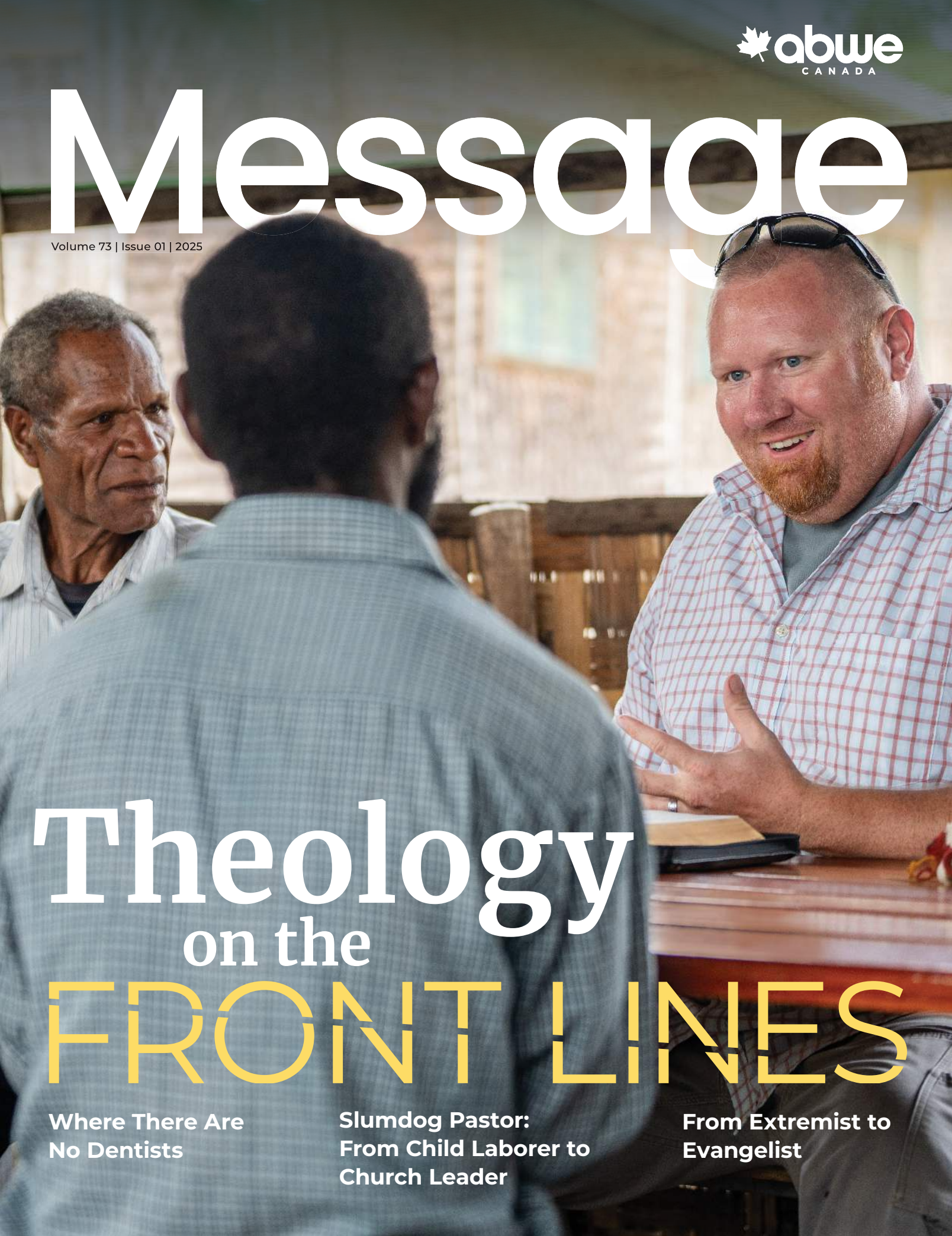


# Message

Volume 73 | Issue 01 | 2025



## Theology on the FRONT LINES

Where There Are  
No Dentists

Slumdog Pastor:  
From Child Laborer to  
Church Leader

From Extremist to  
Evangelist

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**WHO IS ABWE?**

ABWE was founded in 1927 as an independent Baptist mission. Supported by a network of 450 like-minded churches, we are a global family of ministries, dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission by multiplying leaders, churches, and missions movements among every people. Currently, more than 1,000 ABWE missionaries are reaching the lost in 89 countries through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and national partnerships.

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# Editorial

FROM THE PRESIDENT



## Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry

BY: DR. JOHN TAYLOR

ABWE CANADA PRESIDENT

I fondly remember this 2006 gathering in Verkhovina, nestled in the Carpathian mountains of western Ukraine, surrounded by church leaders dedicated to theological education. All of these men were leading CMI (Church Ministries Institute) Bible schools that equipped believers to effectively serve in their local churches and to multiply disciples across Ukraine and beyond. Although I am no longer in Ukraine, I rejoice that God's Word is still being faithfully proclaimed through the disciples of these church leaders. This impact brings to mind Paul's charge to Timothy: "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

Theological education isn't just about gaining knowledge—it's about multiplication. It equips leaders to disciple others, who then equip still more people for the work of ministry. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:12, this is the very purpose of ministry: "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." When biblical truth is taught and applied, it produces lasting fruit that strengthens the church and transforms lives and communities.

This issue of Message will introduce you to several ABWE missionaries and the ways they are equipping pastors and ministry leaders around the world. From the bustling streets of South Asia to the rural villages of Uganda, these stories highlight the eternal impact of equipping the saints. We'll also honour the legacy of a beloved pastor and partner of the Goroka Baptist Bible College ministry in Papua New Guinea, who dedicated his life to training others to know and proclaim the Word of God. Though he has gone to be with the Lord, his ministry lives on through the leaders and churches he discipled.

As you read these stories, I hope you'll be inspired to pray, give, and go. Whether it's through a powerful radio ministry in South Africa broadcasting the gospel or seminary students in South Asia planting churches despite persecution, God is using theological education to fulfill the Great Commission. By training leaders who can teach others, we ensure that the gospel continues to spread to every corner of the globe.

