

abwe

Message

Volume 73 | Issue 02 | 2025



Bold.

Faith and Witness
Where It Costs

A House Divided
and Delivered

2024 Annual Report:
God's Global Work

From Closed Borders
to Open Hearts

General Editor:

Alex Kocman

Managing Editor:

Katelyn Hawkins

Creative Director:

Christine Morales

Graphic Designer:

David Brandt

Contributors:

Judy Bowen

Stephen R. Clark

Joe Gugin

Noel Lay

Carol Lee

Ben Lowe

Ethan Molsee

Mark

Hannah Strayer

Cassie and Jordan Timpy

PO Box 8585

Harrisburg, PA 17105-8585

T: 717.774.7000

E: info@abwe.org

abwe.org

WHO IS ABWE?

ABWE was founded in 1927 as an independent Baptist mission. Supported by a network of more than 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, nearly 1,000 ABWE missionaries are reaching the lost in more than 90 countries through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership development, and national partnerships.

RIGHTS & PERMISSIONS

We encourage churches to use material from the Message to mobilize church members for missions. Permission is granted to copy material as published or excerpt material without photos for non-commercial purposes as long as this publication is credited as the source. Suggested credit: "ABWE Message. Used with permission." We request copies of material republished pursuant to this permitted use. All other rights are reserved by ABWE and permission for other commercial or non-commercial use requires written permission from the editor (communications@abwe.org).



abwe.org

Editorial

FROM THE PRESIDENT



Courage Where It Counts

BY: PAUL L. DAVIS
ABWE PRESIDENT

Not long ago, Martha and I had the privilege of visiting one of our fields in South Asia—a region where Christians make up a very small minority and are often viewed with suspicion or even hostility. We sat across from national believers who quietly, yet courageously, gather to study Scripture in places where doing so could cost them dearly. We shared meals with our ABWE missionaries who have chosen to live and raise families in areas where gospel work is slow and the soil hard, but the harvest is worth the labor.

We came away humbled. These workers do not serve for recognition. Many of them remain unseen by the world, their names unknown outside their local communities. But in heaven, their names—and their sacrifices—are known. And to us, they are heroes of the faith.

These missionaries reminded me of the Apostle Paul's words: "for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). Paul didn't shy away from opposition. He didn't equate difficulty with a closed door. In fact, he recognized that adversity often accompanies opportunity—and sometimes signals that we are right where God wants us to be.

Our ABWE missionaries are embracing that same calling. In countries where church planting assumes risk, where converts face alienation from families, and where discipleship happens one slow relationship at a time, they remain. Not because it's easy—but because a door is open.

Sometimes I take for granted the privilege we have in the West to worship freely, speak openly, and gather without fear. But let us never assume that the gospel is only "effective" in comfortable places. The gospel shines brightest where the darkness is thickest. And some of the most fruitful work—though often unseen—is happening in the hardest, most resistant places.

Martha and I are deeply thankful for our brothers and sisters serving in these contexts. As you read their stories in this issue of Message, may their courage challenge our comfort, their faith strengthen ours, and their obedience remind us that God's mission never retreats. It moves forward—boldly, humbly, and with the full assurance that he is at work, even when the ground seems toughest.

Let's keep praying for open doors. But let's also be willing to walk through them—even when there is difficulty on the other side. ■

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE MINISTRIES AND MISSIONARIES OF ABWE

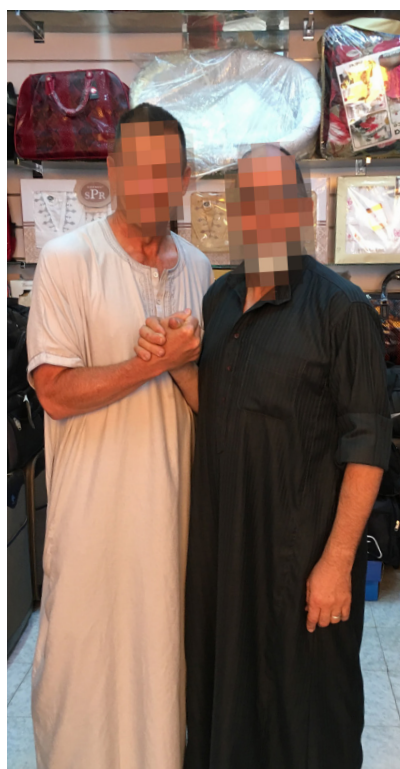


Contents

18

A House Divided and Delivered

A missionary's business opens doors to reach a fundamentalist Muslim family—and their faith costs them everything.



04 CONNECTIONS

A Sign of Faith

A Middle Eastern church makes its presence known—and the door opens for many.

Dreaming of Jesus

A jihadist uprising, Jehovah's Witness, and jaw-dropping dream providentially conspire for the conversion of a Syrian Muslim.

'Tactical' Evangelism in Full Force

Gospel-infused first responder training leads to professions of faith among 12 Panamanian police officers.

Faith Comes by Hearing

Audio Bibles cross borders to unreached people groups with low literacy rates.

From Closed Borders to Open Hearts

A missionary family's sudden relocation creates connections with unreached East Asians.

10 LEGACIES OF FAITHFULNESS

Bob and Lynne Trout

For nearly 60 years, the Trouts' dedication to ministry and to their Lord has impacted lives throughout South America and the US.

12 FOCAL POINTS

5 Ways to Support Missionaries in Risky Places

Missionaries serving in the world's hardest places face danger and isolation—and they need the steadfast, sacrificial support of the church to endure and thrive.

14 2024 ANNUAL REPORT: GOD'S GLOBAL WORK



26 FIELD NOTES

Why Our 'Risk' Was Right

Through the witness of a godly home, people once antagonistic to religion find faith in Christ and become leaders in the underground church.

27 SPOTLIGHT

A Church Stands Strong

A small church surrounded by ardent Muslims responds to intimidation with evangelism.

Subscribe Online

Save postage and receive weekly articles, videos, and photos from our mission blog when you subscribe online.
[ABWE.ORG/SUBSCRIBE](https://abwe.org/subscribe)



ON THE COVER

ABWE missionary Jacob Lee and a Ugandan pastor preach from atop a Land Cruiser in a Muslim-majority village.

Photo:
Carol Lee



JOHN & LYDIA
South Asia

"I had the privilege of teaching at a two-day conference for persecuted pastors. These men gathered from different regions of our nation for a time of learning and encouragement. Some shared firsthand testimonies of persecution, including jail time. I taught four sessions on a Scriptural response to suffering. Pray for these shepherds who are faithfully living each day. The gospel is progressing in spite of increasing opposition."



PATRICK & MICHELE REED
The Gambia

"In February, we organized the largest Christian event ever held in The Gambia. Patrick invited pastors from the US to lead the 'Dream Conference' to train Gambian church leaders. The Gambian Pastors Alliance arranged to host the event at a conference center built specifically for an Islamic convention last year, which caused some persecution. With God's help, we filled the center with 1,000 people, plus 200 in overflow. Many testified of its positive impact on their church ministry."

Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

A Sign of Faith

A Middle Eastern church makes its presence known—and the door opens for many.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: MIDDLE EAST

"I didn't know there was any church in our province."

Ayda pressed the buzzer at the building entrance, gazing up at the church sign. She had found the church on Google Maps, surprised to discover a Christian gathering not only in her city but in her neighborhood.

Her search began when she, a soft-spoken introvert who doubted the veracity of Islam, felt alone and rejected by her devout Muslim family and society. While exploring the Bible online, she read Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7: "[S]eek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Ayda sensed that Jesus was inviting her personally to come to him.

This is what I'm looking for, she thought. I need to find a church; I need to talk with a Christian.

