

THE MIND OF A MISSIONARY

What Global Kingdom Workers Tell Us About Thriving on Mission Today



DAVID JOANNES

Foreword by **NIK RIPKEN**, author of *THE INSANITY OF GOD*

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PRAISE FOR *The Mind of a Missionary*

David Joannes shapes this book through various lives who have followed Jesus from the streets of their birth to the ends of the globe. *The Mind of a Missionary* is filled with the truth and grace of the Great Commission command. Here, crucifixion and resurrection meet in the lives of real people and families who have determined to carry their cross to far away places. Joannes reminds us that the rolled-away stone—the power of the resurrection—can become all peoples’ eternal possession and reality. — Nik Ripken, Author of *The Insanity of God* and *The Insanity of Obedience*, www.nikripken.com

In *The Mind of a Missionary*, David Joannes takes us on a virtual adventure spanning centuries and continents with his latest book. His story-telling is a feast of verbal delights as he transports you into the minds and hearts of some of the most profound risk-takers for the sake of spreading the Gospel message! — Ron Luce, Founder of Teen Mania Ministries and Jesus Global Youth Day, www.jesusglobalyouthday.com

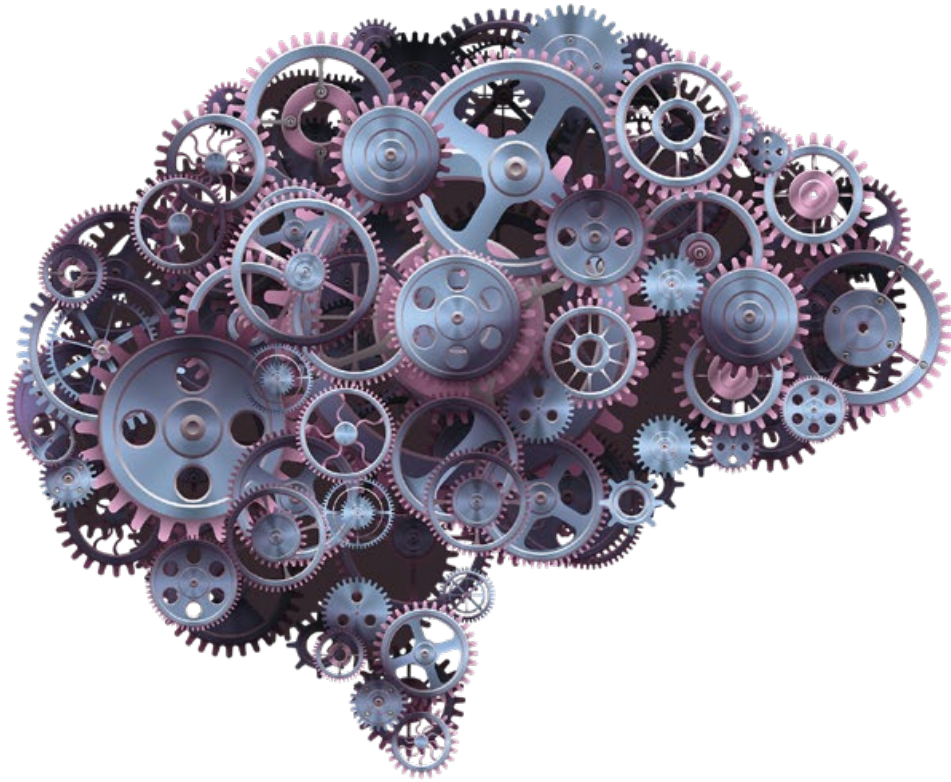
“*The Mind of a Missionary* is a timely reminder that if we don’t learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat her mistakes. Joannes brings a helpful, new perspective on timeless lessons from missionary legends. You’ll be inspired and encouraged.” — Craig Greenfield, Founder of Alongsiders International and author of *Subversive Jesus*, www.alongsiders.org

“*The Mind of a Missionary* is a compelling read. This book is a must for anyone who wants to last long and finish strong in their missional calling. As much as David is a masterful storyteller, he is also a practical guide. He lays out both the triumphant highs and challenging lows of life on the mission field, while always pointing to Jesus as the enabling Source and eternal Hope. Anyone who reads this book will surely be encouraged and better equipped to fulfill the Heavenly call on their life!” — Pastor How & Pastor Lia, Senior Pastors of Heart of God Church Singapore, www.hogc.sg