Together, let's remain steadfast in this work, trusting that God's Word will not return void but will accomplish what he purposes—for his glory and the joy of the nations. ■

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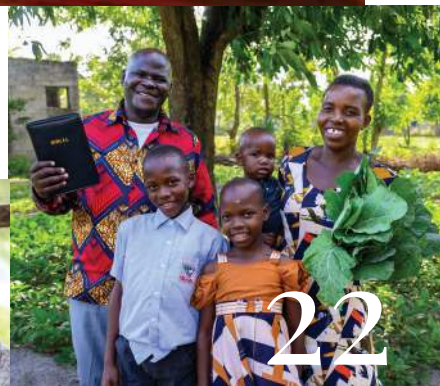


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ABWE missionary Brian Hovey trains leaders at a church plant in Goroka, Papua New Guinea.

**Photo:** Cassie and Jordan Timpy

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## GLENN & TAMMY CLOGDO

Bolivia

"Many of ABWE's Good Soil resources have been translated into Spanish and are being used by missionaries and nationals all over Latin America. On a recent three-city trip with missionaries Carl and Lois Sexton, we trained 160 Bolivians in Good Soil Evangelism and Discipleship. In a separate 'Train the Trainer' course, we taught 39 church leaders to lead these interactive workshops. One attendee commented, 'I finally feel like I know what it means to share the gospel and how to do it so it's clearly understood.'"



## MIKE & RACHEL G.

Ukraine

"Around one third of Ukrainian pastors have had to exit the country since the full-scale invasion in February 2022 decimated the land. Churches left pastorless cried out for new shepherds as their flocks increased. Our team has assisted Kyiv Theological Seminary and other Ukrainian partners with stop-gap schools to fill the breach through weekend training events for children's, youth, and women's ministry leaders and specialized training in discipleship, military chaplaincy, biblical counseling, and pastoral ministry. Several hundred leaders have received solid education and preparation to meet wartime needs."

# Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

## Faithful Unto Death: A Gospel Legacy Overcomes Tribal Strife

A church confronts crisis when the passing of an ABWE ministry partner sparks tribal warfare.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**"I am ready right now to see Jesus face to face. Are you ready?"**

Gesturing at the patients assembled outside the Seigu Clinic, Pastor Rex Sombe emphatically concluded his Monday morning devotional. The same message permeated his interactions with the ill and injured throughout the day. As the final rays of sunlight faded, ABWE missionary Lori Smith administered the last IVs and medications, and patients and staff dispersed to their homes. Rex called over his shoulder as he left, "For God's glory!"

"I never dreamed those were the last times I'd hear that voice and share that friendship this side of eternity," Lori later reflected.

That night, a massive heart attack ushered Rex into the glorious presence of his Lord.

"Rex was welcomed home with the fragrance of ministry fresh on his skin," Lori continued.

News of his passing plunged the community into chaos.

At age 53, Rex had gained respect not only for his outreach as Seigu Clinic evangelist but as a pastor and teacher. After graduating from Goroka Baptist Bible College (GBBC), an institute founded by ABWE to train Papua New Guinean pastors, church planters, and teachers, Rex assumed leadership of a GBBC campus church. Ten years later, his passion for evangelism led him to establish Praise Baptist Church to reach the growing population of drug users in the community. He also planted Bethlehem Baptist Fellowship in the home village of his wife, Dorothy, often spending Sunday afternoons walking under blaz-

Photo: Phil and Jan Smith



Pastor Rex ministers to patients at the Seigu Clinic during the COVID-19 crisis.





Scan QR code  
to watch video.



**Above:** Pastor Rex preaches God's Word to his congregation—the ministry he said was his highest passion.

**Left:** Church members show their respect for Pastor Rex at his interment.

ing sun or tropical downpour to preach in both locations.

"His life passion was to share Christ," said Lori. The gospel he preached penetrated the vast spiritual darkness gripping the people groups of the remote island nation.

Even as local believers grieved Rex's death, surrounding villages plotted retribution.

"If a non-elderly person dies without any apparent cause in Papua New Guinea, many people believe the death is a result of witchcraft or evil spirits," explained missionaries Phil and Jan Smith. "They will attack the village or person they think cast a spell on the deceased in an effort to drive off the evil spirit."

Residents of three neighboring villages converged on Rex's village in a coordinated attack. Armed with knives, they violently destroyed homes, uprooted gardens, slew livestock, looted possessions, and assaulted villagers. Within a short time, the village lay devastated.

Hearing of the onslaught, ABWE and GBBC ministry partners scrambled to provide food and supplies to those left with nothing.

"We were able to reach into the need after the destruction to help replace items lost," shared Lori. "That had a huge impact on many, especially the unsaved."

From the darkness of death and destruction, the team has witnessed the fruit of Rex's faithful legacy growing within the community, even as they continue praying for God to break through barriers.

"The Christians chose to love and forgive those that destroyed their village," Lori conveyed. "People are seeing real Christianity with love and compassion." ■

**Help train the next generation of Christian leaders like Pastor Rex in Papua New Guinea through the Goroka Project. Learn more or give at [abwe.ca/goroka-project-update](http://abwe.ca/goroka-project-update)**



## JUNIOR & BREANNA DE SOUZA

Brazil

"The seminary Junior teaches at, Logos Baptist Seminary, organized a missions summit with the leaders of missions organizations from all over Brazil to pray, plan, and strategize how to work together to grow the missions movement in Brazil. Junior also met with the president of Brazilian missions agency Maranatha Multicultural Ministries to increase our team's partnership in training and recruiting new missionaries. Pray that God will raise up missionaries in Brazil to send to the world's harvest field."



## JON & ANGELA STONE

Peru

"Seminario Teológico Bautista (Baptist Theological Seminary) in Lima, Peru, wrapped up another fruitful academic year with its graduation ceremony in December. Twelve graduates completed programs ranging from a one-year certificate to a bachelor's degree and a master's in biblical counseling. This graduation was particularly special as it coincided with the seminary's 40th anniversary! Currently, our in-person and online courses include students and faculty from 18 countries. More than 190 students engage in theological studies, continuing the legacy of training leaders for the global church."