In her unreached province of 1.5 million people, however, only two evangelical churches exist—despite the region's prominence in early church history. After locating one online, Ayda arrived at the door one Sunday with the service already in progress. Pastor's wife and ABWE missionary Christina hurried to welcome her inside the building. Eager to find spiritual hope, Ayda joined a Bible study with Christina and another female believer. After several months, she placed her faith in Christ and was baptized in September 2024.

Ayda later expressed her gratitude to Christina: "The first time I ever came to church, you opened the door for me. If I am ever able to open the door for others, it is because of you."

Photo: ABWE missionary



A national church leader (left) and ABWE missionary Jonathan (right) baptize new believers.

A Bold Conviction

When Ayda discovered the church online, the small congregation had only recently agreed to assume the risk of publicly displaying its location.

At the time of the church's founding by ABWE missionaries in 2015, only one national believer joined the small gathering. Discovering that their ground-floor location in a downtown business district deterred seekers afraid of being recognized with Christians, they moved to a less-trafficked area. COVID-19 restrictions soon forced another relocation—a long, difficult process due to Muslim landlords refusing to rent to Christians.

The church's persistence soon bore fruit. "As the church began to grow through these different moves, we started having more nationals come," shared ABWE missionary Jonathan, the church's pastor. "People came to Christ, were baptized, and joined the congregation."

"By putting out a sign, we widen the net. And that's the step of faith these brothers in Christ are taking, knowing that they may face persecution because of this."

Jonathan, ABWE missionary

Each new attendee made the same comment: before meeting someone from the church, they hadn't realized there was any church in their region. Repeatedly hearing this, a national believer became concerned.

"This is a problem. People are trying to find a church, but they can't find us," he urged the congregation. "We need to be brave; we need to be bold. Why don't we have a sign?"



Photo: ABWE missionary

A national church leader teaches the growing congregation.

Jonathan had been waiting for the national believers to initiate this step. With full congregational approval, and after instituting security measures, the church posted a sign outside their building and listed their location online at the end of 2023.

"By putting out a sign, we widen the net," Jonathan explained. "And that's the step of faith these brothers in Christ are taking, knowing that they may face persecution because of this."

Since then, several locals like Ayda have visited the church and chosen to follow Christ. In addition, the church offers its contact information through an online Bible distribution ministry and encourages its members to share the gospel within their spheres of influence. They regularly hold evangelistic Bible studies, recognizing that nearly all who agree to begin a Bible study eventually place their faith in Christ.

"In 2024, eight people came to faith, three were baptized, and we just baptized four more," said Jonathan.

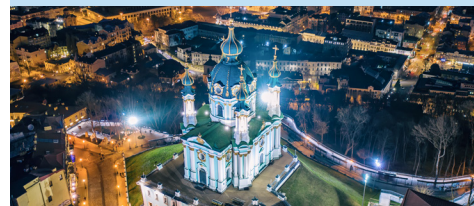
With Sunday attendance averaging 20 people, God is using the small congregation's decision to boldly follow Christ to open the door of salvation to others. ■

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

MARK & CHARITY

East Asia

"As part of our long-term ministry, our team focuses on equipping believers throughout East Asia for gospel ministry through biblical training and resource development. A major fruit of that effort is the Bible Toolbox—a free, web-based platform for pastors, church leaders, and Bible students. Now serving over 40,000 registered users, the Toolbox offers thousands of pages of national-language commentaries, lexicons, sermon outlines, and more. The New Testament library is nearly complete, with Old Testament work underway."



CALEB & CHRISTINA SUKO

Ukraine

"Recently, we launched the 'Hope for 1,000 Ukrainians' project to bring the gospel to those affected by the war in Ukraine, using 'The Story of Hope' Bible study. In the last six months, over 30 small groups across the country have started this study, many in front-line areas and formerly occupied territories. Participants dive deep into God's Word, exploring key gospel truths through 40 chronological Bible lessons. As the war continues, this project is helping Ukrainians discover real hope in Jesus amid much loss, trauma, and uncertainty."

Dreaming of Jesus

A jihadist uprising, Jehovah's Witness, and jaw-dropping dream providentially conspire for the conversion of a Syrian Muslim.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS | LOCATION: SYRIA

Alaa startled awake, his mind replaying his vivid dream of a man on a cross. With burning conviction, he decided: *I must follow Jesus.*

Alaa had been born into a clan in a Syrian village with no evangelical presence. As a young man, he met an influential attorney. The man's power and prestige inspired Alaa to attend law school. During his studies, the Islamic State (IS) capitalized upon Syria's ongoing civil war to seize control of his region.

IS militants arrested Alaa. In prison, he endured not only abuse at the hands of his captors but repeated bombings by rival factions. IS officials demanded

that Alaa stop studying law, which they viewed as heretical under Islamic Sharia law. They tortured him until he acquiesced. Once released, injured and traumatized, he fled to neighboring Lebanon with his brothers.

In Lebanon, Alaa was visited by Jehovah's Witnesses. They told him for the first time about the Bible and that Jesus was more than the prophet that Islam claimed him to be. Their words angered Alaa, adding to his rage toward fellow Muslims who had treated him cruelly. He desired to know for himself what was true. As he researched the Bible, another man, pointing to certain texts in the Qur'an, challenged him to consider the biblical Jesus. Alaa's anger and confusion grew. He begged God to show him the truth.

Soon after, Alaa dreamed he was being chased between two crowds of people. Before him rose Jesus on the cross. Alaa ran toward him, shouting, "Help me!" As Jesus embraced him, the crowd shouted a word Alaa had never heard: "Hallelujah!"

Alaa awoke convinced that the gospel he had read in the Bible was true, and he began following Jesus. When he told his family, they beat him and screamed at him until he escaped barefoot out the door.

For the next year and a half, Alaa lived on the street. Providentially, he met ABWE Live Global partner Aquila. Aquila invited Alaa to the Desert Training Center in 2017, a three-month mobile course he founded to train national believers. Aquila, alongside Live Global missionaries and pastors from the US, teaches modules on theology and ministry, after which students complete internships. More than 60 graduates now serve throughout the Middle East and Africa.

"Aquila trained and mentored Alaa and saw he is incredibly bold for the gospel," said Junia, a Live Global director.

Alaa, now a Live Global partner, reaches other Syrians affected by the 13-year war that displaced 12 million. In 2021, he opened a refugee family center in Lebanon to provide children's educational classes, women's sewing and literacy courses, and men's groups.

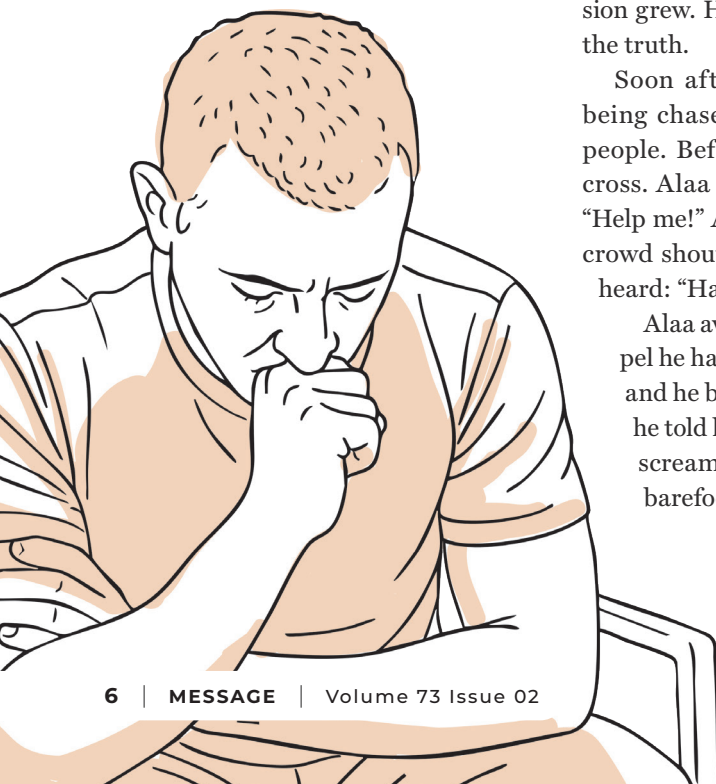
"Connections lead to trust, which leads to sharing the gospel," explained Junia.

