

# mission:world

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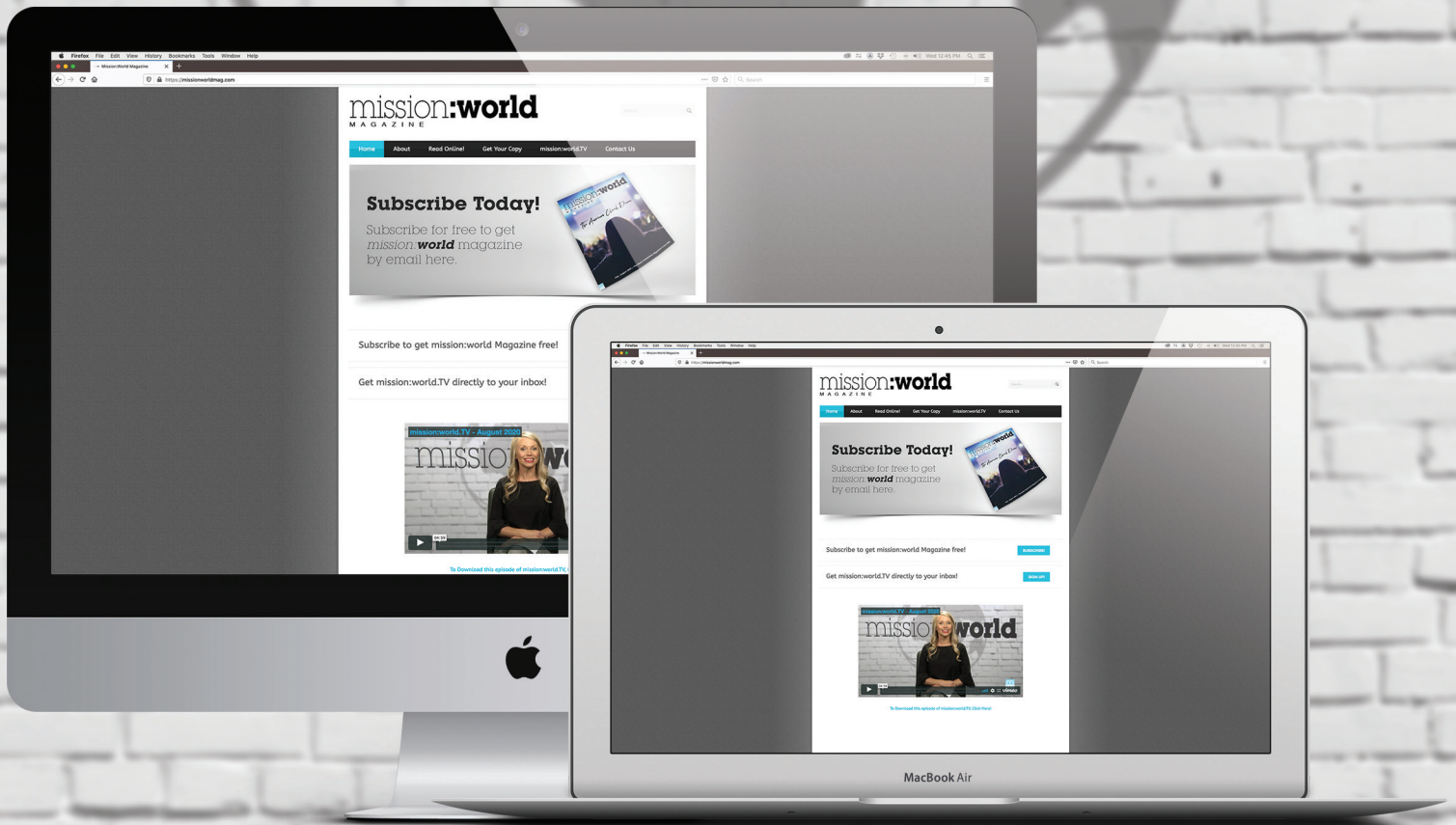


## GOD'S GREATEST GIFT

November - December 2020 ::: The Great Commission Magazine of the BMA



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## mission: **world**

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**BMA Missions** seeks to facilitate churches in fulfilling the Great Commission through assessment, training, coaching, and missionary care.



**Lifeword** assists in taking the gospel throughout the world through radio, television, the internet, and mobile devices.



**Ministers Resource Services** helps meet the financial planning needs of BMA pastors and staffs.



BY: Dr. John David Smith  
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# Gift-Giving and God's Grace

**T**he custom of giving gifts to celebrate the birth of Christ is probably traced back to the fourth century. It is indeed most likely based on a non-Christian custom from the Roman Empire. However, it is possible to contextualize *most* things and make them Christ-centered, positive customs as followers of Christ have done with gift giving. When we think about gift giving at this time of year, our thoughts may migrate to the memories of being dressed in our fathers' way-too-big house robes, our heads covered with a bath towel, some makeshift staff in our hands, and a gold, spray-painted box and/or trinket representing gold, frankincense, and myrrh during the annual Christmas play as we portrayed one of the three (by the way the Bible does not say there were three) "wise men" with their gifts for baby Jesus. Unfortunately, in our heavily consumeristic cultures, we may think of that latest and

greatest gadget that I want for Christmas this year. We will look a little deeper in this article at gifts, specifically the gifts of the magi (wise men) and God's greatest gift.