Photo: Hannah Strayer

Pastor Pakhamani (left) and Pastor Dennis Nkosi (right) broadcast weekly biblical programming on VUMA FM.

## Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

# Sound Doctrine: A South African Ministry Broadcasts Biblical Truth to Thousands

Biblical training equips South African pastors to disseminate sound doctrine over the airwaves.

BY: STEPHEN R. CLARK

LOCATION: SOUTH AFRICA

### “Why don’t we go to church like other people?”

To Mzo Mhlongo, his children’s question felt like an indictment. Recalling his own Catholic upbringing, he committed to finding a church for his family. When a man at a car wash invited him to his church, Mzo decided to visit. A sermon on sin seemed targeted directly at him. “It felt real,” said Mzo. That day he placed his faith in Christ.

At home, desiring to learn more about the Bible, the family turned on the radio and discovered Dennis Nkosi’s biblical programming on the Zulu-language station VUMA.

Dennis, the pastor of Crossroads Community of Christ Church, records popular programs that air on five radio stations reaching more than 700,000 people weekly.

“He’s a fantastic speaker,” said Darin Ishler, an ABWE missionary who has served with his wife, Kathy, in Durban, South Africa, since 2011. An important part of their ministry involves discipling and supporting local pastors, including Dennis and several others who also have radio programs.

While in the U.S., streaming content has somewhat supplanted the radio, in South Africa, the radio is a daily staple. It’s a powerful tool for sharing the Bible with an audience hungry for truth—like Mzo’s family.

Moved by Dennis’ teachings, Mzo called him and said, “I want to understand and teach the Bible like you do!”

Dennis invited him to join a Bible study based on ABWE’s resource “The Story of Hope,” which builds a biblical worldview

through a chronological survey of Scripture. Mzo shared what he learned with the men’s group at his church. The men were impressed. The pastor was not.

“Nearly every church in South Africa mixes in ancestor worship and paganism,” explained Kathy. Prosperity gospel teachings are also prominent. With pastors making money selling “holy water” and other artifacts, their profits are threatened by sound doctrinal teaching.

Mzo and his family joined Dennis’ church. He was later challenged to join Dennis in planting a new church, Sound Doctrine Fellowship, with help from the Ishlers. The church started with barely a dozen members; today, it has grown to 70 and still grows. All those attending heard about the church through the radio.

Darin explains that many South Africans are hungry for sound biblical teaching, despite the opposition it brings. Sharing the truth of Scripture has earned Dennis death threats, slashed tires, and worse. Still, those listening to his radio programs beg him to start churches in their communities.

Supporting these endeavors forms the heart of the Ishlers’ ministry. Darin explains, “The bulk of our time is spent equipping young men and women to be leaders.” They train pastors, church planters, elders, Bible teachers, and lay leaders by tirelessly leading Bible studies, teaching classes, and mentoring men and women one-on-one in their home. ■



# Slumdog Pastor: From Child Laborer to Church Leader

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: SOUTH ASIA

**K**aushal dreamed of going to school. From the moment he arrived in the crowded, bustling city, sent by his father to earn money for his impoverished family, he thought of the open-air village school he had never been able to attend. He longed to study instead of working long shifts in the factory.

Kaushal slept in a local slum. As he settled into the community, a group of professionals visited the slum to offer medical care and educational programs for families. Noticing the inquisitive young boy, the ministry directors, ABWE Live Global missionaries Paul and Hannah, approached him and asked if he would like to attend school.

Astounded, Kaushal eagerly exclaimed that he would. The next instant, his face clouded with hesitation. *How much would it cost?* he wondered. Paul assured him that they would provide the necessary resources, along with advocating for his admittance to a local school and enrolling him in the ministry's tutoring center.

Kaushal thrived in school, eventually becoming the first in his family to graduate high school—and then to complete college and obtain a job at a multinational corporation.

More significant than his educational success, however, was his decision to attend Paul's church plant, where he heard the gospel for the first time. Although a devout Hindu—originally from a region so hostile toward Christianity that it was known as “the grave-

yard of missionaries”—Kaushal's heart softened through the care he received. He surrendered his life to Christ as a teenager.

“Many of the kids accept our invitations to church, where we talk about Jesus and why we do what we do,” explained Paul. “And many of them come to know the Lord.”

Another of these children was Sita, who attended the tutoring program after Paul convinced her father that the best way for her to overcome poverty was through education rather than an early arranged marriage. She too placed her faith in Christ and later directed a similar ministry for young girls. Her friendship with her classmate, Kaushal, blossomed, and they married after graduation.

Kaushal currently serves as a church-planting pastor and coordinates Bible translation projects, while gaining

additional theological education and ministry training at the church planting institute Paul launched in 2024.

“There's an army of young kids that, over the last two decades, we've seen grow up to be leaders in our churches,” said Paul. “Many are planting churches in various parts of the city.”

Education and pastoral training play foundational roles in Paul and Hannah's initiative to develop national church planters and missionaries to share the gospel among the 519 unreached people groups in their city and throughout South Asia. Their ministry spans all strata of society. Their slum ministry, college student outreach, business as mission endeavors, and church plants each advance their goal of sustainable church multiplication and their vision to engage 20 unreached people groups and plant 30 churches by 2030.

“Our city has such a great spiritual need and so many people,” said Paul. “But the gospel crosses all barriers, and we are seeing how Christ promised to build his church.” ■

*Editor's Note: Names have been changed for security.*



Photos: Getty Images

## Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

ABWE missionary Jacob Lee distributes study Bibles to local church leaders.

# Where There Are No Dentists

Dental clinics bridge gaps with unreached people groups in a geographically isolated corner of Uganda.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: UGANDA

Their way lit only by the starlight remaining before dawn, a small group of locals approached the Reaching Africa's Unreached (RAU) ministry property. Even at 4:00 a.m., the beginnings of a small crowd were rapidly forming at the gate. By 7:00 a.m., over 110 patients had assembled—the capacity for the fifth and final day of RAU's dental clinic.