At a second center in Syria, Alaa shares Christ's hope with those ravaged by war and disciples believers often isolated or persecuted for their faith.

"Sometimes I believe that our ministry is the only source of hope and joy for them amidst all the uncertainties and troubles," he shared, noting, "God's mission will not stop." ■

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

Alaa bows his head in prayer.



'Tactical' Evangelism in Full Force

Gospel-infused first responder training leads to professions of faith among 12 Panamanian police officers.

BY: STEPHEN R. CLARK
LOCATION: LATIN AMERICA



TACTICA instructors provide tactical medical training for police officers in Panama.

A short-term missions trip designed to both train and evangelize Costa Rican police officers opened Ryan and Gretchen Rought's eyes to a new ministry potential.

The model struck a chord. Ryan, a police officer, and Gretchen, a Spanish teacher, recognized God's leading and moved with their two young daughters to Costa Rica in 2006 to begin a similar, full-time ministry: TACTICA (Teaching Authorities Christian Truth in Central America).

In cooperation with local governments, the ministry offers free, high-quality professional training to police and other first responders. Given the increase in drug trafficking, migration challenges, and violent crime in Central America, this kind of cutting-edge training is desperately needed. In most cases, the police receive only minimal instruction before being placed in the field.

TACTICA instructors are believing police officers or military veterans from the US who volunteer their time.

"We now have around 300 who have served as instructors," says Ryan. Each week-long course includes 40-60 local officers. Training includes typical law

enforcement, emergency medical, and first responder fare.

The difference is TACTICA's focus on the gospel. Explains Gretchen, "On the first morning, they receive a welcome package that includes a Bible and a devotional called *My Tactical Time With God*."

Instructors incorporate spiritual examples into the training and transparently share testimonies of how they found hope in God and healing for past hurts. Twice daily, they break into small groups for a Bible study using the devotional. Topics touch on marriage, family, prayer, pornography, PTSD, and more.

Participants are challenged to memorize Bible verses from a list of 99 and earn points they can exchange for donated police gear. In their first-ever training in Panama, one officer memorized all 99 verses by Thursday!

During the Panama training, 12 out of the 40 officers accepted the Lord. They stood publicly in front of the entire class to acknowledge their commitment.

Even after the class is over, discipleship continues.

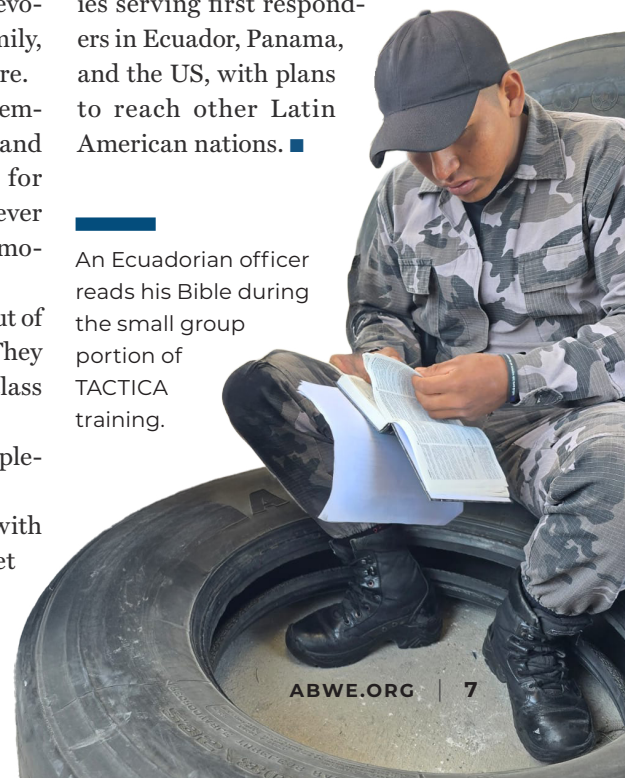
"Each instructor keeps in touch with participants," says Ryan. They meet one-on-one and in virtual large-group sessions via Zoom.

"We work with local churches wherever we go," explains Gretchen, "to ensure those who make a decision for Christ can be planted."

TACTICA also offers counseling, support, and ministry to the whole family. Gretchen shares that after each training, using the information gathered from registrations, "I'm on the phone for days reaching out to the spouses and families."

In addition to regular police trainings in Costa Rica, TACTICA has expanded to include ABWE missionaries serving first responders in Ecuador, Panama, and the US, with plans to reach other Latin American nations. ■

An Ecuadorian officer reads his Bible during the small group portion of TACTICA training.





Connections

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Faith Comes by Hearing

Audio Bibles cross borders to unreached people groups with low literacy rates.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: TOGO

ABWE partners use battery-operated Bluetooth projectors to show gospel videos in remote villages.

With more than 40 languages spoken in the small West African nation of Togo, communicating the gospel can be a challenge—especially among people groups resistant to Christianity.

A young Fulani man recently traveled two days across dangerous, jihadist-controlled territory in Burkina Faso to reach the Hospital of Hope (HOH) in northern Togo. ABWE physicians, struggling to communicate through a translator, learned that he had not come for medical attention. He requested one thing: audio Bibles. His brother had returned to their village a few months prior after a long hospitalization at HOH with an audio Bible he had received in his tribal language.

“We can’t hear it anymore,” the man said. He explained that a group of Fulani villagers—an unreached, semi-nomadic people known for Islamic radicalism—gathered to listen to the audio Bible three nights a week after evening prayers at the mosque. The group had grown to over 100 people, making it difficult for the words

to reach the back of the crowd. With another device, the man said, everyone would be able to hear.

“This story is not unusual,” said missionary doctor Melissa Molsee. “From Fulani herdsman to patients and their families to local Islamic leaders, people are showing up at our hospital asking for an audio Bible in their heart language. Most in our region do not know how to read, so the ability to hear the Word of God in their heart language is a priceless gift.”

In 2024, HOH chaplains distributed 600 audio Bibles in eight languages to those with whom they shared the gospel. Their goal is to give away 1,000 in 2025.

Understanding that faith comes by hearing, ABWE missionaries in southern Togo also employ media to bridge languages. Audiovisual ministry Studios Vérité, led by missionaries Daniel and Sherri Lethers, recently partnered with Revelation Media’s iBible project—the first narrated animation of the Bible—to translate iBible videos into several West African languages.

Studios Vérité staff first worked with a team of Togolese pastors to translate and record the audio script for the nine-minute “The Real Story of Jesus” in the Ewe language.

“When we synced it with the video, they were literally in tears because they saw it come to life in their language,” recalled Daniel.

Two staff members immediately took the video to local villages. Using a battery-operated projector, they showed the animated gospel presentation, and seven people trusted Christ. In another village, 14 came to faith.

This year, Studios Vérité is recording 42 iBible narrations from Genesis, along with 40 from the Gospels, in two major Togolese languages, Ewe and Kabiye. Videos are distributed through the iBible smartphone app, online, and on SD cards. Studios Vérité also completed an audio recording of the Old Testament in Ewe and will soon complete the New Testament.

“God is drawing people to himself as they hear his Word,” conveyed Daniel. ■

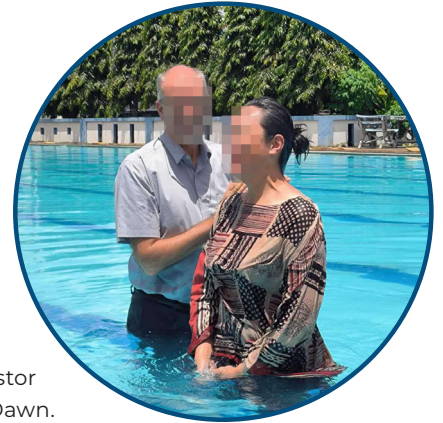
Photo: Ethan Molsee

From Closed Borders to Open Hearts

A missionary family's sudden relocation creates connections with unreached East Asians.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: THAILAND



A local pastor baptizes Dawn.