For fun, consider some of the gift giving customs around the world that differ greatly from our own customs in that area. In Kenya, the Massai people insist on spitting on your gift as a blessing. They also spit on the head of a newborn baby for the same effect. In Brazil, never wrap your gift in purple wrapping paper because purple is the sign of mourning. Many Australians celebrate Christmas on July 25 and December 25 because in December they are in the middle of the hottest part of summer. They like to celebrate at a time when the temperatures more closely reflect Christmas to them. In the U.S. that does not seem strange at all especially to the Hallmark Channel addicts who know they watch Christmas movies in July (all comments about the Hallmark Channel should be addressed to Larry Barker).

A gift is defined as something received or given without compensation in return. In the Old Testament, gifts could be sacrifices to God; health, food, and wealth from God; gifts on festive occasions (Ps. 45:12; Esther 9:22)... so we do have precedence for our giving gifts on special occasions; a dowry for a bride; and even used negatively to gain undue favor or a bribe.

In the New Testament the idea of a gift changes considerably to place emphasis more on what God does for us that no one else can do. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).*

Taking a closer look at the gifts presented by the Magi to the baby Messiah can also shed more light on this idea of gift giving from a Middle Eastern viewpoint. Author Tony Maalouf (1957-2020), a Syrian-born brother who came to Christ in the midst of medical studies and changed course to become a professor of Middle Eastern studies at a

number of reputable seminaries, speaks about these gifts in one of his books. The main focus of his book is to show that these Magi were from Arabia and not Chaldea or Persia. In this context, he speaks about the nature of the three gifts that were given by the Magi and their significance from the region of Arabia. He groups incense, frankincense, and myrrh into the one category and states that, “Thus it was an established fact in the ancient world that all of Arabia spread a very delicious fragrance, and that south Arabia in particular was the aromatic country par excellence.” These gifts represented the economic power that Arabia enjoyed at this time and added a note of great significance for why these gifts were chosen. They were part of the identity of the Magi and the clear choice for the absolute best in terms of being high-priced and precious gifts to the Messiah. There are several biblical references about the gold of Arabia (I Kings 10:10; Ps. 72:15; Isa. 60:6; etc.), even foretelling that the Messiah would receive gold from Arabia. Maalouf points





out that the three small packages, usually portrayed on Christmas cards or in Christmas plays, presented by the Magi do not fit the biblical description or the cultural norm of that day. He says that these gifts and the Magi would have been accompanied by a caravan of camels carrying a very large amount of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Magi offered the prestige of their kingdom to the newborn King!

This newborn King Jesus is God's greatest gift! *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).* Paul says, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17).* *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).*

These and many more verses proclaim that Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift!

David Hesselgrave reminded us that the word *gift* has two aspects: the offering of the gift and the necessity of accepting the gift. To the audience on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said *"Repent!"* To the Athenians, Paul said that *"all everywhere should repent."* John said, *"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).* To say that men must accept the gift of salvation certainly does no harm to the fact that Christ is God's greatest gift and it is extended by grace. There are two aspects of grace (*charis*): unmerited provision **and** thankful reception. May we contemplate the unlimited grace of God in the person of His eternal Son Jesus Christ and may we have perpetual gratitude if indeed we have believed and now have life in His name. Merry Christmas!

# A GIFT THROUGH THE AIRWAVES



BY: Rigoberto Jiménez Cruz  
Lifeword  
lifeword.org



**T**he year 2020 has been one of a kind, and we are in the final stretch. It is also that time of the year when we hope to have a little extra cash to purchase gifts for our loved ones and those we admire. However, some of us have struggled and are struggling to even make ends meet.

I have a feeling that for many of us things will be different this year. Perhaps some of us have become depressed because we have not accomplished what we set out to do this year or are not going to get what we want. No doubt some will go deeper into debt to show their love through gifts. Still others will wish they could catch a break and hit the jackpot.

Some of us erroneously show love to people by giving them a perishable gift rather than investing time and resources into their lives and their eternities. However, as disciples of Jesus Christ we all have the greatest gift to share, regardless of the state of the world. The Bible tells us in Romans 5:8 that, "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Those are wonderful words.

We don't have gold or silver, but what we have we will give to our community. God's gift to the world is Jesus Christ, who died on the cross of Calvary for us not because we are good or deserve it, but because He loves sinners. His work on the cross is the ultimate proof of that love.

Even though He could show His love in many ways, there is no greater way than the cross, the ultimate proof of God's love and man's hatred. It also proves that the depth and height of mankind's hate cannot defeat the depth or height of God's love.



## NEW HEIGHTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Speaking of heights, allow me to share with you about new heights. Yes, there is good news in 2020, and here is a little background:

About eight years ago, God brought a young man named Valmori into our lives from the eastern part of El Salvador. He began helping me with translation and interpretation when mission teams visited.

The first team to visit was from Illinois. During their visit, I spent time with this young man who was working part time at a local radio station while studying English at the university and helping me with translation.

Translating and interpreting for this missionary group that visited us was an opportunity for Valmori to practice and perfect his English skills. But one thing that impressed me about him was his willingness, responsiveness, and responsibility when asked to do something.

The following year other teams came (both medical and evangelistic), and once again he helped with translation services. Though there have been others to help in this area, my focus was on this impressive young man.