Inside the lecture hall, normally used as a biblical training center, dental professionals from Ugandan partner organization Hope Smiles treated the steady stream of patients at four mobile dental stations, providing cleanings, fillings, root canals, veneers, and extractions.

"A remarkable 558 individuals received the invaluable gift of dental care that week," reported ABWE missionaries Jacob and Carol Lee. "This situation underscores a huge need for dental care in our region."

The Lees established RAU in the remote, northwestern tip of Uganda precisely because of the needs they observed in the region, geographically isolated by the Nile River from economic and educational resources available in the rest of the nation.

Photo: Carol Lee





A Ugandan national receives dental care from a Hope Smiles dentist.

Photo: Carol Lee

The spiritual needs first drew Jacob's attention. "Due to the lack of development, few pastors or church leaders have access to Bible schools or seminaries, and so, at a foundational level, theological soundness is lacking," he explained.

Although over 83 percent of the population claims Christian adherence, animistic syncretism and prosperity-based teachings are making headway. "Prosperity gospel preachers act much like the local witchdoctor who asks for money in exchange for special prayers of health, wealth, and fertility," Carol continued.

Through RAU teaching modules, Jacob and Carol educate church leaders in biblical theology and distribute Christian literature. They also engage unreached Islamic people groups with the gospel—including refugees from nearby South Sudan—by meeting practical needs.

An ABWE medical team identified dental care as a prime ministry focus. "Dentistry was only available in the rudimentary form of tooth-pulling—sometimes without anesthetic," said Carol. RAU held its first dental clinic in November 2023, and, after experiencing widespread success, a second in November

2024. The clinics drew patients from not only surrounding villages but unreached mountain tribes and even neighboring countries—including two South Sudan-

**As patients sat under tents awaiting treatment, they received Bibles and gospel tracts, which many read with interest.**

ese generals, who arrived for dental care accompanied by bodyguards.

As patients sat under tents awaiting treatment, they received Bibles and gospel tracts, which many read with interest.

"We are strategizing how we can effectively use the long wait times to reach people with the gospel," Carol said while sharing plans for future clinics. "I had more than one person say with enthusiasm that we have identified a real area of need." ■



**BRIAN & LAURI DIX**  
Horizon Education Network

"Horizon Education Network, an ABWE affiliate, partners with 51 theological institutions in 26 countries. We help multiply church leaders by equipping schools with tools and training to use online learning effectively. Recently, while we were training faculty in Nigeria, leaders from a school in the north of the country traveled 13 hours to participate. Because of intense persecution in their region, it was becoming too dangerous for students to be on campus, so they were pursuing online options. How humbling to see their formidable commitment to training church leaders!"



**GREG & RACHEL VRUGGINK**  
Thailand

"In November, Greg presented a one-day training workshop for a network of Thai churches in Bangkok. The pastors will all soon begin a teaching series on Deuteronomy, so they asked Greg to teach them how to approach preaching from the Old Testament. Greg also taught an overview of Deuteronomy to help prepare them for their upcoming series. The group was grateful for the training and expressed interest in future workshops."

# Mark and Diane H.

**From the Amazon to the Middle East, Mark and Diane H. have spent more than 40 years training the next generation of pastors, missionaries, and church planters—leaving a legacy of gospel-driven leaders impacting the world.**



**F**or more than 40 years, Mark and Diane have poured their hearts into theological education, convinced that deep biblical training is vital—not just for today’s church leaders but for the next generation of pastors, missionaries, and church planters.

Their ministry has taken them across five continents, where they’ve invested their lives in personal discipleship, church planting, and seminary instruction. Through their faithful service, a growing legacy of gospel-driven leaders continues to impact churches around the world.

**Q: How did your journey to missions begin?**

**Mark:** Growing up, I knew for certain that I’d never be a missionary. It wasn’t a question of willingness; it was a question of ability. All my attempts at public speaking were disastrous, and high school Latin classes convinced me that I could never learn a foreign language. Before going to university, however, I attended a Bible college for a year, where a chapel speaker challenged the stu-

dents to commit to praying Jesus’ prayer request (Matthew 9:38) every day for a year. I happily prayed that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers to the mission field. I even made suggestions to God of who those people could be. By the end of the year, God used that experience to call me as his harvester.

**Diane:** God led me into missions one baby step at a time. I was teaching at a Christian school in New York when ABWE missionary Ron Washer called me out of the blue through a family connection to ask if I would go to Togo to fill in for another teacher for a year. While preparing to go, I met Mark at an ABWE Missionary Enrichment conference. We were engaged six weeks later and married the next year after I returned from Togo.

**Q: How have you trained leaders and planted churches throughout your career?**

Like Aquila and Priscilla in the book of Acts, God has sent us many places. Mark began overseas work on the Amazon River in 1983, learning from veteran

missionaries about multiplication church planting. Ministry there included starting two churches (one for the deaf), evangelism and discipleship on the river, and teaching at the local Bible institute.

After our marriage, we headed to Santiago, Chile, where we focused on theological education and inner-city church planting. Throughout our 11 years there, we experienced many blessings, including the birth of our two children, the birth of a church, and fluency in our second language.

We were then invited to train pastors in a new field for ABWE, Nicaragua, which was recovering from recent civil war. For the next 17 years, we collaborated with national pastors to start the Institute of Church Planters.

As that work was turned over to Nicaraguan leadership, we asked God where he would send us next. After our children attended the Greek Bible College in Athens, the president of Hellenic Ministries invited us to train church planters as a follow-up to country-wide Bible distribution that put New Testaments into 1.5 million homes. We also helped



start a Bible institute for Muslim-background refugees, which led to church planting efforts in three refugee camps and opened the door for a move to the Middle East, where we focused on pastoral ministry and mentoring.

