopes for racial reconciliation in the future of our nation? What are our biggest hurdles as a society to move toward healing?

Jelani: Our biggest challenge as Christians will be to divorce ourselves from the idea that our political and governmental institutions can somehow deliver the justice only the Kingdom of God provides. If we accept that they cannot, we can freely embrace the compassion and empathy needed to travel across color lines and cultural boundaries to reconcile ourselves to Christ and others.

Kajavius: Walking through this memorial, I realized I was never supposed to succeed. My ancestors were forced to come here and forced to work. It was never intended for us to be free. In the past it took courageous folks to say, “You can’t do this.” At the end of the day, we need somebody to acknowledge that [the current racial divide] is not right and advocate for what is.

Calvin: For our country to see godly restoration happen among different people groups, it must be led by the Church. Unity in the world always results in opposition to the Kingdom of God. But unity taught from a biblical worldview brings restoration and advancement for God’s Kingdom.

Many churches are trying to educate their congregations on these topics, which I commend, but they are afraid to take real action to change the narrative. However, God has placed a hope in me through reading His Word and seeing the great things that He can do through sinful men. If the American church continues to emphasize dependency on the Holy Spirit, I believe that God will continue to unite His Church and help us repent in the areas where we need it most.

Jonathan: Jesus wants to use His Church as an agent of reconciliation, and experiences like we had [at the memorial dedication] can move us to fulfill our identity and calling. Because Christ is on the throne and has given us His great and precious promises, I’m always optimistic.

2017

Freely Forgiven

Danny Amos was born into a family of bank robbers. “Everybody on my dad’s side of the family were all criminals,” the 65-year-old recalls. “My dad robbed several banks—him and some of his family. I was my dad’s number one. He kept me with him all the time.”

When Danny Amos was 10 years old and his father was in prison, his mother gave him up to the state. She had seven other children, and Danny fought with her boyfriend. She was fed up with Danny, so she decided to let the government raise him instead.

A year after Danny’s mother abandoned him, police arrested him for stealing. The juvenile court system judged him to be incorrigible, which gave the prison guards room to treat him however they saw fit.

“They would have me bend straight over and put my head between their legs,” Danny remembers. “They’d pour water on my back and take the palms of their hands from way up high and come down. They’d leave a print on my back.”

During his time in the juvenile system, Danny was often placed in solitary confinement. For 90 days at a time, he received small amounts of food and had little light.

“They would put me in solitary for anything they wanted to.” His sharp features grow sharper as he recounts the events. “It made me hard, and it made me [have] two personalities. I had that monster in me, and then I had the good in me.”

Struggle to Survive

Danny was released from the juvenile system when he was 15 and immediately dove back into a life of crime. “I knew from experiences with my family that robbing was a way of getting finances, and it was so easy.”

He met a girl and got married when he was 17, which led him to steal more because he needed to take care of her. In 1970, when he was 19, Danny was arrested. Not long after, his wife gave birth to their daughter.

At first, he had only a six-year sentence, but his wife kept pressuring him to come home and be with her and the baby. He tried to break out many times to be with them but was unsuccessful.

“I’ve got numerous attempts and escapes in my record over the years,” Danny notes. “However, I ended up with so much time I didn’t care anymore.” He added five more years to his sentence for every attempted escape.

Over the course of his imprisonment, Danny was placed in 34 different U.S. prisons. “When you become violent, they try to separate you from the people that you’re mixed up with by moving you around,” he says. In addition, he was punished with solitary confinement for 13 years at one time. “The chances of me making it [out] were zero to none.”

Danny called out to God: *Old man, look. I've tried everything else. Help me find some good people. I don't want to be around criminals no more. Let me make it out there.*

Healing for Body and Mind

A few months later on May 27, 2015, Danny had served his sentence. He was free after 50 years in prison. Nichole Strom became his parole officer.

“[Ex-convicts] need somebody in their lives 24/7 who can help them learn how to make good choices and do things right,” says Nichole, who contacted several churches to find a mentor for Danny.

Jeff Naegelen, Nichole’s pastor at Alliance Church of the Valley (St. Croix Falls, Wis.), was the first to respond. When he approached a church member, Dana Frank, about the mentorship, Dana prayed and accepted. Nichole then asked Danny if he would meet Jeff, Dana, and her coworker Anna when he got out, and he agreed.

“I trusted her because everything she had said to me so far had been true,” Danny says. “She fought for me, and I’d never had nobody on the correction’s side fight for me. She’s my angel, my bodyguard.”

The five met at Nichole’s office after Danny was released to ensure he and Dana were a good fit for a mentoring relationship. “I had a gut feeling that he was a good person, that he was straight up and wasn’t phony,” Danny says.

The group took Danny to Walmart with a \$250 gift card from the church to purchase essentials such as clothes, a watch, and a phone. They didn’t know his sizes because he had worn a prison uniform for most of his life.

Danny had multiple health problems when he was released. Not only was he fighting cancer, but he also was struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the violent prison life. While he received treatment, he lived at Serenity Home, a shelter that reaches out to the homeless, including ex-cons who want a better life.

For the first several months, he was in the hospital three times a day and had many anxiety attacks. He awoke from dreams about prison, thinking that he was still there. The church community, however, helped him to get the treatments he needed.

After seven months, he was declared cancer-free.

Receiving Life

Because of his incarceration, Danny had never learned to drive, cook, use a phone—or even a can opener. “I was like a newborn baby out here,” Danny recalls. “I was still going by the only thing I knew about: survival. And then I go to this new world out here, and it was nothing like it was when I was a kid. It was all like I was in a dream world.”

Dana taught Danny how to live again. “Everything that I experienced with Danny was like [teaching] a child,” Dana says.

Danny’s goals were simple too—“to stay out of jail and to get a Chihuahua and a truck.” Using everything that Dana taught him to do, Danny now partially supports himself as a handyman and has a driver’s license. He calls himself Handyman Dan and has purchased equipment that allows him to help the community.

For many months, Danny searched for a place to live on his own. A woman in the community, Dorene, rents a home to Danny with the intention of having him own it one day. “She gave me a place to rest my head when nobody else would rent to me,” Danny says.

Not only has the church family blessed Danny, but Danny also has been a helpful addition to the church. He is now an active member of Alliance Church of the Valley. He and Dana serve at church events together, cleaning dishes and doing other tasks. For Christmas Danny spent an entire month’s disability check on toys for the church’s kids.

Dana has sacrificed much to mentor Danny. He has lost many friends, including two who would not allow Danny to come to their wedding. Mentoring Danny has been a learning experience for Dana as well. “It’s brought a lot of reminders like, ‘We’ve all got pasts, and you don’t judge somebody by it,’” Dana says.

Danny now mentors others like himself, ex-cons who have no life direction. Any time he can, he helps these people, whether they’re male, female, or juveniles. His dream is to open a place like Serenity where ex-cons can get back on their feet and find purpose.

Danny has begun to witness to his sister as well. When she was going through a tough time, he told her to go in the bathroom, shut the door, and just talk to God like she would with anyone else.

Because of the outstretched hands of this church family, Danny has received Christ’s forgiveness. “Danny definitely knows he’s been forgiven,” Dana says. “I think he has turned it over to the Lord.”