He often spent the night in our home, and this was a good opportunity to continue investing in his life and getting to know him better. After three years of working together, I asked him to assist with evangelistic and medical visits, and he did an incredible job.

This story is long, but I'm sharing it with you because meeting him was no coincidence or a matter of fate but rather God's perfect plan. Since that first conversation with Valmori (who is a new father) God has knitted our hearts together to take our collaboration to new heights.

# MAKING JESUS' NAME FAMOUS

Together, we will be taking the greatest gift to our communities—the gift of Jesus Christ. The best gift that any community could receive is the gift of Jesus. The greatest gift to any community is not physical food but spiritual food, and that need is not only present in COVID-19 times or festive months. Needing Jesus continues even after feeding someone physical food.

It is a spiritual need that no other gift can fill. The latest phone, a Thanksgiving or Christmas meal, and the latest technology gadget can't fill it; only Jesus can.

Together we have been praying for wisdom and God's guidance to know how to take this wonderful gift of the gospel to every community around us. I knew what I longed to do, but the more we prayed and talked with Valmori, the more the Lord worked in our hearts.

One day I said to Valmori, "I want you to help me think through the process of an internet radio station where we can take the gospel to the nations." Valmori replied, "Really?" And I said, "Yes!" In a few months, we began sharing ideas, designing graphics, logos, images, and even names for the station.

God put the idea in our hearts to take Jesus to every Central American community and expand the

reach of community radio through an internet radio station.

This year has brought many challenges, but in spite of them our gift to our community, country, neighboring countries, and the Spanish speaking world is *Radio Centroamericana*, an online Christ-centered radio station that will proclaim and make the name of Jesus famous.

Our vision is for the station to assist and support local pastors in developing ministries the Lord has entrusted to them. *Radio Centroamericana* is an extension of the local church as it fulfills the Great Commission.

I have no doubt that God is supporting this wonderful project, but I also know God uses people to carry out His plan. We are grateful to the Lifeword team and especially Donny Parrish and Luis Ortega for their support in this adventure to make Jesus' name famous.

Our mission is to proclaim

the name of Jesus to the farthest corners of the earth as we preach His gospel and see changed and transformed lives responding in faith to His message, becoming disciples of Jesus, and plugging into a local New Testament church. Will you join us in prayer?





# THE BOX FULL OF LOVE

BY: Angela Rice  
BMA Missions  
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Every year thousands of shoeboxes are sent from Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) churches to missionaries around the world to give to children in the areas in which they work. Inside every box are toys, activities, and many other items that will bring lots of smiles for a time. However, this ministry is called Everlasting Smiles because along with the toys and games, each box has a Bible in the children's native language that can bring them smiles and joy for eternity.

In 2019, some of the Everlasting Smiles shoeboxes were sent to BMA Changemaker Missionary Eudo Rodriguez in Cape Verde, West Africa. Once the shoeboxes arrived in Cape Verde in February of this year, Pastor Eudo had only just started passing them out to the children in various villages when the country had to be quarantined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He is still continuing to hand out last year's shoeboxes even now. Pastor Eudo shared this with us in August, "After a long time without sharing the shoeboxes because of

COVID-19, today we went to a village in the mountains to share the gifts. This village does not have roads to get to it, so we had donkeys carry the shoeboxes there. It is a tough place to go, but a lot of smiles have been found. There we shared the shoeboxes and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you so much for blessing us in Cape Verde.”

Another country that the Everlasting Smiles shoeboxes went to last year was El Salvador. BMA Changemaker Missionary Rigoberto Jimenez said, “It is a great joy to know that you are already working on the shipment of shoeboxes to bless thousands of children here in El Salvador and Central America. Personally, I feel immense joy since this helps us to bring the gospel to many people in different communities through a gift for the children. Today we have many families who came to know Jesus by bringing their children to receive a shoebox. On one occasion, the father of a child told me ‘I came to accompany my son because he was very excited to receive a shoebox with toys. But I think I am more joyful now because I carry Jesus in my heart.’ Whenever we deliver the shoeboxes, we do so with the enlargement of the kingdom of God in mind. For us, they are doors that God opens for us through the shoeboxes. We have several mission churches that have started after a medical team came or after sharing shoeboxes in a community. Thank you for all those great blessings that you send wrapped in a shoebox. I am very excited for the shoeboxes we will receive this year. This will be very different from other years since the situation around the world has changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. I know that for many low-income families, the fact that their children will receive a box of toys will fill their hearts with joy.”

Brother Valmori Zelaya, who works with Pastor Rigoberto in El Salvador, had this to say about the shoeboxes from last year. “We had not only the opportunity to tell them that this is your gift, but

we also had the opportunity to tell them that Jesus loves them and that He died on the cross for them. We were able to share with them that they need Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The shoeboxes are not only a material gift. They are a key to open doors in different communities to bring kids and families to local churches. These shoeboxes are a way to preach the gospel. Because of that I want to say thank you so much for your love and kindness for our people in El Salvador.”



During the Christmas season we often find joy in giving material gifts. Packing shoeboxes is a way to bless children in other countries with lots of pretty toys, fun games, and things they may not be able to have without the shoeboxes. However, many times we do not think about the purpose behind our gifts. In each shoebox we give lots of great gifts, but we also give the greatest gift, the

gospel. Our missionaries use these shoeboxes to bless families around the world with the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to build relationships with them. Each shoebox is not only full of fun things. It also brings the opportunity for a child to come to know Christ, a family to join a church, or a new mission to be planted in a community. So, as we are entering the Christmas season, please remember to pray for our missionaries who are giving the greatest gift to lost people around the world each week in many different ways.