David and Susan's 11-year ministry in East Asia ended abruptly and dramatically when the COVID-19 crisis forced them to leave their country of service. They were later refused re-entry. Grieving the loss of their life's work and searching for God's guidance, they moved with their family to northern Thailand at the suggestion of ABWE teammates to serve the large population of East Asians residing there.

They discovered that thousands of East Asian families move to Thailand to educate their children in international schools. David and Susan examined the needs of the parents, along with their own skills honed through previous ministry, and decided to launch a language course in their home called "Reading the Bible in English."

To spread the word among the unbelieving East Asian adults they hoped to reach, David posted advertisements around the neighborhood in their language. On the first day of class, nobody came.

"We sat down and prayed, 'God, please bring people to our door,'" recalled David.

The second week, one neighbor arrived. The third week brought a lady named Dawn, a nonreligious, divorced mother of a high school girl. Dawn was so fascinated by the class that the next week she brought her neighbor. The following week, she invited more friends.

"Their friends brought more friends, and before the month was out, we had a dozen people," said David.

The Bible was completely new to Dawn. She, like other East Asians, had accepted the atheism imposed by her government. Now in democratic Thailand, away from public surveillance, she felt free to explore religious beliefs.

At first, Dawn enjoyed reading about Jesus but rejected the concept of sin. After several months of attending the class and visiting a church with David and Susan, her thinking shifted dramatically. She admitted she was a sinner and placed her faith in Christ. So too did the neighbor she had invited.

They were both baptized in August 2024. Dawn emerged from the water jubilant. Later that morning, David noticed that Dawn had changed into

dry clothes, but her previous outfit was missing. She replied that she had thrown her wet clothing in the trash. "My old life is gone; my new life has begun," she explained.

David and Susan's witness extends beyond English classes. They invite families, often isolated and lonely in Thailand, to holiday gatherings and help with practical needs. They are able to create instant connections, drawing from their own experience living in East Asia and ability to speak the language.

"This is what God does—he brings people together in fellowship," said David. "Many seekers see this family dynamic and are so attracted that they want to come to church."

These new believers are being equipped not only to serve in local churches but to carry the gospel back to East Asia. ■

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

East Asian adults study English and the Bible in David and Susan's home.

Photos on this page: David and Susan



Legacies

OF FAITHFULNESS



Bob and Lynne Trout

For nearly 60 years, the Trouts' dedication to ministry and to their Lord has impacted lives throughout South America and the US.

Bob and Lynne Trout joined ABWE in 1966, faithfully serving as missionaries ever since. Over their decades of ministry, Bob has worn many hats—church planter, regional director for Spanish-speaking South America, director of Member Care, and current director of ABWE's Ambassador Ministries serving retired missionaries. We recently asked Bob and Lynne to reflect on a lifetime dedicated to missions and the faithfulness of God.

Q: Tell us a bit about your journey with ABWE.

Bob: My wife, Lynne, and I have been married for 62 years, and we've had a wonderful journey. God has been generous to us. We have served with ABWE for 59 of those years, with 45 in Latin America—Peru, Paraguay, and Colombia—and the remainder in the US.

Lynne: We have three children, 11 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren—a real blessing. We first went to

Lima, Peru, with a three-year-old, a two-year-old, and a six-week-old baby. Looking back, we must have been crazy—but when you're young, you do crazy things for the Lord.

Q: How did God lead you into missions?

Lynne: I remember clearly accepting the Lord as my Savior at Geneva College. That night, I couldn't sleep, think-

ing, *I'm 18; why hasn't anybody told me this before?* I told the Lord I wanted to share the gospel with others, because surely there were others like me who had never heard.

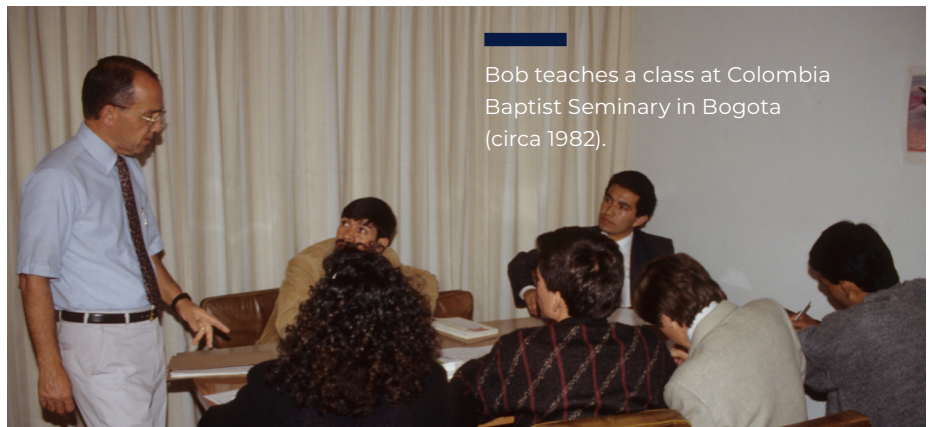
Bob: My father was a businessman, and I was heading that direction. But after 13 job interviews upon college graduation, none seemed right. We began attending a church with a strong missions program, and the Lord used veteran missionaries Bill and Elva Scherer to direct us toward missions. Our first ministry was in Lima, Peru, where the Scherers had served.

Q: Can you share a memorable story from your ministry?

Bob: In Lima, we met a young man who had attempted suicide but miraculously survived. In the hospital, unable to speak, he trusted Christ after some Christians shared the gospel by writing it down for him. Despite severe speech difficulties, he dedicated his life to ministry, eventually becoming president of the pastors' fellowship in Peru. Later, he even moved his entire family from Lima to Bogota to plant churches, selling his house to fund the move. God used him tremendously; his testimony became a widely viewed gospel video in Peru.

Q: You experienced both joy and hardship. What was a particularly difficult moment?

Lynne: While serving in Bogota, a woman hurled a large piece of concrete



Bob teaches a class at Colombia Baptist Seminary in Bogota (circa 1982).



Lynne speaks to around 800 ladies at the annual “Feminario” retreat of ABWE churches in Bogota, Colombia.

through our car windshield, severely injuring our daughter, Holly. It broke her nose in three places, and she sustained other serious injuries. I vividly remember wrestling with God, thinking, *Lord, you can do anything to me, but don't touch my kids.* It was the only time we seriously considered leaving the mission field. Yet, looking back, I'm thankful God didn't let us quit. Had we left, we would have missed seeing him plant 26 churches.

Bob: That event happened in 1980. Had we left, we would have missed decades of blessings in Colombia. God's faithfulness sustained us, and our ministry blossomed.

Q: What is your fondest memory from the field?

Bob: We watched God grow churches beyond expectations. We once started a church in a garage with 30 people; today, three services pack in 350 worshipers weekly, still focused on preaching the Word. Seeing nationals multiply ministries was deeply rewarding.

Lynne: My fondest memories revolve around answered prayer. We've seen God provide money when there was none, change weather, and save countless souls. Those answered prayers stand out most vividly.

Q: What was it like transitioning back to the US after 45 years on the field?

Lynne: It was incredibly hard. I realized I was more Latin than American. Bob reconnected quickly, but I struggled. In Colombia, I'd been busy with Bible studies, discipleship, and ministry. Coming home was isolating. Thankfully, over time, God gave me ministries teaching women and children.

Bob: Adjusting was challenging. The contrast between Colombia and the US was stark—such wealth here, yet so much complaining. Yet, God was faithful, guiding us into our new role with ABWE Member Care.