“In the contemporary Church, there’s little difference between having a fleeting ‘burden for missions’ and starry-eyed wanderlust. The call for long-term missionaries willing to lay aside their lives for the cause of Christ found in past generations are mysteriously absent today. The missions enterprise is taking on the flavor of a microwave culture aimed at scratching our consumeristic itch. David Joannes exposes the need for more missionary grit; he plunges the depths of past missionary mindsets to pull out gems for this generation to learn from. Anything written by David Joannes is a worthy read. I commend *The Mind of a Missionary* to anyone interested in cross-cultural ministry—or ministry in general.” — Alex Kocman, Director of Long-Term Mobilization at ABWE, www.abwe.org

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Lorna:

Your constant encouragement and support helped make this book possible.

I am so thankful to be married to a Proverbs 31 woman like you.

Your passion for God, His Kingdom, and the people we serve inspires me.

Your prayers for me for wisdom as I wrote The Mind of a Missionary undergirded the message of this book. I believe these words are God-breathed—in large part because you championed the Message of the Kingdom and wanted to see me thrive in the gifts God gave me. Thank you!

Your reward will be the many lives this book will touch. I love you.

To my daughter, Cara Liana:

It is my joy to guide you in your missionary journey. I am blessed to see your missions zeal grow even from your young age. I am excited for the plans God has for you. I believe that He will use you to impact the nations with the grace and glory of His Kingdom. Thank you for encouraging me to write this book. May the examples of a life well-lived stir your spirit to join God's grand plan to redeem the world. I love you.

CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------|------|
| Acknowledgments | xi |
| Foreword | xiii |
| Introduction | xvii |
| <i>Section One: Motivations</i> | 1 |
| Chapter One Compassion for the Lost | 3 |
| Chapter Two Obedience to the Commands of Christ | 23 |
| Chapter Three Passion for the Glory of God | 45 |
| <i>Section Two: Expectations</i> | 65 |
| Chapter Four The Internal Monologue | 67 |
| Chapter Five Social Influence | 85 |
| Chapter Six A Posture of Expectancy | 103 |
| <i>Section Three: Risks</i> | 119 |
| Chapter Seven Physical Challenges | 121 |
| Chapter Eight Emotional Struggles | 143 |
| Chapter Nine Spiritual Hurdles | 159 |
| <i>Section Four: Rewards</i> | 181 |
| Chapter Ten Joy on the Journey | 183 |
| Chapter Eleven Breakthrough in Ministry | 207 |
| Chapter Twelve The Kingdom of God on Earth | 231 |
| References | 255 |
| Notes | 267 |
| About the Author | 287 |
| Connect With Us | 289 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am compelled to thank my wife, Lorna, for her constant prayers and support as I wrote *The Mind of a Missionary*. Writing a book is a long and arduous process, and her sacrifice is not forgotten. Not only did she allow me space and time to complete this book, but she also encouraged me throughout the process. Her reminders that *The Mind of a Missionary* encompasses much more than just the author's ideas inspired me to complete the project. I pray that she would find deep satisfaction, knowing that her support will be felt around the world as this book encourages Christians to thrive on mission today.

This project would not be possible without the expertise of Felecia Killings, my writing coach, content editor, proofreader, and friend. Her professional skills have catapulted my writing ability in more ways than I can express. In 2016, she helped me complete *The Space Between Memories: Recollections from a 21st Century Missionary*, and walked with me through *The Mind of a Missionary* as well. She helped consolidate my initial thoughts into this broad narrative of the missions endeavor. Her fingerprints reveal throughout these pages. For that, I am very grateful.

I am thankful for the professional help of Sandy and Phil Hovatter. They graciously made time to design the entire interior content of *The Mind of a Missionary*. I am blessed by their expertise and generosity in helping bring this book to fruition.

Thanks to Natalie Lam for helping to research and arrange the notes and references found at the end of this book. I appreciate her incredible attention to detail and hours of tedious work.