**Q: Much of your career has focused on theological education. How have you found this approach effective?**

God's church must not only grow wide; it must grow deep. In the book of Acts, we see two complementary paradigms of growth: the church grew in numbers as people's knowledge of the Word of God grew. We both emphasize teaching what we feel is the most important life skill for ministry: principles of Bible study. We've done that effectively on five continents, including in several creative-access countries. More gratifying still is to see former students now ministering as pastors, church planters, and evangelists throughout South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

**Q: What is a highlight from your ministry?**

**Diane:** The Nicaragua Institute of Church Planters (ICP) is one of the most gratifying. Three ABWE missionaries joined five national pastors to open the school. We prayed for 10 students. Not only did the first class have 17 graduates, but the two-year training has operated continuously since 2007. The national church has fully embraced church planting, starting more than 100 church plants, and satellite church planting institutes have begun in several other Central American locations.

**Mark:** Highlights of ministry always include watching those we disciple grow beyond what we've taught them. On one of my visits to Cuba, I saw several pastors whom I had had the privilege of teaching. Every one of them immediately recited to me the basic outline of Inductive Bible Study. Boldly, I said to one of the pastors, "That's great! But are

**If everything you do in ministry is successful, you probably haven't stretched your faith very much. Let God do what seems to be impossible—then it's easy to give him all the glory!**

you using what you've learned?" I was stunned when he said, "Oh yes! I just finished writing a series of 52 lessons on the book of James for our church plants."

**Q: What have you learned through serving in so many different regions of the world?**

Each place has been a steppingstone of growth for the next phase of ministry. In Peru, we learned the importance of partnering with nationals right at the start of a church plant. As guests overseas, we are not there to make ourselves look good but to help local leaders build a true local church. In Chile, we learned the value of robust theological education, not only for training current Sunday School teachers and Christian workers but for investing in the future, as many graduates became pastors and missionaries. In Nicaragua, we took what we'd learned to challenge young people to start healthy, theologically sound churches that reproduced from the beginning.

Mark (fourth from right, standing) and Diane (second from right, standing) join students for an event at the Nicaragua Institute of Church Planters.

**Q: Your spiritual legacy includes not only the church leaders you've trained but also your own children. How are they currently serving the Lord?**

Our son, Andrew, and his wife, Anna, are faithfully ministering and raising their family in Larnaca, Cyprus. Our daughter, Suzanna Bartos, and her husband, Asa, are preparing to serve as ABWE missionaries in Lima, Peru.

**Q: What advice would you give someone considering cross-cultural ministry?**

In your ministry, seize some impossible ideas and opportunities. Take some reasonable risks. Pray, plan, consult with national partners and missionaries, but don't fear failure. If everything you do in ministry is successful, you probably haven't stretched your faith very much. Let God do what seems to be impossible—then it's easy to give him all the glory! ■







# From Extremist to Evangelist

From a persecutor's redemption to the training of pastors, Christ is building his church in South Asia.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: SOUTH ASIA

## **"You're not my brother."**

Jabar froze in shock, his outstretched hand hovering uncertainly under the metal tiffin of food as effusive professions of gratitude died on his lips. The cacophony of traffic and vendors' shouts seemed to fade around the two men standing in the crowded bazaar. Before William's interjection, Jabar had simply thanked him for buying him food, echoing the Islamic tenant that all men are brothers and should assist in times of need.

Only the kindness in William's eyes belied his blunt words as he continued. "Until you can reject the false prophet Muhammad, until you can get rid of your Qur'an and stop blaspheming in prayer five times a day, you will never be my brother." William paused.

"But when you accept Christ as your Savior, that's when you'll become my brother."

## **'I Could Die at Any Moment'**


Eighteen years prior, Jabar mounted a dais on the university campus, raising his hands to silence the cheers of the thousands of impassioned students assembled before him. In the inflammatory rhetoric of Islamic extremism, he urged the students to fulfill their religious destiny through jihad.

Jabar, raised in a fundamentalist village, had arrived in the South Asian city for university studies with Islamic devotion infused into his identity. The student arm of a militant Islamist political party soon recruited him and, by 2005, recognized him as a rising star within its ranks. He regularly led rallies inciting students to join the fight for political dominance—even through violence.

The students infiltrated crowded civilian areas, concealing knives under their long tunics. They targeted law enforcement officials in brutal stabbing attacks to clear the way for public protests. Jabar himself killed three policemen, each time escaping arrest.

After graduation, however, Jabar's terrorist affiliations threatened to limit his prospects for employment. He slowly distanced himself from radicalism, pursuing instead well-paying translation jobs with humanitarian agencies.

Photo: Getty Images



“For about six months, Jabar told me that he understood the gospel and thought it was beautiful, but he was a Muslim and could not accept it.”

William, ABWE missionary

In late 2022, a walk through a public park led to a providential encounter with an ABWE missionary. When Jabar expressed interest in the Bible—noting that the Qur’an itself mentions portions of the Old and New Testaments—the missionary invited Jabar to a

weekly international worship service, where he met another ABWE teammate, William. Jabar and William then began meeting regularly.

“For about six months, Jabar told me that he understood the gospel and thought it was beautiful, but he was a Muslim and could not accept it,” William recalled.

The day William confronted Jabar about becoming his true brother through Christ was the last evangelistic confrontation. A week later—at age 39—Jabar collapsed from a stroke and a heart attack.

Lying immobile, he sensed his death was imminent. Memories flashed in his mind of the gospel and of the love and help he had experienced from Christians. *This is the truth*, he realized, and cried out to God for salvation.

He later called William from the hospital. “I believe in Jesus,” he exclaimed. “I could die at any moment. I want to be baptized as soon as possible.”

### Faithful Under Fire

Persecution began even before Jabar was released from medical care. Radical Muslim friends and family members learned of his conversion and at once began threatening to kill him for apostasy. They also began harassing his wife, Tahmina, calling her late at night and urging her to poison Jabar or to abandon her marriage.

At first, Jabar’s faithfulness attracted Tahmina to the gospel. As the threats persisted, however, her resolve wavered. She covertly gathered Jabar’s financial savings and fled to the city with their young daughter and her sister. A group of Jabar’s

Photo: Getty Images





Photo: ABWE missionary

ABWE missionary William (left) disciples and trains Jabar (right) in the faith.

former friends pursued, attacked, and raped the women. A few weeks later, Tahmina and her sister both discovered they were pregnant. Overcome with shame, bitterness, and rage, they refused to return home or speak to Jabar except to express their hatred for all that his faith had cost them.