Q: Tell us about your current ministry.

Bob: Today, we serve in member care, specifically focusing on ABWE's retirees through the Ambassador program. We have about 300 retirees, and we've expanded gatherings to multiple states so retirees can stay connected. We help them navigate life's transitions and maintain meaningful ministry involvement. For us, it's about ensuring they never feel disconnected.

Lynne: Bob spends hours on phone calls and emails—maybe 500 to 600 a month—to answer financial questions, pray, or just check in. These relationships are vital. I stay connected through weekly Bible studies and discipleship classes with women in Bogota.

Q: How would you like to be remembered?

Bob: Faithfulness. I saw it in my dad, who served faithfully until age 97. Faithfulness is stewardship—caring well for what God gives.

Lynne: Every night, we thank God that we can still serve him. All we've ever wanted is to serve faithfully until he calls us home or returns.

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

Bob: Make sure that you don't allow your schedule to become so busy that you neglect your personal time with God. Faithfulness, a teachable spirit, and mutual respect for your colleagues are all essential, regardless of the stressors you face in life and ministry.

Q: Any final thoughts?

Bob: Our life hasn't been easy, but it has been greatly blessed. Our pastor used to say, “Just preach and pray and plug away.” That's what we've done, and that's what we'll keep doing. ■



Tune in to the Cloud of Witnesses podcast to be inspired by remarkable individuals like Bob and Lynne who have advanced Christ's kingdom throughout the century-long history of ABWE. Listen now at cloudofwitnessespodcast.com.



5 Ways to Support Missionaries in Risky Places

Missionaries serving in the world's hardest places face danger and isolation—and they need the steadfast, sacrificial support of the church to endure and thrive.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

I met my former neighbors in a bomb shelter. Political violence had surged in our region of the Middle East, and attacks and air raids upended our daily lives. It quickly became apparent that to sustain ministry in this turbulent location, my team and I would need steadfast support from those holding the rope in North America.

Our situation was not unique. The 100 largest unreached people groups—comprising 24 percent of the world's population—all dwell within the 10/40 Window, a swath of global territory spanning North Africa, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, and much of Asia. Most nations in this region restrict Christian activity, and missionaries regularly confront religious hostility, closed borders, harsh climates, inadequate medical care—and tremendous gospel need. Yet only 3 percent of the missionary force has answered this call.

When Jesus appointed 72 disciples for short-term mission, his commission included not only a mandate but a warning of the risk they would assume. “And he said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the har-

vest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves’” (Luke 10:2–3).

Jesus' words still resonate today as a clarion call to risk-averse generations. The gospel will not penetrate the ends of the earth without missionaries willing to face danger. The question, therefore, is not *whether* we need to risk but *how* to support those who do. Consider these five principles to guide our efforts.

1. Provide for Their Daily Needs

Most missionaries need financial support. For those whose daily life includes navigating threats or adverse conditions, a stable income becomes even more crucial. Being able to rely on consistent contributions to provide their family's daily bread can free up their already-occupied minds and hearts to more fully engage in ministry. Beyond their routine personal and ministry budgets, unexpected costs can arise for emergency situations or special ministry projects. Giving generously is an opportunity to demonstrate tangible care.

During his imprisonment in Rome, the Apostle Paul commended the Philip-

pian church for their financial gifts and concern for him, describing their support as sharing in his “trouble” (Philippians 4:14). He later encouraged churches in Crete to send missionaries such that they “lack nothing” (Titus 3:13).

This holy admonition to share in our missionaries' trouble includes not only financial support but regular personal encouragement. Following the Philippians' example, we can communicate our care through messages, emails, or calls. Even short, simple messages demonstrate love and value. In locations with few other Christ-followers, missionaries may not often hear biblically grounded encouragement on difficult days or have opportunity to discuss life events with like-minded friends.

2. Engage in Fervent Prayer

Amy Carmichael (1867–1951), pioneer missionary to India, once remarked, “If you are ever inclined to pray for a missionary, do it at once, where ever you are. Perhaps he may be in great peril at that moment.”

We cannot expect to press the gospel into nations gripped by the darkness of false religions and antagonistic political

systems without acknowledging the spiritual forces at play. Missionaries serving in these areas feel this darkness acutely. Therefore, when the Lord brings them to mind, pray. When you hear their country mentioned in the news, pray. Pray for wisdom and discernment, strength and endurance, boldness and clear witness, and abundant growth for them and for the national churches.

3. Follow Security Guidelines

Take particular care to find out which modes of communication your missionaries consider secure in their context: email addresses, messaging apps, social media platforms, or mail. When corresponding with those in creative-access locations, where communications may be monitored, learn which specific phrases or sensitive topics to avoid and what to use instead. For their safety and ongoing ministry, it's usually best to avoid referring to these workers as "missionaries" and ensure that you do not post their names or personal information online.

Security guidelines are usually determined by missions agencies or sending churches, who can also provide personal security training for those serving in places of risk. Understanding situational awareness and threat assessment—along with real-time assistance from professionals and debriefing when needed—can give confidence in turbulent situations.

4. Set Realistic Expectations

While we certainly should honor those who serve in the hardest places, let us not forget that they are people like we are with feet of clay. They can get sick, tired, and discouraged and need periodic time away for refreshment, along with grace and compassion. Likewise, ministry in these regions can seem more like plowing concrete than planting in good soil, and it's often necessary to break through layers of hostility and opposition before seeing the kind of spiritual results which supporters may expect.

As much as we may yearn for missionaries' on-the-ground ministry to continue, partnership also involves open-handedness: they may face complex decisions of whether to stay on the field or to evacuate to best steward their resources, ministries, and very lives. Here too, they appreciate compassion, understanding, and practical assistance as they follow the Spirit's leading and the guidance of designated church and agency leadership. These missionaries stand in good company: both the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul at times withdrew from life-threatening situations and at others boldly endured persecution to fulfill their mission.

5. Join in Their Risk

The best way we can support missionaries in risk is by being willing to risk ourselves. Rather than viewing missionaries as somehow separate from other believers—or exempting ourselves from ministry with a well-intended "I could never do what you do"—let us consider what God *has* called us to do. Christ's commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" was issued to *all* his disciples (Matthew 28:19–20)—or, as Charles Spurgeon summarized, "It is the whole business of the whole church to preach the whole gospel to the whole world." God may not have called you to places of risk, but he has placed you in a specific family, neighborhood, and city. We must all daily preach the gospel to ourselves, remind ourselves of Jesus' sacrifice, and follow his model as we selflessly engage the lost, hurting world around us.

When one day we stand before God's throne, in a kingdom of peace and justice, our lives will not be evaluated by the degree of our risk but by the measure of our faithfulness. Let us boldly follow him into the harvest field to which he has called us and expend ourselves in sacrificially supporting those sent to the hardest fields.

That is a risk worth taking. ■

"And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.'"

Luke 10:2–3 ESV

Photo: Hannah Strayer

2024 Annual Report:

I never tire of seeing the gospel stride forward victoriously in the face of cultural upheaval, economic uncertainty, persecution, and spiritual opposition. God is moving. New countries are opening to the gospel through ABWE workers. New field teams are forming—bringing the total number of nations where ABWE is serving to 91. And new missionaries are answering the call of God on their lives to go.

All glory belongs to God for the way he is working through his church.

In 2024, we also saw God's provision in historic ways. For the first time in our history, ABWE surpassed \$60 million in gross revenue—our largest financial year to date. But we don't exist to chase numbers. These resources are simply tools—entrusted to us by the Lord and by his people—to send and sustain missionaries who are laboring to proclaim Christ; make disciples; raise up leaders; plant healthy, biblical churches; and meet human needs in Jesus' name.

Pray with us that we would steward these gifts faithfully and that the Lord would continue to provide for the work ahead. The mission is not finished, and the challenges we face globally remain significant. But we believe this is a unique moment—an open window of gospel opportunity. Let's not miss it.