FACEBOOK.COM/BMAAMMISSIONS



# FIRST CHRISTMAS AS A BELIEVER

BY: Jeremy Hambrice  
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**T**his story begins in a forgotten village, hidden deep in the mountainous jungles of Papua New Guinea. This village, along with nine others, makes up the tribal grounds of the Wantakia people. In this small village, Yedas was born. He grew up like any other Wantakia boy, hunting for birds and other wild animals in the jungle during the day, sitting around the fire at night with his family, eating sweet potatoes and greens, listening to his father tell him ancestor stories of how the world was made and more importantly, how to appease and live in harmony with the spirit world around him, including a god known as the “high one.” The “high

one,” was distant and far off, never seeming to really connect with or care about what really mattered.

Everything was normal with Yedas and his family—that is until the day his dad fell deathly ill. They did all they could to try and save him. They went to the local bush doctor, but his rituals and chants couldn’t find the cure. They went to the local cult leader, but his prayers and incantations just weren’t strong enough. After his father’s death, the family sat mourning for many days. Then his uncles came, convinced their brother had been poisoned. After many rituals, they found the culprit. They dragged him up to the house and demanded of Yedas’ older brother, “If you are a real man,



you'll come avenge the death of your father." With seemingly no other choice, he stepped outside and strangled the man, avenging his father's death.

Yedas and his family now feared for their own lives. They fled to the Wantakia village of Pinji. Fast-forward two years. Our missionary team arrived in Pinji, telling the people that we wanted to learn their language, put it into a written form, teach them how to read and write, and teach them "God's Talk." When we first moved in, we didn't know Yedas; but it wouldn't be long before we began to notice this teenage boy who never wanted to leave our side.

We asked God from the beginning to bring us faithful, available, and teachable men and women who could teach us their language and be involved in the work we came to do. Yedas shined bright. Every time we asked him to help us, he did, coming around even when we didn't ask. He was hungry. He knew the answers weren't in the ancestor stories his father had taught him. He knew the local cult's talk that he heard in the trade language seemed foreign and just didn't make sense.

By God's grace, our three families learned the Wantakia language, developed an alphabet, and

began to translate Scripture and write Bible lessons that we would use to teach God's Word from beginning to end, as one story with Jesus the Savior at the center. Yedas was a part of all of it. He quickly joined the first literacy class, learned to read and write, and now helps teach the classes! He continues to help us translate the Bible and write the Bible lessons. And this year, he began to hear God's Word being proclaimed in his own language for the first time. Finally, he began to hear truth. His world was being turned upside down.

For the first time he heard of a God who was not "high up," but who came down and was with us. He was strong and ruled over all, even the spirit world. He heard this God was a provider and a giver. He didn't even spare His own Son! After months of hearing Old Testament stories in preparation to understand the gospel message, he finally heard all that Jesus did to save him. He tried to express his belief in words but could hardly speak them through his tears. "I am a sinner from Adam's race. I was born in Satan's clan, separated from God. I can't save myself. But Jesus...but Jesus...He did all the work for me. He is the Savior. My work is only to believe in Him. Thank you, Jesus, I believe!"

This will be Yedas' first Christmas as a member of God's family. And he will be celebrating with many other new believers. It won't be filled with old empty traditions, but with gratitude and praise to the God who is with us, the God who came, the God who saved.





# A JOB SEARCH LEADS TO JESUS

**H**ave you ever stopped and watched a child open a present on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day? Have you watched and observed his or her reactions, movements, and thought process? If you haven't had the chance to do so, I encourage you to do that because it not only makes you feel bubbly and joyous from within but can also help you analyze so many things in life.

Maybe you're asking, "Joe, what can it help me analyze?" Well, I'm glad you asked! Whenever I have the opportunity to "people watch," especially in this case, I always focus

on how each child's method of unwrapping the gift. There is the slow and the cautious child, wanting the gift but also loving the anticipation and taking *all* the time in the world, enjoying the chance to recycle some paper. And then there's the fast and the furious child (I'm that kid by the way!) that wants only the gift and wants it *now*. I also focus on what the child does after they finish unwrapping and see the gift. That's my favorite part to watch! Instead of starting to play with whatever is in front of them, most children, without missing a beat, actually smile, jump, and look at their parents pointing at the gift





and telling them how they had wanted, even needed, this gift for so long.

I think this is exactly how the gift of the gospel makes us feel, react, and do! When we unwrap the good news and understand how it enriches our souls, changes our lives, and affects everything around us, we cannot help but smile, jump, look at the people around us, point to it, and tell everyone how good it is!