Meanwhile, Jabar's uncle—an influential leader in his village—dispatched 14 Muslim clerics to force Jabar to return to Islam. When Jabar refused to deny his faith, the leaders shoved him to the ground and beat him with rods.

Alone in his apartment, injured and heartbroken, Jabar turned to Scripture. Opening his Bible to Psalm 59, he identified with David's lament that his enemies lay in wait for his life like wild dogs. He echoed David's plea that God would "spare none of those who treacherously plot evil" (v. 5). He shared the passage with William, who often visited him to offer encouragement, arriving at Jabar's door in disguise to conceal himself from the extremists.

Jabar pointed to the psalmist's words and said, "This sounds a lot like what's going on with me."

"I cautioned him that the passage was contextual for David," William later recalled. "But the next

day, Jabar found out on Facebook that his uncle who sent the clerics to attack him—a healthy man in his 50s—was struck with a heart attack and died. So, I had to agree with him."

Without Jabar's uncle, the group of radicals disbanded. They soon returned, however, armed with summons for 13 court cases filed on trumped-up charges. With no legal recourse, Jabar fled and hid in the jungle for two months.

The isolation only intensified his despair. He decided to return to the city, telling William, "I need to be with God's people. I need to be with the church. If they come for me, it will be okay; whatever happens, God will take care of me."

Over the next year, William and others in the local church disciplined and trained Jabar in the faith. Jabar quickly developed a burden for sharing the gospel with Muslims from his own people group.

"He's led several people to Christ," shared William. "He asked me one time for 50 Bibles. He said,

"I need to be with God's people. I need to be with the church. If they come for me, it will be okay; whatever happens, God will take care of me."

Jabar



One local pastor baptized 56 new believers in 2024.

“[Jabar] said, ‘I’ve got a bunch of friends in the hills, and I want to preach to them and give them these Bibles.’ So, he gathered 50 people in a friend’s house, explained the gospel, and gave out the Bibles. He’s doing the work of an evangelist.”

William, ABWE missionary

‘I’ve got a bunch of friends in the hills, and I want to preach to them and give them these Bibles.’ So, he gathered 50 people in a friend’s house, explained the gospel, and gave out the Bibles. He’s doing the work of an evangelist.”

In fall 2024, Jabar was finally notified that the fraudulent court cases had been dismissed. Soon after, he received a call from his estranged wife. Hesitantly, Tahmina told him that she wanted to return to his house with her children. She was ready to be identified as a Christian.

“In the midst of so much chaotic suffering and pain, we’ve seen God move in Jabar’s heart—taking him out of a place of feeling hatred and revenge toward his enemies to holding a Christ-

like attitude of forgiveness,” shared William’s wife, Rachel.

With his family restored, Jabar seeks to lead his children and others in his community according to the truth of God’s Word.

### **Moving Beyond Evangelism**

Within the South Asian church, ABWE workers have recognized a growing number of national believers like Jabar active in Christian witness.

One local pastor with whom William works felt challenged to pray audaciously that his church of 90 members—primarily first-generation believers—would see 50 people saved and baptized in 2024. His congregation responded by boldly inviting friends, neighbours, and co-workers from diverse communities to visit the church and hear the gospel. By October, the church had baptized 56 new believers, including a former Buddhist monk and his entire family.

Since the 1950s, ABWE workers have partnered with these and other local believers to



spread the gospel among the many unreached Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist people groups in this densely populated region. Missionaries working in the 1970s and '80s discovered that the best—and sometimes only—way to plant churches in villages prohibited to Westerners was to train and send national leaders.

As local churches began to pick up the mantle of evangelism, however, they uncovered a deeper need.

“We’re seeing more and more that, for the indigenous Christians to truly take ownership of evangelism and discipleship in their churches, they need help to grow deeper in their biblical foundations and convictions,” explained William. “Many pastors struggle to articulate basic doctrines like the Trinity. Church leaders don’t just find correct theology on their own; they need theological education, training, and resources.”

While theological education is crucial for establishing biblically faithful churches that teach the full counsel of Scripture and guide believers

toward spiritual maturity, statistics indicate that as many as 85 percent of the world’s pastors—not only in South Asia—possess no formal biblical or theological training.

William witnessed these needs firsthand growing up as a missionary kid in South Asia. After his own conversion in college, the Lord instilled in him a burden for the unreached and a passion for teaching theology and biblical languages. Desiring to use those skills to develop doctrinally sound churches, he, Rachel, and their young family returned to South Asia in 2022 to serve in theological education alongside two other families.

“In South Asia, our team works with hundreds of churches that we’re strengthening, developing, and equipping,” said ABWE President Paul Davis. “One of the unique aspects of ABWE’s approach to theological education—in South Asia and around the world—is that we simultaneously employ both informal and formal methods to fit the context of the church leaders we’re training.”

“Literature is one of the most important ways that we can impact future generations of Christians. This is a huge step in theological education for the South Asian church toward rightly handling the Scriptures and safeguarding the church from error.”

William, ABWE missionary

### Equipping the Saints

William notes that informal theological education has proven particularly effective for developing South Asian church planters serving in villages hostile toward Christianity and inaccessible to the American teammates. Other pastors actively serve in less restrictive areas but still benefit from one-on-one instruction and regular small-group

meetings to gain a foundation in biblical theology, expository preaching, church polity, worship, and ministry.

“Each of the pastors we’re training has several house churches, and we’ve asked them to bring their sons so we can train them too as elders,” shared William.

The theological educators also serve as professors at a Bible college established by ABWE workers in the 1980s to develop reproducing national church leaders. The Bible college offers formal courses at three branches in the region, all designed to move students beyond spiritual milk to the meat of the Word (Hebrews 5:12-14). One branch provides a one-year, full-time program to equip young men and women who have recently graduated high school and desire training for future ministry. The second offers for-credit evening courses for pastors, deacons, and church leaders already engaged in vocational or lay ministry, while the third offers intensive classes. Since its founding, over 200 local believers have graduated from the Bible college and currently serve in churches throughout the region.