Thank you for your generosity, your prayers, and your sacrificial support of the Lord's work through ABWE. May the Lord continue to pour out from the storehouses of his grace everything we need to do his will.

As Hudson Taylor once said, "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply."

For the sake of his name among the nations,



Paul L. Davis
ABWE President

851

Long-Term
Missionaries

+

46

Mid-Term
Missionaries

+

79

Short-Term
Missionaries

555

Baptisms in churches
where missionaries
serve as their
primary ministry



Photo: Hannah Strayer

God's Global Work

976 Workers
Reaching 91
Nations

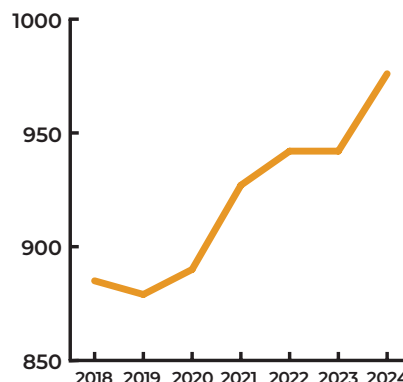


Chart 1: Shows the growth in the number of missionaries from 2018-2024.

462

Church plants initiated, strengthened, or established

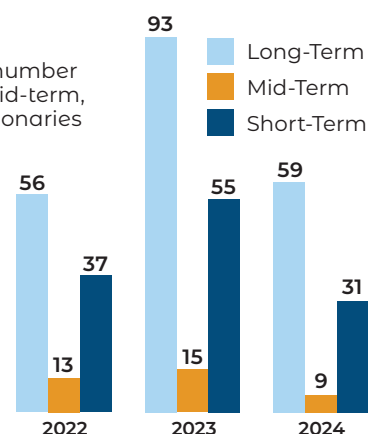
148

Translation projects initiated or completed

27

New sending churches

Chart 2: Shows the number of new long-term, mid-term, and short-term missionaries from 2022-2024.



134,817

People given healthcare

God's Financial Provision

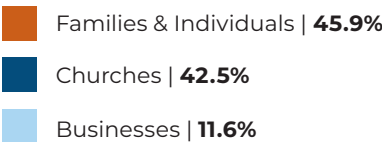
2024 Financial Summary

FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT IN 2024	% CHANGE FROM 2023
Contributions	\$55,135,625 (89.8%)	+ 7.6%
Other Sources*	\$6,231,984 (10.2%)	- 10.6%
TOTAL FUNDING	\$61,367,609	+ 5.4%

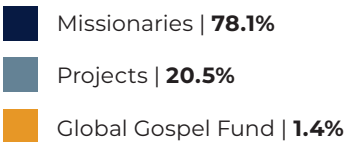
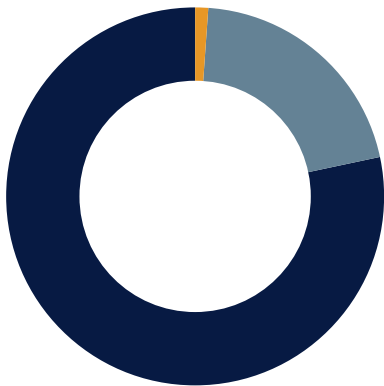
EXPENSES	AMOUNT / %	% CHANGE FROM 2023
Program	\$54,788,251 (82.5%)	+ 4.6%
Management & General	\$6,307,087 (9.5%)	-4.4%
Fundraising	\$5,307,949 (8%)	-3.8%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$66,403,287	+ 2.9%

* Other Sources includes investment returns, changes in trust assets, etc.
Complete and audited financial statements are available at abwe.org/financial-statements.

Who Supports ABWE?



What Did They Support?





SOUTH ASIA MINISTRY CENTER

Bringing the Light of Christ to Reach the Lost With the Gospel

\$329,974 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/southasia2025

85% raised: \$850,000
To be raised: \$150,000



THE GOROKA PROJECT

Expanding Goroka Baptist Bible College and the Seigu Medical Clinic to Bring New Life to Papua New Guinea

\$194,950 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/goroka2025

20% raised: \$1,331,840
To be raised: \$5,377,646



THE GLOBAL GOSPEL FUND

Mobilizing New Missionaries and Supporting the Work of 1,000 More Across the Globe

\$1,448,524 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/global2025



COMPASSION MINISTRIES

Sharing the Hope of the Gospel While Meeting Urgent Needs Caused by Flooding and Other Crises in the Middle East, Brazil, Thailand, Bangladesh, and the United States

\$261,007 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/compassion



MY FATHER'S HOUSE IN HAITI

Sharing the Gospel Through Orphanage and Education Ministries to Disciple Kids to Become Mature Followers of Christ

\$251,170 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/fathershouse



LIBERIA PROJECTS

Supporting Local Evangelism and Discipleship Ministries in Liberia

\$312,806 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/liberia25



OBED'S HOUSE MINISTRIES

Helping Homeless Children in the Philippines Heal From Trauma and Learn About God's Grace

\$271,177 GIVEN IN 2024
abwe.org/obed25

A House Divided and Delivered

A missionary's business opens doors to reach a fundamentalist Muslim family—and their faith costs them everything.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS

LOCATION: NORTH AFRICA



Soon after the mid-morning call to prayer echoed through the market from nearby minarets, and faithful Muslim shopkeepers spread—then later rerolled—their prayer mats in devotion, Youssef and Alan looked up to see a large, bearded man step into their narrow shop.

“Mahmoud,” Youssef called, forgoing all expected greetings, “Alan says that the Qur’an is a book full of lies, and 1.6 billion people have been deceived.”

Alan stiffened at the sudden pronouncement. He saw Mahmoud’s eyes narrow; the neighboring shopkeeper’s Islamic zeal was visible even in the callus built up on his forehead from prostrating in prayer five times a day. In their North African city, Alan knew he could be killed for a statement like this. Bowing his head, he prayed silently, *Lord, please help me!*

The fear racing through his mind then collided with another thought: *I’ve been praying for this man for years. This is a perfect opportunity to share the gospel.*

He met Mahmoud’s intimidating gaze and, breathing deeply, asked, “What do you know about the

Ten Commandments?” Mahmoud, like many Muslims, was not familiar with the commands God gave Moses, so Alan continued: “If I told you there were five gods, is that the truth or a lie?”

“That’s a lie,” Mahmoud answered grudgingly.

“Right, there’s only one God, and that’s the first commandment.” Alan grabbed a piece of paper and began to draw. “If I were a great artist, and I drew a beautiful picture and said, ‘This is what God looks like; let’s worship it,’ would he like that?”

“No, that’s *haram*, forbidden.”

“You’re right; that’s number two—don’t worship idols.” In this manner, Alan proceeded to explain each commandment. When he reached the seventh, Mahmoud considered his own lust toward the attractive women he watched in the market and hung his head in shame.

To Alan’s amazement, Youssef—also a Muslim—suddenly interjected. He began relating Jesus’ teachings from the Gospels, which he had heard previously from Alan during their many conversations in their shop.



Photo: Getty Images



A North African man shops for shoes in Alan's market store.

Mahmoud's scowl deepened. Speaking severely, he rebuked Youssef with a quote from the Qur'an: "The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt" (Surah 10:94). He turned on his heel and stalked out of the shop.

Terrified, Alan quickly shoved his belongings into his briefcase. The store was surrounded by tightly packed market stalls, encircled by fervent Muslims. *Would Mahmoud incite them into a mob?* he worried. Rushing back to his apartment, Alan drafted an urgent email to his supporters: "Please pray; I'm afraid these men are going to stone me."

Missions as Business Meetings

Alan and his wife, Joan, had followed God's call to North Africa four years prior. Their destination—a country nearly 100 percent unreached, according to Joshua Project reports—does not grant missionary visas for residency and restricts Christian activities. Like many believers serving in creative-access contexts, Alan and Joan planned to leverage their education and vocational experience to meaningfully contribute to the local economy and create natural openings to share the gospel.