This is what I see when look at my friend Mohammad. Moe (for short) is new to the body of Christ, He is one of the few people who reached out to me instead of the other way around. His assurance in God astounds, teaches, and even rebukes me! Moe, as his name suggests, is of course from a Muslim background and from a Syrian heritage. He came to Lebanon to learn how to and find work as a cook. If you were to ask him, his two primary passions in life are hands down Jesus and cooking! He works in a café restaurant in Beirut very close to my local church. He started to ask questions about his Muslim faith, and felt that there was something missing. He basically felt that there was no connection between him and his god, and he wanted more than that. He needed a relationship and a God that loves him no matter what. So, Moe began to search for answers, mainly via the internet; but he also asked people, discussed his questions constantly... and one day he came across our church and just wandered inside, asking for someone to help him out in finding more answers and supporting him in his path to Christ. I “coincidentally” (not really) was at the church, and thus our friendship and discipleship began. Prior to the Covid-19 lockdowns, we would meet on a weekly basis to discuss the Bible, his family, and even how he is beginning to be persecuted by his extended family in Syria. Moe is a 25-year-old that simply wants



to please God in his life and wants to discover Him day by day—a love story that started by an unwrapping of the greatest gift ever!

Yes, Moe has received that gift. The awesome thing is that he knows it and he surely wants to show it! Please pray for Mohammad as he is getting to know Christ more and starting to share about Him with others. Please pray that he can be more committed to the body of Christ and start to understand day-by-day God’s mission and will for his life. Also please pray for protection and that God would continue to work in and rule his life!



BY: Sam Jordan  
BMA Missions  
bmamissions.org

# Receiving the Gift of Life in Jordan

**I**t is good for a person, when young, to bear the yoke. Lamentations 3:27  
I moved back to Jordan in late 2013 after I finished my master's in divinity. I came as a missionary with a vision to focus on the younger generation. I believe they can be part of the church leadership and I worked hard to fill the gap between generations.

God has blessed us with many young people who have dedicated themselves to the Lord. I would like to share an amazing story of a young man with whom God has blessed our church. I would also love to share the story of a young lady who found Christ through our clinic.



### RAKAN'S STORY

Rakan Milkonian is a young man born and raised in the city of Zarqa, Jordan. Though his family has a Catholic background, they were not a religious family, nor do they attend church. As a child, Rakan attended the Catholic church for two years where he simply carried a candle during Mass.

At the beginning of his teenage years, Rakan was a very shy and introverted kid. He did not have the courage to talk to people directly or to speak in front of more than one person. However, he was highly active on social media and had 256,000 followers. Rakan began a relationship with a lady from Syria, but after a short while, he decided to breakup with her. She was Muslim and he knew the relationship would never last unless he converted to Islam. Rakan found himself going through a rough time following the breakup; he ended his activity on social media and isolated himself from people.

One day a friend called and invited him to our church. While there, Rakan heard a message from a guest speaker about the love of our Savior and how it can reach you anywhere and in any situation. Rakan accepted the Lord that night and decided to commit his life and his gifts and skills to serve the Lord and the church.

Rakan fell in love with God's Word. He spent hours studying the Bible each day. His life changed 100 percent. Our church helped him to open up and become a very social young man. He told me that he is now ready to stand in front of thousands of people and to share his heart and his testimony. Even his family noticed the different person that Rakan had become. His life now had new meaning and a new purpose.

Rakan got involved in the youth ministry. He became a very committed young man who loves the Lord and loves His people. Rakan is able to greatly influence other teenagers. He started a summer camp called "Tyrannus School" where more than 100 young people gathered. There he told them about the love of God and taught them the Word of God.

This year, Rakan finished college with a very good GPA. He wants to be 100 percent dedicated to serve the Lord. As a church, we see great potential in him as a future leader in bringing souls to Christ. We continue to invest in him.





## QAMAR'S STORY

Qamar is a young Muslim lady who suffered severe burns when a missile hit her home in Syria during the war in 2013. The attack occurred while her mom was making French fries. When the missile hit her house, hot oil poured all over her. She thought, "That's it, I'm going to die." Eighty percent of her back had been burned. The rest of Qamar's family survived the blast and escaped. However, Qamar had no access to a capable hospital in Syria to treat her extensive third-degree burns.

Qamar received basic treatment in Syria and then she fled with her family to Jordan, crossing the desert by foot. She was in so much pain; her wounds had not received proper treatment and she had no medicine for relief. In Jordan, a volunteer doctor promised to help her; but he had to move out of the country, and she was left without treatment. Qamar was very frustrated and attempted to commit suicide three times.

In 2017, Qamar found our clinic "Mercy Medical Center." When we heard her story, we adopted her case and decided to help her as much as we could. The clinic found a donor and a doctor to perform the last four surgeries needed to rebuild her skin.

After the surgeries, Qamar returned to the clinic as a new person with new hope for a bright future. After suffering for more than four years, she began to see life with new eyes. One day, Qamar came and shared that she would love to volunteer to work with other Syrian children and to help other refugees. We accepted her offer and she started to help around the clinic. Qamar is a very smart girl, full of passion and love for others. She had seen the practical love of God through our team and began to ask many questions about the Christian faith. Qamar decided to accept the Lord as her Savior. She prayed and began her new journey with new faith. Currently, Qamar is working and helping at the clinic. She loves what she does and is thoroughly enjoying her new life after finding salvation and healing in Jesus Christ.



# GO DISCIPLE PLANT REPEAT

WORLD MISSIONS DAY 2021



## FEBRUARY 28, 2021

IN RECOGNITION OF PIONEERING BMA MISSIONARY JERRY KIDD, KNOWN AS "PASTOR TO MISSIONARIES", THE **WORLD MISSIONS DAY OFFERING** WILL NOW BE CALLED **THE JERRY KIDD OFFERING**.