I am particularly thankful for the many global Kingdom workers serving in foreign fields around the world who contributed to this book by telling me their testimonies. Nearly one-hundred people took *The Mind of a Missionary Survey*; the thoughts and experiences they shared were priceless. I also interviewed dozens of missionaries serving in nearly fifty countries around the world. They told me about their difficulties and desires, frailties

and triumphs. My prayer is that their thoughts shine through this book, giving voice to the many present-day missionaries who seek to articulate the often-misunderstood nuances of the mission field. In part, this book is a journey through missions history. But it is much more than that. It is the longing of scores of missional Christians who seek the advent of God's Kingdom on the earth; who wait expectantly for the consummation of Christ's kingly rule in the nations. I pray that my feeble words give justice to the many passionate global Kingdom workers highlighted in *The Mind of a Missionary*.

To our foreign and indigenous missionaries serving at Within Reach Global: may you be encouraged and inspired to pursue the call of God on your lives. Your missional efforts among the unreached people groups of the 10/40 Window are making a tremendous impact. The effects of your service may be difficult to recognize at times because you are small parts in God's grand redemption plan. Continue to press forward and reach the Gospel-deprived peoples who wait at the other end of your obedience! The Spirit of God understands the times and seasons better than you do. He delights to include you in His missionary enterprise.

I thank God for allowing me to be a small part of His story. The thoughts in this book exist to bring Him glory in the nations; to elicit "righteous deviants" who will push against the current of social influence, and who will follow the leading of the Spirit into the darkness to shine as beacons of light. Indeed, this book is less about *The Mind of a Missionary* than it is about the mind of Christ.

FOREWORD

Our family's world has been defined by Jesus' Matthew 28 command to "go into all the world" and make disciples of every people group. In the last 35 years of "going," we have met others in the Christian faith who have refused this command, ran from His command, trivialized such a foundational command, and those who have romanticized the Great Commission to dangerous extremes.

Not so with David Joannes in *The Mind of a Missionary*. Joannes highlights various people who followed Jesus from the streets of their birth to the ends of the globe. He reminds us that Christ's followers are called to be "sheep among wolves," but he never settles for foolish actions on the part of the sheep. One of my favorite biblical observations about Jesus was that He was filled with "truth and grace." Biblical obedience, balanced with the love and the example of Christ, is apparent in each story Joannes illustrates.

I almost refused to pen this foreword. It caused me to experience, once again, the faces of starved Somali children, ravaged women, hopeless fathers, and a shattered people group. Through the lives illustrated, David calls believers in Jesus to embrace a lost world with every ounce of one's mind, soul, and strength.

For years, our ministry in the Horn of Africa received many volunteers who followed Jesus to the ends of the earth. They joined us in Somalia to serve the Somali people. The country was an edgy place to be; some considered it a destination only for "radical Christians." Increasingly, the cavalier attitude of some people arriving to serve caused us concern, as the focus seemed to be more about the one going rather than the Lord who sent. We knew something must be done to address this attitude and to call forth altruistic missions motivation. One of the methods we implemented served to curb the vainglory of potential volunteers and to assist all of us who served in such a hostile environment.

Before going in-country, we asked those who joined our team to write a letter to their family and friends. This letter would remain in their file.

If the worst happened, and they did not live through their time among the Somali people, the letter would be given to their family to explain why they followed Jesus to such a hard environment. This practice of “counting the cost” and writing a letter to explain their potential death was often met with a wild-eyed response. Suddenly, the price of following Jesus to Somalia became real. Before going in-country, we gathered our teams and read each letter aloud. The written words of our volunteers crystalized the cost of following Jesus.

After serving with us in Somalia for up to six months, we would celebrate their service with a team meal, the giving of a gift, and a review of their time with our teams. Often we would hear our volunteers say something like, “You know, my time in Somalia did not bother me as much as I thought it would before I went in the first time.” Their missional efforts shined the light of the Gospel in difficult places. They had served Jesus well.

Every day, they helped feed 50,000 starving people. They witnessed the burial of scores of small children who died each night. Conversations with molested women filled their days. They listened to husbands and fathers who had been made to watch their wives and daughters molested and killed. The stories of these tragedies were their common lot. Now, we were sending our volunteers back to their families and churches as spokespersons for a people group decimated by civil war and famine. They were returning home as our advocates for the Somali people; yet their common, incredulous response was “how little my time in Somalia bothered me!”

Their attitude brought our family’s faith journey to the forefront of our minds. We served among a horrifically-abused people who had, by and large, been overlooked by the Christian Church for much of the 2,000 years since the death and resurrection of Jesus. We recalled the times we tried to tell family and friends in the United States what we had experienced on the mission field. It was never easy; the moment we began to describe the tragedies we encountered, a waterfall of emotions rushed over us.