Opportunities arrived unexpectedly; Joan was hired as an international school teacher and administrator and Alan found himself part-owner of a shoe store.

Alan first noticed the shop on their daily commute through the neighborhood market. As he navigated the wares spilling into the narrow street—crates of fresh fish, mounds of vegetables, bins of spices molded into bright pyramids, and traditional robes and rugs strung from awnings—he greeted each shopkeeper in Arabic. His greetings turned to conversations, then later to relationships solid enough to support the weight of the gospel through the tremors of opposition.

One shopkeeper, Omar, mentioned that the shoe store he ran with his brother, Youssef, was experiencing financial difficulties, and he approached Alan about joining the business. Alan prayerfully agreed. He drafted a business plan based on biblical principles and initiated conversations about what God was teaching him through the Scriptures during their hours in the shop and their weekly business meetings at a local café.

One day while sitting in the shop, Youssef asked, "Alan, why don't you believe the Qur'an is God's word?"

Alan answered readily, "It doesn't matter what I believe; I'll show you what God says about the Qur'an." He turned to the prohibition in Revelation 22 against adding or subtracting from Scripture, noting that it was written more than five centuries before Muhammad is said



Photo: Getty Images

A North African shopkeeper arranges his merchandise while talking with customers.

Alan drafted an urgent email to his supporters: “Please pray; I’m afraid these men are going to stone me.”

to have received the Qur’an. Then he read Proverbs 30:5-6: “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.”

Based on these verses, Youssef announced to Mahmoud that Alan believed the Qur’an was full of lies. Fearing for his life, Alan had avoided the

market until, several days later, Mahmoud amiably invited him to lunch.

The betrayal Alan anticipated came not from Mahmoud, however, but from Youssef, his own business partner.

‘My Whole Life Has Been Built on a Lie’

While visiting the US later that year, Alan received a frantic message from Youssef’s brother, Omar: Youssef had stolen the store’s finances, disappeared without a trace, and left the business to fold. Youssef was gone, it seemed, for good.

A year and a half later, Alan answered his phone to hear Youssef’s voice. He urgently wanted to meet with Alan, and he planned to pay back the money he had

taken. The next morning, Alan walked into the café to find Youssef already seated in the back corner.

Youssef exclaimed, “Why didn’t you tell me the prophet Muhammad was a murderer, a rapist, a vile man?” He continued: “When we sat in that booth over there for our business meetings and you shared all those stories about Jesus, I knew they were true. I’ve spent the last year and a half investigating. My whole life has been built on a lie, and 1.6 billion people have been deceived. What do I do?”

Breathing a prayer of thanksgiving, Alan presented the gospel, then connected Youssef with a local pastor he served alongside. Youssef repented and believed.

The men began meeting regularly for discipleship. They were listening to an Arabic audio Bible one day when Youssef reached over and paused the recording. “I need to tell you a secret,” he said. Twelve years earlier, he had fallen in love with a girl he met working in a factory. His family had forbidden their marriage due to the girl’s recent divorce and baby

daughter. They married anyway, and, unbeknownst to his family or to Alan, now had four children. They lived in a nearby city near his wife’s family, all fundamentalist Muslims.

“You can’t tell my wife that I’ve become a Christian,” he warned. “She is a devout Muslim, so much so that she fully veils in public with only her eyes visible under her *nigab*. But could you tell her why *you* are a Christian?”

At Youssef’s apartment, Alan watched the children arrive home from school and Youssef’s wife, Kenza, prepare lunch with warm hospitality. He contemplated how he could insert the gospel into the conversation. As the family scooped bites from communal platters of food, he asked Kenza, “Do you realize these children aren’t yours?”

She stared at him, incredulous, as he continued. “Children are God’s creation, and he gives them to us as parents. It’s our responsibility to teach them that he is holy, and they are not, and they desperately need a Savior.” Then, he related the biblical accounts of creation, the fall, the prophets, and the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he prepared to leave, he prayed aloud for God to have mercy upon the family and save them. He opened his eyes to see Kenza sobbing. She requested one thing: a Bible to read for herself.

Youssef awoke late one night to find Kenza sitting in bed, holding the Bible, and weeping. “Do you realize what Jesus did for us?” she asked tearfully. Youssef revealed that, yes, he had become a Christian. He led her to the Lord that night.

“When we sat in that booth over there for our business meetings and you shared all those stories about Jesus, I knew they were true. I’ve spent the last year and a half investigating. . . . My whole life has been built on a lie. What do I do?”

Youssef

Imminent Danger

Kenza immediately became burdened for her sister, who was nearing death from cancer. She began sending her WhatsApp messages with the gospel. When their father discovered the messages, he gathered their mother and brothers and stormed into Kenza's home while Youssef was away, shouting at her and attempting to drag her out by the hair until her children intervened, injuring one. A week later, her family returned, saying they had found a Muslim man to take Youssef's place as Kenza's husband. "You'll regret the day you ever came into this family," they threatened Youssef.

Upon hearing of their imminent danger, the small church that Alan and Joan were part of contributed funds to move the family to another city. Finding themselves still within reach of

Kenza's well-connected family, they discussed with Alan a plan to seek asylum in Europe, citing Jesus' instructions to the twelve that if they were persecuted in one town, they should flee to another. Alan hesitated, wrestling with other Scripture passages that provide alternate examples.

"We need believers here for the local church to exist in North Africa," he later explained.

Youssef and Kenza decided to cross the border to a neighboring nation—an attempt which usually proves impossible for would-be asylum seekers. Before dawn, the family climbed into a taxicab and rode to the border. They exited the car into a jostling crowd of hundreds of people vying for entrance. Suddenly, a border guard pointed at Youssef and motioned for the family to come with him. He escorted them to the passport

control booth, stamped their passports, and pointed them toward the officials across the border. Once in the neighboring country, the family applied for asylum. In the subsequent interrogation, Kenza explained their situation and boldly included the gospel message, to the amazement of the officials. Within three hours, they were installed in a refugee camp.

Their safety in the refugee camp was short-lived. The camp was populated primarily with sub-Saharan African Muslims who, after discovering Youssef and Kenza were believers, began murmuring threats. One afternoon, the camp director—providentially also a Christian—summoned Youssef and instructed him to be ready with his family at midnight: he had learned of a plot to kill them and planned to quietly help them escape to Europe.



Photo: Getty Images

“We’re seeking to raise up the next generation of leaders to spread as leaven throughout their culture, as Jesus described. By God’s grace, we want to see the gospel ignite like wildfire through North Africa.”

Alan, ABWE missionary



Alan (left) meets with neighboring shopkeeper, Mahmoud (right), with whom he shares the gospel in the context of their friendship.

Photo: ABWE missionary

Youssef quickly called Alan. “Before we go, I want you to come and baptize me,” he urged.

Alan and a national pastor hastily traveled to meet them. Gathering on a beach in joyful celebration, they baptized Youssef and Kenza—and then their oldest daughter who, after talking with the pastor, trusted Christ that day. They proceeded to a café to observe the Lord’s Supper before tearfully embracing in farewell.

Once in Europe, Youssef and Kenza intentionally sought work at a refugee center, where they assist fellow immigrants and introduce them to hope in Christ.

Shaking the Faith of Unbelievers

Alan and Joan’s deepening friendship with Youssef’s extended family, and with other individuals in their city, has underscored the importance of building relationships to establish trust in their closed, often-suspicious society.

“One relationship gets you into these huge family networks,” Joan said, explaining that Youssef’s family has taken them to meet relatives in their conservative mountain village that currently has no gospel witness. “We have relationships now with people in the village.”