BY: Joseph Eniwo  
BMA Missions  
bmamissions.org

# FROM SEEKER TO CHURCH PLANTER

I am Joseph Adewole Eniowo. I have been married to my wife Lydia for about ten years and the Lord has blessed our marriage with two children—our eight year old son Paul and our six year old daughter Praise.

My spiritual journey started as a teenager in November of 1988 when I gave my life to Jesus Christ during my secondary school fellowship days. Though no one followed up with me following my conversion and though I received no discipleship, I continued to search for the Word of God and what it meant to be a Christian.

One day in 2004, I came across one of the Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) of America's adult Sunday school teaching materials in Lagos. This marked the beginning of my discipleship experience.

Four years later, I felt the call of God and surrendered to the ministry in 2008. In January 2009, I traveled to Ghana where I attended BMA doctrinal courses taught by Brother Paul Heuermann and others. Before my graduation, the Holy Spirit impressed upon my heart the desire to

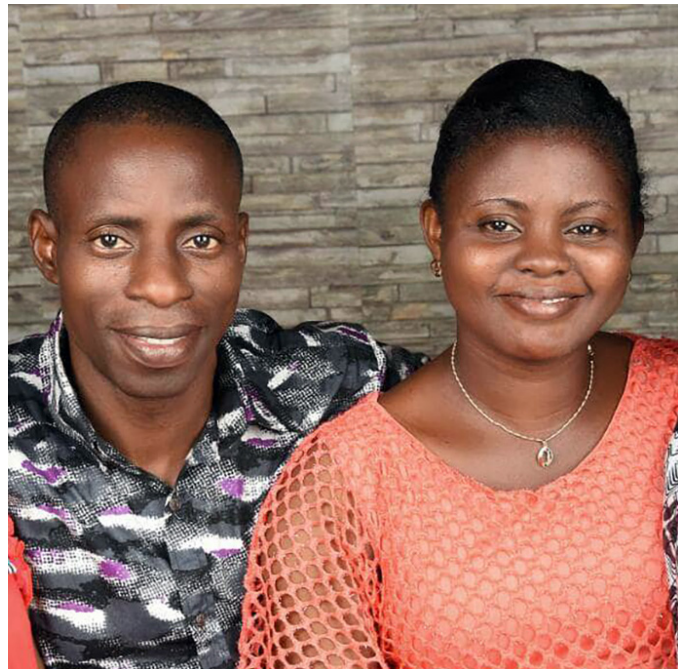
serve with Bible Baptist Church and the BMA of Ghana as a children's and youth pastor under the leadership of Pastor Moses Adjekwei and Brother Adu Boahen.

After ten and a half years of service in Ghana, the Holy Spirit led me to move back to Nigeria where I was confirmed by Pastor Moses Adjekwei and Brother Phil Knott in 2018.

By God's grace, I am serving as a BMA missionary church planter in the Oyo State of Nigeria with my wife Lydia. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, I began witnessing to others about Christ. We started a Saturday Bible club in our home where we hold Bible studies with children in our neighborhood. As we taught the children, the Holy Spirit opened the hearts of some of their parents and these adults began to join our Bible club. This marked the beginning of our church planting success.

As of today, we have baptized three adults and two teenagers into the body of Christ to the glory of God.

I believe James says it more accurately: "the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is



working” (James 5:16c). With that scripture in focus, I would like for Christian believers all over the world to join us in prayers.

Please pray first that the Islamic terrorism and killings especially in Northwest and North Central parts of Nigeria would stop, and that the way would

be paved for Christ’s gospel to penetrate the land.

Second, please pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to open the doors of people’s hearts, and that we would be able to harvest many more souls, disciple them, and plant additional BMA churches here in Nigeria to the glory of God. Amen.

# PRAISING THE GOD OF SECOND CHANCES

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*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!  
Let your kindness be known to all. The Lord is near.”*

*Philippians 4:4-5*

**R**ejoicing in the Lord entails putting your joy in God alone, not in things, people, or relationships. These sources can generate joy, but it will always be fleeting. The joy that comes from the Lord is eternal, because He is eternal and faithful; and He will never disappoint you. Your joy must be in Jesus Christ, the eternal source of joy.

Paul’s text speaks of joy and apparently changes the subject, going on to talk about kindness: “Let your kindness be known to all.”

Kindness, or “moderation,” as it appears in some translations, speaks to the way a person who serves Christ should relate to others. If I have the joy of the Lord, that joy must be reflected in my relationships. And how does it appear? It is reflected in my love for others, how I deal with others, and how I show kindness.

Paul ends the passage by saying “the Lord is near.” There are two ideas here. The first is God’s intimacy with us. It is because of His closeness to us that His love infects us, motivating us to share it with others. The second is also “close” as we return that intimacy. We need to be kind so that people see our joy and believe that Jesus Christ is coming.

We can help improve the lives of many people in a variety of ways, such as through social interactions. But if Jesus Christ is not a part of these interactions, these lives will not be changed or transformed.

The joy [happiness] people have without Christ will be fleeting and will not lead to eternal joy since only Jesus Christ can transform our passions, pursuits, and provide this joy. Consequently, we need to reflect the Savior’s joy and love, so that people can know Christ and be with Him in eternity enjoying true joy.