### In the Footsteps of William Carey

In order to build deep, enduring foundations, the national church must have not only theological instruction but also access to biblical resources.

“As our team continues to grasp the specific needs of the church here, we’ve seen a glaring need for unity of confession on basic Christian doctrines,”

said William.

To this end, he authored a catechism in the local language, published in 2024, to provide succinct questions and answers about the fundamental doctrinal principles that Protestants around the world have affirmed for centuries. William published the catechism with the assistance of ABWE South Asia teammates and national partners dedicated to translating Scripture and Christian resources into local indigenous languages.

Even more momentous, William recently completed a New Testament Greek textbook, grammar, and lexicon written in the local language.

“This is the first time since the days of missionary pioneer William Carey that Christians in this region have been able to learn the New Testament in its original language,” he explained excitedly. A class of 12 students now meets to read the New Testament in Greek—the first time this has ever happened in their language.

William continued: “Literature is one of the most important ways that we can impact future generations of Christians. This is a huge step in theological education for the South Asian church toward rightly handling the Scriptures and safeguarding the church from error.”

### An Unwavering Gospel Witness

Through the ABWE team’s dedication to imparting the doctrinal riches of Scripture to church leaders who “will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2), indigenous evangelists, pastors, and ministry leaders are poised to establish an unwavering gospel witness in villages and people groups throughout their nation.

“Our theological educators in South Asia reflect ABWE’s model of balancing contextualization for national ministry with biblical faithfulness, resulting in local churches that can reproduce,” conveyed Paul Davis.

“Through theological education and resources, the South Asian church can grow beyond her infancy,” William reflected. Even now, the foundations are visible. “National believers like Jabar and local church leaders are doing ministry even beyond what we know about, and it’s exciting.” ■

*Editor’s Note: Names have been changed for security.*





Photo: ABWE missionary



## Welcoming Dr. E.D. Burns to ABWE

ABWE is thrilled to welcome Dr. E.D. Burns as our new executive director of training and development. A seasoned missionary and theologian, Dr. Burns brings over 20 years of global ministry experience, having served in regions including the Middle East, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

As the author of *The Missionary-Theologian* and *Great Commission Spirituality*, Dr. Burns emphasizes the need for theology to drive missions methodology. "Before we can discuss strategy, we need to anchor ourselves in the foundational truths of the gospel," he shared. His training vision prioritizes spiritual resilience and practical skills, equipping missionaries to adapt cross-culturally while remaining faithful to the gospel.

Dr. Burns continues to live on the mission field, ensuring ABWE's training is shaped by firsthand experience. "It's the privilege of a lifetime to serve in my remote village," he says.

ABWE President Paul Davis notes, "E.D. isn't just an academic—he's living his calling and equipping others to do the same."

Under Dr. Burns' leadership, ABWE is committed to training missionaries and churches for lasting, gospel-centered impact. Join us in welcoming him as we strive to reach the nations together. ■

# Combating 5 Deceptions Plaguing the Global Church

BY: ALEX KOCMAN



When we think of the Great Commission, we often focus on *reaching* the lost and *preaching* the gospel. Yet, in Matthew 28, Jesus commands his followers not only to go and make disciples but to accomplish that task through *teaching* them to observe all that he has commanded (v. 20). This instruction does not just have unbelievers in view; it also applies to the shepherds of the church itself.

As Paul reminds Timothy, the survival and health of the church hinge on training the next generation of faithful leaders (2 Timothy 2:2). Yet, one oft-cited, sobering statistic reveals that nearly 85 percent of the world's pastors and ministers lack formal theological training.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that many church leaders around the world don't wait for such education before diving headlong into ministry. While some, like Apollos, are open to

correction and growth, others—whether through ignorance or ill intent—may lead their congregations astray. The church must rise to meet this need, ensuring its leaders are grounded in sound doctrine and equipped for faithful ministry. In this vein, consider these five forms of false teaching plaguing the global church.

## 1. TRINITARIAN HERESIES

Since the earliest days of the church, the enemy has sought to corrupt biblical doctrine with respect to the *nature of God himself*. In the third century, for instance, Sabellius taught the error of *modalism*, the unbiblical notion that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are merely three different manifestations of one God, rather than three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons.

Little has changed since the 400s; false teachings relating to the Trinity

continue to threaten the health of local churches. One missionary in South Asia recently described to me that most of the Christians among whom he ministers have embraced or are at risk of embracing modalism themselves. Islam and Mormonism also represent equal and opposite corruptions of the biblical doctrine of God—the former conceiving of God as a single, solitary *monad* incapable of possessing love and community within his singular nature, and the latter by positing an infinite number of finite, planetary demigods. Missionaries engaged in teaching today must be well-versed on the doctrine of God—both in his oneness of being and his threeness of person, subsisting in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## 2. CHRISTOLOGICAL ERRORS

A related yet distinct category of heresies common in the world today includes





those teachings which corrupt the Bible's *Christology*, or its doctrine of Christ. Islam proffers a Jesus (or "Isa") who is merely a prophet and not the divine Son. Hindus usually affirm Jesus as some sort of avatar, or physical manifestation of a god. Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus is the first creation of God and is to be identified as Michael the archangel, despite Scripture's teaching that God has created all things through Christ (Colossians 1:16) and Christ is superior to the angelic species (Hebrews 1:4-6). And modern Talmudic Judaism holds that Jesus was not only merely human but was a false prophet.

The Bible clearly teaches that Christ, as the God-man, is the sole, effectual mediator between God and mankind (1 Timothy 2:5). Thus, a Jesus who is less than truly divine or less than truly human cannot save. It is crucial that in our global ministry efforts we teach not only the work of Christ but the person of Christ.

### 3. SOTERIOLOGICAL ERRORS

Broadly speaking, much of the world has been "Christianized" to some extent; if we were to count all Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants as Christians, they together comprise roughly a third of the world's population. But as evangelical missionaries working in the shadow of Christendom can attest, not all Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, or mainstream Protestants truly possess saving knowledge of the biblical gospel.

Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church has formally anathematized all those who embrace justification by faith alone—the material cause of the Protestant Reformation, and the direct teaching of the books of Romans and Galatians. Eastern Orthodox theology regarding the way

of salvation is somewhat harder to pin down, but its emphasis on mystical union with the divine and strict adherence to church tradition mean that adherents often lack certainty of their salvation or a biblical understanding of grace. Even among Protestants, radical methodologies like Insider Movements teach missionaries to regard as converted those who have little understanding of the gospel and who likely see Jesus as a mere moral teacher. Those called to make disciples among the nations must take care that they do not take for granted the salvation of those who outwardly identify with the broader Christian tradition.

### 4. SPIRITUALISM

Within both the developing and developed regions of the world, new—and not so new—notions of spirituality represent a formidable hurdle for evangelists. In traditional cultures, spirits such as gods, demons, or ancestors are feared as powerful, and through such superstitions the forces of darkness hold sway over entire tribes and cultures. In the East, philosophic religions like Taoism see all of existence as a single, divine whole in which good and evil exist in a natural duality, failing to recognize the distinction between creation and its Creator and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In the West, atheistic materialism has been supplanted by New Age spiritualities, in which the occult has seen a resurgence, and hallucinogenic substances like ayahuasca are used to commune with unseen entities and ascend to higher planes of consciousness.

Without careful instruction, these false spiritualities can find their way into the church, and Jesus may be regarded as simply an ascendant teacher of a higher way of life more attuned to the universe's mysteries. Missionaries on the field must carefully emphasize God's distinctness

from creation, Christ's authority over every spiritual entity, and both the emptiness and danger of magical practices that attempt to connect the user with the divine.

### 5. PROSPERITY "GOSPEL"

Many American Christians are familiar with a certain brand of teaching, perpetuated through cable television and popular books, which presents Christianity as a self-help regimen designed to maximize their wealth, health, and happiness. Unsuspecting consumers of such content are promised that with enough positive thoughts, prayers, or expectant words spoken regarding a situation, they can call down virtually limitless blessings from heaven on their earthly lives. In this system, Christ is not a suffering Savior from sin but a self-help guru with a message of positivity and ease.

What many may not realize is the extent to which the American church has exported this false gospel throughout the developing world. Vast swaths of Africa lie under the sway of prosperity-preaching charlatans who, like their American counterparts, enrich themselves with donations given in faith that rewards will follow. Biblical teachers in every culture must stand guard against this false gospel of health and wealth and preach boldly a true gospel of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

Though the range of false teachings facing the global church is wide, few of the heresies with which missionaries contend are truly new, and many can be traced to the earliest days of the church. But what is older still is the truth itself, which stands for all time in Scripture, equipping God's people with all that is needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). May we contend earnestly, armed thus with the Word of God, for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. ■



Pastor Samweli Chacha and his family  
harvest produce from the urban farm  
they developed next to their home.





# Deepening Roots:

## A Pastor Flourishes Through Biblical and Agricultural Training

A Tanzanian pastor, once untrained and struggling, receives vital instruction for growing his ministry and providing for his family.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

PHOTOGRAPHER: HANNAH STRAYER

LOCATION: TANZANIA

**“When I was appointed as a pastor, I had not received any training on the Word of God.”**

Samweli Chacha accepted a request to lead a fledgling village congregation near Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, equipped only with a burden for ministry. Challenges grew faster than the weeds on the church’s empty property.

“I had to leave the job I was doing,” Samweli said. “[My family] had to walk on foot from where we live to the church. There was even a period of going to bed hungry.”

Despite his faithfulness, his lack of theological education or ministry training hurt his leadership ability.

“I was trying to teach people in anger. I used harsh methods, even for preaching on offerings,” he recalled.

When Samweli heard about the Biblical Training Center for Pastors (BTC), led by ABWE missionaries Aaron Boon and Joe James, he immediately enrolled in the 18-month course.

The missionaries established BTC recognizing that many Tanzanians

remain without access to the biblical gospel, even within churches. “Many pastors don’t have the foundation—or resources in their language—to study or understand the Bible,” Aaron explained. The program includes modules in doctrine, hermeneutics, preaching, and evangelism, along with urban farming, taught by ABWE partner Apollo Mazengo, to help pastors earn income.

With this training, Samweli’s ministry flourished. He is teaching his growing congregation to disciple others, and they constructed a church building. His agricultural endeavours also yielded fruit.

“Now I am able to provide my family with all the essential needs,” he shared. “I was also able to get a motorcycle, which helps me in evangelism. Recently we took the gospel to a village. Truly God helped us and more than 300 people were saved.”

“As Proverbs 12:1 says, ‘Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge,’” he continued. “I will use this knowledge to teach the Word of God so that people may know God. . . . [I]t is my desire to see the true gospel reach every corner of our country so that people can hear the truth from the Word of God.” ■



Samweli provides for his family and ministry through urban farming.

**Katelyn Hawkins** is a communications specialist with ABWE. She serves as managing editor for Message Magazine and the ABWE blog. She holds an M.A. in Social Sciences and B.A. in Communications, and has lived in locations across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.



**Hannah Strayer** is a media specialist serving in Africa with ABWE. She uses media to share the needs on the field, help missionaries more effectively communicate with supporters, and share the gospel with nationals.

# GOOD SOIL RESOURCES



## Sharing God's Story of Hope in a World of Competing Faiths and Cultures

*The Story of Hope* is designed for evangelistic Bible studies, one-on-one or in small groups, but is also helpful in teaching God's redemptive plan to believers. Its time-versatile "shrinkable and expandable" presentation is great for telling or teaching the Bible's big redemptive story in as few as 15 minutes or as long as 20 or more hours. Each event is beautifully visualized. A set of evangelism-focused Bible study questions is included in the material for each event, followed by a summary of the eight essential "eternal life or death truths" that emerge from the Bible's story of hope.

Used by thousands around the world and translated into about 50 languages with various adaptations (including for children and Muslims), *The Story of Hope* is now available in a Canadian version. This is just one of many **Good Soil** resources available to help you penetrate unbiblical "worldview noise" with unbelievers using God's redemptive story, as it unfolds from Genesis to Revelation.



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