Alan and Joan find that, hidden behind intense social pressure to adhere to Islam, some North Africans are questioning the beliefs they have been taught, secretly searching for answers on the internet or in private conversations. By being present in their communities, missionaries and national believers can fulfill the vital role of sharing the truth of the gospel that they likely would not hear otherwise.

As relationships develop, and people demonstrate openness to discussing the gospel, Alan and Joan invite them to visit their church plant. Church planting is central to their mission as the means for gathering Christ’s body, practicing the ordinances, discipling new believers with sound doctrine to overcome previ-



Photo: ABWE missionary

A national pastor (sixth from left) stands with Youssef's family after baptizing Youssef (fifth from left), Kenza (right), and their oldest daughter at a beach.

ous beliefs and superstitions, and reaching others with the message of Christ.

"We're seeking to raise up the next generation of leaders to spread as leaven throughout their culture, as Jesus described," conveyed Alan. "By God's grace, we want to see the gospel ignite like wildfire through North Africa."

This does not come without risk. "We've had people come into the church, profess faith, and then turn on us and threaten to turn us into the police," Joan shared.

In much of North Africa, foreigners are permitted to be Christians, but it is illegal—even imprisonable—to shake the faith of a Muslim through proselytizing.

"This is where our theology is so important," said Alan. "We don't have the ability to shake anybody's faith—that's God's job. So, when somebody's faith is shaken, their issue is with God."

This confidence grounds their commitment to continue serving unreached people groups.

"In North Africa, and around the world, ABWE missionaries are following Christ's commission to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth," said ABWE President Paul Davis.

In locations opposed to the gospel, they enter authentically to bring value through healthcare, education, business, or community development—integrating it with their Christian faith and their identity as believers.

"Even in the darkest places, ABWE missionaries remain true to our core values," continued Paul. "We boldly celebrate the gospel. We give Jesus first place, above any humanitarian cause. We enter nations with humble confidence, deferentially submitting to just laws while maintaining our allegiance

to Christ's command. We demonstrate a biblical family atmosphere to those whose faith has cost them earthly relationships, and we share our lives and possessions in pursuit of Christ's mission."

These faithful workers know that their risk is not in vain. "Sometimes you don't know what the Lord is doing," explained Joan. "But we don't have to see what he's doing; we just need to be faithful to what God has called us to. The story is still being written." ■

We Can Do More With Your Help

Join us in reaching creative-access regions like North Africa with the gospel.

Learn more at:

abwe.org/disciplenorthafrica



Why Our ‘Risk’ Was Right

Through the witness of a godly home, people once antagonistic to religion find faith in Christ and become leaders in the underground church.

BY: MARK | LOCATION: EAST ASIA

In February, I had the joy of reconnecting in East Asia with several believers who had come to faith through our Bible study many years ago—those who, at the time, were openly atheistic and even antagonistic toward Christianity. Before sharing what the Lord used to draw them to himself, let me tell you where they are now—18 years later.

Two of them, whom I’ll call David and Ruth, are now married and serving in a rural region of the country. They were sent out from their home church in a large city to help strengthen a smaller congregation. While they primarily shepherd that church, they also travel to other congregations in the area—raising up leaders grounded in Scripture, just as Paul instructed Titus (Titus 1:5).

Another brother, John, is now a leader in a church where our family served for five years. I had the privilege of serving as an elder there, while my wife taught children and helped with worship. In late February, John was preaching from 1 Peter when the police arrived. God gave him wisdom and peace as he safely guided the congregation. Since then, they’ve met in a different location each week.

John’s maturity is the result of years spent in the Word. I meet with him weekly via Zoom, and I thank God for the faithful man he has become.

When I see what God is doing through these coworkers, I’m reminded how different their lives—and ours—might have been had we chosen the safer path. There were many unknowns in our decision to go. Others would see the location of our service as a risky one, but we do not see it that way. Yes, there were uncertainties along the way. But the Lord has confirmed that the “risk” was worth it. These men aren’t just believers now—they’re shepherds and disciple-makers. Only God could have written that story.

When we arrived in East Asia nearly 20 years ago, we brought our four daughters with us, and our youngest was born there later. Some wondered what we were thinking, and honestly, I had moments of doubt too. But God met us with reminders of his providence—even on day one.

At the airport, a border officer glanced at my passport and asked, “Are you a Christian?” To be a Christian there is not usually viewed favorably.

When I said yes, he smiled and said, “God bless you,” handing me back my documents. That small moment helped me stop fixating on what might go wrong and start resting in what God could do.

What he did—more than anything else—was use our home, our marriage, and our parenting to adorn the gospel. Titus 2 reminds us that sound doctrine, lived out, makes the truth beautiful. John later said it was witnessing our marriage and family life in our home that first softened his heart. He had assumed Christianity was for the weak. But he saw something deeper in the way we lived—and God used that.

To him alone be the glory (Psalm 67:1–4). And yes—we’d do it all again. Not because it was easy, but because he is worthy. ■

ABWE missionary Mark (left) meets with East Asian men who came to faith through his Bible study.



Photo: Mark

A Church Stands Strong



A small church surrounded by ardent Muslims responds to intimidation with evangelism.

BY: KATELYN HAWKINS
 PHOTOGRAPHER: CAROL LEE
 LOCATION: UGANDA

In rural northern Uganda, a small church surrounded by ardent Muslims stands firm.

When ABWE missionaries Jacob and Carol Lee visited the church in December 2024 to provide theological training and encouragement, Muslims from surrounding villages planned an opposing gathering along the church property line to celebrate a local family who had converted to Islam. The Muslims—from the unreached Aringa people group—invited two fundamentalist clerics from the Middle East to lead their assembly. The Lees joined church members in greeting the Muslims, and, finding warm reception, shared the gospel and distributed tracts and Bibles. When the clerics arrived, the atmosphere changed.

The clerics later approached the believers and demanded they become Muslims. They patrolled the property, chanting Islamic incantations. The church leaders stood strong, confident in the Lord's presence and their nation's religious freedom.

Being informed of the intimidation, Jacob and Carol planned a second visit, this time accompanied by members of seven other Aringa churches burdened for their beleaguered brethren. Jacob taught on remaining faithful amid persecution, exhorting them with Jesus' words, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Since that time, Jacob and Carol have returned to the church to hold outreaches and training events—one of which included over 180 Aringa church leaders. Each gathering increasingly emboldened the believers to firmly trust in their Lord and publicly worship and evangelize.

At the end of each day, Jacob and a local pastor climbed atop the Land Cruiser to preach the gospel. Under cover of darkness, a crowd gathered to listen—first to the message and then to the Jesus film shown in the Aringa language.

"Jacob later received word that some of the Muslims were very touched by the gospel message," Carol reported. "We heard that a few had placed their trust in Jesus. The local church is standing with them."

Through unwavering opposition, this church has been inspired to seize every opportunity to boldly proclaim the message of salvation. ■

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.



Carol Lee and her husband, Jacob, serve with ABWE in northern Uganda. Their ministry, Reaching Africa's Unreached (RAU), trains pastors and church leaders, while also providing agricultural education and clean water in remote villages. Carol's photography serves to communicate in color what God is doing in the region.



PO Box 8585
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8585
Change Service Requested

Join Us:

REFORMATIONSUNDAY

November 2, 2025

More than 500 years ago, a spark in Europe fanned into a flame that brought renewal to churches across the world. We look back on that movement as the Reformation.

Today, the American church is in desperate need of a new reformation.

Many churches have drifted from biblical worship and sound doctrine. Others who hold the truth are often weak in bringing the gospel to their neighbors near and far. We need renewal—starting with worship among God's people and leading to the saturation of every community with the fullness of the biblical gospel.

This Reformation Sunday, November 2, 2025, we are calling churches to host a day of prayer for reform and gospel advance that will lead to new churches planted in their own cities and towns.

Resources are available to help your church lead your people in prayer, repentance, and renewed mission.

Learn more and get your free resources at **abwe.org/reformation**.