When we share the gospel, we rejoice because we are serving God and His purpose. In Luke 10, the disciples who were sent to announce the arrival of the kingdom also experienced this. They saw spirits submitting to them, but Jesus called them to attention in verse 20: “However, do not rejoice because the spirits submit to you, but because your names are written in heaven.”

The reason we rejoice is because Jesus Christ is our salvation. The results only exist because we have been saved and the world can be transformed.

During my journey as a preacher, I feel privileged to be able to share the good news and I am very happy to see the fruits of this work.

I would like to tell the stories of Carlos and his family and a lady named Alda.

Carlos, a young man struggling with drugs and alcohol, sometimes appeared at church crying and asking for prayers. He wanted to abandon his addictions and start a new life but would always relapse immediately, continuing his involvement in drugs and alcohol.

He disappeared for many years and nobody heard anything about him until he came to one of our evening services with a wife and two children. We were happy with their presence but could tell that Carlos and his family were still far from Christ. After the service we talked some more, and I invited him to have a snack with the intention of learning more about his spiritual life.



He accepted the invitation and they all came to our house where we stayed until around midnight talking about the importance of having a true encounter with Christ. Then I shared some Bible passages and prayed for them. After the prayer, Carlos was in tears expressing his desire to give his life to Christ. I invited him to surrender his life and he gladly accepted the invitation. I then gave the same invitation to his wife and children. That night they all accepted Christ.

We later discovered that Carlos was not legally married, and the two children were not his, only his wife's, but Carlos welcomed them as his children. The following week, I began discipling Carlos and his partner Pâmela. Two months later, they were legally married. Another three months passed and then I had the opportunity to baptize them.

Once Carlos met Christ, he abandoned his addictions, got his family life in order, and he and his family all became members. Now everyone is active in the church; the children are obedient and interested in spiritual things; and he is part of the media team helping with sound.

Another person whose life was changed is our dear Alda who appeared at church from time to time and sat in the very back. When the service was over, she was the first person to leave, so I didn't even have the opportunity to greet her. But one day I decided that I would not let her go without acknowledging and





greeting her. The following three Sundays, I did not see Alda at church and I started to get a little sad, wondering why she had stopped coming to church.

After three Sundays, I saw that Alda had arrived for the service. Even though we were about to start, I did not miss the opportunity to sit beside her and tell her that we had missed having her the past couple of Sundays. I also asked her if my wife and I could stop by her house for a visit. She said yes, so we scheduled a day and time.

On the scheduled day, we arrived and noticed that Alda was visibly happy to have us over. It was the first time that a pastor had visited her. We talked about Christ and I invited her to Sunday school the next day. From that day on, we strengthened our relationship. Soon we realized that Alda was no longer in such a hurry to leave after services were over.

Since then I had many opportunities to share the good news until one day Alda decided to give her life to Christ. Shortly after, I baptized her and today she is a faithful believer.

As Paul reminded us in the text above, we need to demonstrate kindness to those around us. When we do this, we soften their hearts and win the opportunity to present the message of joy, the good news of salvation.

It was like that with our brother Carlos, Pâmela, and his children. It was also like that with our sister Alda. Now that everyone is connected with Christ and in the church, the joy of salvation has arrived in their lives.

We glorify our Lord the Son of God, who gave His life for sinners; and we are witnesses of the joy our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has already given us. Since God is our source of joy, we must also love those around us and carry this message of joy to those who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior.

Let us bring joy to the lost by presenting them with the greatest gift, the gift of God, and telling them that Jesus was born and is our Savior.





# CONFIRMING THE CALL TO THAILAND

One of the great joys of the Christian life is looking back and seeing God's providence—seeing how He guided us and even used our seemingly insignificant decisions for His glory. For example, one morning not too long ago my daughter and I decided to ride out to the main street in front of our neighborhood to grab some breakfast. Little did we know how that decision would not only affect our lives, but that God would use it to change some other lives as well.

Before Josie and I grabbed us some sticky rice and garlic pork from the street vendor for breakfast, we stopped by the medicine shop. We made our purchase and started to head out the door. Outside, we noticed a tall, well-dressed man standing by his car staring at us. It's not unusual to have people stare at us; we get it all the time since we are foreigners here in Thailand. However, as we were walking up the stairs, I sensed that this guy wanted to talk to us. My thoughts were racing every which way trying to guess what this was going to be about. I would have never guessed.

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The man standing by his car introduced himself: “Hi, I’m Mo.” He then proceeded to introduce his wife who had her head hanging out the car window as we were talking. Mo then said, “My wife Eve has started designing and making children’s clothes. Would you be interested in your daughter helping us model them?” Let me be honest. My first thought as a Dad was nope; but the conversation took a turn. Mo then asked me what I do here in Thailand. I thought to myself, “Well, now he won’t want anything to do with us when he knows we are Christians and work at a church.” After I shared that with him, I waited for the conversation to get awkward. Instead, his eyes lit up. He responded in the exact opposite way I thought he would. He was actually glad to find out we were Christian and worked at a church.

Later we found out that he and his wife had been seeking God. They first went to a Mormon church because they were invited. After a while they didn’t feel right about that but wanted to keep seeking God. They were currently attending a Catholic church when we met them, but they had similar feelings, doubts, and lots of questions about Catholicism also.

