

THE CHOICE WE ALL FACE



As we unpacked our bags after two months travelling through Madagascar, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, I found myself reflecting on one word that seemed to follow us wherever we went. Fear.

Fear wears many faces. In some villages, people live in fear of offending their deceased ancestors. Others fear government authorities, terrorist attacks, or that their neighbours might be linked to extremist groups. Many people fear becoming sick because there is no access to even the most basic medication. Others wonder if there will be enough food to feed their family tomorrow.

Even some of our visits had to be handled carefully. Before spending time with some of our partners, we first visited local

authorities or the President's office to explain who we were, why we were there and how long we planned to stay. It wasn't about bureaucracy—it was about protecting our partners from suspicion and potential repercussions.

Yet what struck us most wasn't the fear; it was the faith. The faith of our partners, who have every reason to be afraid, yet have chosen instead to trust God completely. They know He has called them, He is with them, and He will give them everything they need to fulfil that calling. Their circumstances haven't changed but their peace and confidence comes from knowing the One who walks with them.

One of our new partners shared a story we will never forget.

A few years ago, he and his wife moved into a Muslim village to share the love of Christ. Many people came to faith. In fact, so many became Christians that three local mosques eventually closed. Not everyone welcomed the change. When an albino person disappeared from the village, rumours spread and the Christians were blamed. One day, a large group of men seized our partner, tied him up and threw him to the ground while an angry mob surrounded him.

As he told us the story, we expected him to describe overwhelming fear. Instead, he said he had experienced an incredible peace in that moment. He watched a man approach carrying a large stick, ready to strike him. Then he saw a hand restrain the man and heard a voice say, "Don't hurt him." Moments later, the police unexpectedly arrived, fired shots to disperse the crowd, untied him and took him into custody while they investigated the accusations.

The crowd warned the police that if he was released, they would kill him. He was forced to leave the village and move to the city, where he is still being watched by the secret police after being falsely accused of supporting terrorists.

As he quietly shared his story, we couldn't help thinking about how differently many of us experience fear. Most of us won't face an angry mob or be accused of crimes we didn't commit. Yet fear still finds its way into our lives. We fear failure. We fear rejection. We fear stepping into something new. We fear not having or being enough. We fear what the future may hold.

Fear is one of the Enemy's most effective weapons. If he can't stop us from believing in Jesus, he'll try to stop us from fully trusting Him. Fear says, stay where it's safe. Don't take the risk. Don't step out in faith. Keep your head down.

No wonder one of the most repeated commands in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid." God never promises that life will be easy, but He does promise that we never face it alone.

Living by faith doesn't mean we never feel afraid. It means we refuse to let fear have the final say. We choose to trust God's promises more than our circumstances.

Our world gives us plenty of reasons to be anxious. Every day we're bombarded by news and events that can make us wonder what the future holds. But as Christians, our confidence isn't based on circumstances. It's based on the unchanging character of God.

Isaiah 41:10 reminds us: "Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you."

What an incredible promise. The question for each of us is simple: will we choose to live by fear or by faith?

Tim and Grace Downs

Southern Africa Partnership Facilitators

BRIGHT HOPE WORLD NEWS

It would be beyond optimistic to say that spring is here. We're still a month or so away from that and it was snowing in Christchurch just a couple of days ago!

Yet, it does feel like we are in a more hopeful and sort of 'spring-ish' season here at Bright Hope World. It has felt like a lot of our news and the stories we have heard from around the world have been very heavy - and this has certainly not ceased - but in the midst of it all there have been some quiet stories of positive change and new faith, as well as some very good ideas indeed.

One very cool new work we are involved in is in Indonesia. A partner of ours had the idea to create coffee carts attached to electric bikes and train young people to make very nice coffee as well as taking a message of hope out to young people in urban environments. The carts provide an income for the young people and enables them to work fulltime in connecting with others.

This kind of work reminds us - if ever we need it - that we are, at our core, an entrepreneurial ministry. We have very good systems and criteria and evaluation processes for what we do, but we really value taking a faith risk on something innovative. This is a common feature of our partners, our team, and a great proportion of our donors and supporters!

But just in case we are at risk of being too positive(!), we also have been checking in recently with a number of our partners in southern Africa and are seeing some really difficult circumstances in countries like Mozambique and the DRC. There are so many challenging factors: political, social, cultural, and economic. The DRC, for instance, is facing an outbreak of Ebola, marauding militias and fighting, and widespread poverty. We are working with our partners there on farming, water projects, and a range of small enterprises, but making these kinds of things work in an unstable environment is so very difficult.

How blessed we are to be able to partner with the kind of resilient and faithful people that continue to do amazing ministry and support their people even in such trying circumstances.

LIFE CHANGE STORY – EGM BRILLIANT STUDENTS FUND, PAKISTAN



EGM's vision is to equip young people in the Christian community to become self-sustaining by funding high performing students into post-secondary school training.

Shakeel is a hardworking student from Youhanabad, Lahore, currently pursuing a BS in Nursing (1st year) at NUR International University. His life journey has been marked by deep personal loss, as both of his parents tragically passed away in an accident, leaving him to face life's challenges at a young age.

Despite this heartbreaking situation, Shakeel has remained strong and focused on building a better future through education.

With limited financial resources and the responsibility of managing life on his own, he continues to pursue his studies with

courage and hope. Supported by EGM Pakistan's Brilliant Students Scholarship, he is able to cover his tuition and essential expenses, enabling him to stay committed to his dream of serving humanity in the healthcare field. He is connected to St. John's Catholic Church in Youhanabad.

Shakeel works part-time in a tuition centre and helps his younger brothers and sisters. He also has now joined EGM church and bible study group where he finds strength and encouragement as he moves forward with faith, resilience, and a desire to make a meaningful impact in the lives of others.

For more information, visit: <https://www.brighthopeworld.com/partnerships.asp?pid=240>

BRIGHT HOPE WORLD PRAYER AND PRAISE

1. Pray against fear and for courage for our partners and the vulnerable people they are working with. Pray that those that would seek to instil fear and persecute our partners would be frustrated in their efforts.
2. Pray for the people facing difficult circumstances in southern Africa, and particularly in the DRC.
3. Pray for Shakeel and all the other students benefiting from the scholarship fund.

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