Long story short, we did do a mini modeling session for Eve. Our daughter was really shy, but after the professional handed his big camera over to her daddy, she relaxed and took some pictures for us. Around the same time, Mo and Eve started

attending our church and coming over to visit. They had good questions and it was neat to see how God was working in both of their lives. I’ll never forget one night as Mo and I sat at the table after an evening meal. The kids were playing, and we spent some time talking. He might not know this, but the one thing he said to me was probably the most encouraging thing I have ever had anyone say to me while serving here in Thailand. He looked at me and said, “Brandon, I’m so glad you guys came to Thailand so that we could know God.” In that moment Mo assured to me that all the adjustments

we have made and challenges we have faced in Thailand were worth it. There is no greater joy in ministry than to see a person come to know Christ. He is worthy of all praise and adoration! He receives the glory and we receive the joy!

Some might think this couple came from Christian

families, especially since the wife is named Eve, but that’s not the case. This young couple has now started their own Christian family. It was a joy to visit them and their newborn at the hospital and hear Mo pray and praise God for His provision. We are so thankful for Mo and Eve. We are so thankful to God for His providence. There is no such thing as chance or luck. We met each other that day because God planned it. God is all-knowing and sovereign in His saving work; and there is no greater gift than salvation!



# Reaching Immigrants in Minnesota



BY: Mike Strong  
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**M**innesota is a state known for immigrants. We have roughly a half million of them. The Twin Cities are where most of Minnesota's immigrants call home. Many of these immigrants live right in my neighborhood. On a normal day I will talk to neighbors who are Ojibwe, Black, Hmong, Ecuadorian, Ethiopian, White (Scandinavian), and Somali. These are just a few of the nations represented on my daily walks.

Many Minnesota immigrants are refugees who come to the state to escape death. They were driven from their home with the threat of being murdered for what they believe or who they are. The Hmong

people, for example, were literally hunted and chased from country to country. The Karen people from Burma were to be eradicated as part of an ethnic cleansing process. In Somalia, civil war, famine, and unemployment led to a need to move outside the country's borders. Minnesota is home to roughly 77,000 Somalians. Each of these groups have been given the gift of a new home, a new citizenship, a new status, and thus the hope for a future as they flee from their destroyed homelands, demolished dreams, and the pain of extreme loss.

As a Baptist Missionary Association (BMA) kid, I grew up hearing about missions. It was infused into my blood. Missionaries and pastors became my heroes. Seeing people who had never heard the gospel come to Christ was a hunger I was taught to crave, to desire, and to enjoy when we heard it had, in fact, occurred. We celebrated when men, women, and children were led broken before their God to bow before the altar to confess sin and dependence and to call out for His help for their great need. We celebrated when anyone took steps of faith because they believed what His Word said. What a gift faith is, right?!

The Bible speaks of God giving us many gifts. In fact, every good and every perfect gift is from above (Jas. 1:17). God gave mankind the earth and everything on and in it as a gift (Gen. 1:26-32). He gives us a new heart and a new spirit, the Holy Spirit as a gift (Ezek. 36:25-27). He gives us all we need to be thankful and to produce thanksgiving to God and generosity (2 Cor. 9:9-12). He gives eternal, everlasting life by faith in Christ (Jn. 11:25-26). He gives assurance of our salvation and hope for the future He has promised rooted in His character and ability to keep His Word (Jn. 10:27-29). All of this and more flows out of the gift of salvation that comes from the work of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). If God has given us the gift of His Son, what gift will He withhold (Rom. 8:32)?

With all this talk of immigrants, you might think I have a great story to tell you of how we led some of our neighbors to Christ. Today, I want to tell you about God's faithfulness to our family. God chose a people—Israel. He was faithful to that people. He sent Jesus to save that people. He went specifically to the Jew first. The plan was to reach the world,



but the plan was always to go to the Jew first. Another gift God gives us is our children. Shortly after commissioning us, God graciously answered our prayers and blessed the work of investing in discipling our children and neighbors. The first three people that came to Christ were my girls. The fourth was a young lady named Daleeyah. We want to reach the world. We want everyone to know the worthiness of our God and to believe the good news He commissioned us to take to them. We want them to experience the joy of worshipping our good God. And we get to start right at home, right where we are. I am thankful for God's gracious gift of children (Ps. 127). I am thankful we get the great responsibility of leading our family first and then others. Our family is on mission, but our family is also part of the mission. Praise God He cares about our kids too! Pray for us as we seek to reach the nations in the months and years to come for the glory of God and the joy of all peoples!

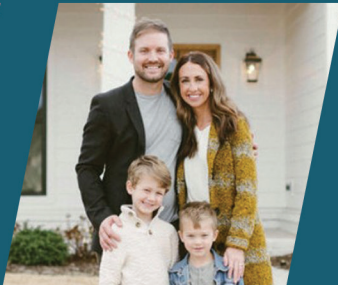
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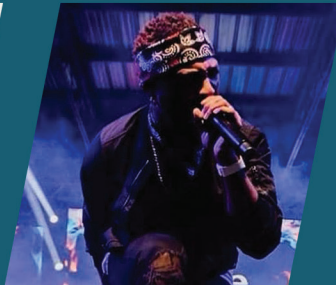
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**Chris Vines**  
Host



**Aaron Williams**  
Speaker



**FLAME**  
Concert



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**TJ Johnson**  
Speaker



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