With these contemplations in mind, we asked our volunteers to describe in detail their experience in Somalia. “In less than a week, you will be standing before your family, friends, and churches,” we began. “What will you tell them? Tonight, you are in a safe place. Practice on us. Remember with us. What will you say to those who sent you here?”

They began to speak, to remember, to unpack their experiences.

Within minutes, sobs of emotion replaced their stoic narrative. It was normal for them to sit on the floor, broken by what they had experienced. It was exceedingly painful for them to open up the closets in their minds where they had hidden images of the children buried, the emaciated fed, and numerous young women whose innocence was stolen from them on a daily basis. During our debriefing period, we cried together at each shared memory. Our meeting culminated in rejoicing at their willing obedience to allow God to use them. We prayed for the people who had been touched by their lives, praying that we would one day see our Somali brothers and sisters standing before God's throne. The unpacking of their experiences realigned our hearts and minds with the eternal Kingdom of God.

The Mind of a Missionary by David Joannes took me back to those moments of deep introspection. This book is filled with the "truth and grace" of the Great Commission command. Here, crucifixion and resurrection meet in the lives of real people and families who have determined to carry their cross to far away places. The world knows what it means to be broken, to be crucified. David helps us to "write our letter home" so that, if we don't make it back, others will realize the lives laid down for the Gospel of Jesus. He reminds us that the rolled-away stone—the power of the resurrection—can become all peoples' eternal possession and reality.

Dr. Nik Ripken

Author of *The Insanity of God* and *The Insanity of Obedience*

July 10, 2018

INTRODUCTION

God enlarged my heart and awakened my mind to the needs of the world when I was still a child. My parents read missionary biographies to me—stories of cannibal-headhunters, orphaned children, and unreached people groups living in distant lands. The heroic narratives glimmered with romanticized hues; the valiant deeds of global Kingdom workers portrayed otherworldly courage I had never before experienced. As I learned about the radical individuals God used to advance His Kingdom on the earth, missionaries became my heroes. Their sacrificial service inspired me; their fervent passion for God left an indelible mark on my heart and mind. The portrait of a missionary—albeit both aggrandized and incomplete—propelled me to join the missionary enterprise by going overseas.

Today, I am less starry-eyed and sentimental about the nuances of the mission field as I was in childhood. Having served as a missionary in Southeast Asia for over two decades, the romanticized glimpses and fantastic encounters I once read about have become my new normalcy. I have found that the people God uses are the typical types—run-of-the-mill individuals who simply said “Yes” to God. There is little that distinguishes them from the crowd. Indeed, the missionary task force comprises of ordinary people, warts and all.

As I considered this reality, I began to ponder the makeup and mindset of Christian missionaries. What propels some believers to abandon earthly comfort and man’s acclaim by going to foreign fields? How do they juggle the expectations surrounding the unique call of God on their lives? Why do they take such daring risks? What rewards do they hope to gain?

This book is an effort to uncover the thought process of past and present missionaries serving around the world. In *The Mind of a Missionary*, I hope to shed light on God’s Kingdom values and His power at work in and through mere men and women. He placed eternity in our hearts and invites us to join Him in His grand redemptive plan. God’s scandalous grace is the starting point of the missionary venture, and His glory is the pinnacle of

this timeless narrative. What concerns us at present is the messy middle—the moments and instances we find ourselves in today.

The myopic perspective through which we see the world is strikingly different than God's eternal viewpoint. He fits every piece of the puzzle into its perfect position to reveal a portrait of His great love for humankind. We often overlook the providential purposes He employs through pain, problems, and persecution. We wonder if He does, indeed, have everything under control. Amidst the struggles of life, we question His competence and capacity to overcome evil and prove Himself the Lord of Heaven and earth.

Such carnal contemplations bother the minds of every Christian, whether at home or abroad. For those who go overseas to publicize the name of Jesus in foreign cultures of the earth, these questions compound the already difficult situations they find themselves in. Missionaries face unique physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges. What, then, causes some to triumph and others to fail in their missional endeavors? How do their examples help us to thrive on mission today?

I spent months researching the missions venture. I read dozens of books, articles, journals, and blogs to better describe the nuances that global Kingdom workers encounter. Had I not sensed the Holy Spirit's powerful prompting, I would have ditched the entire project. The truth is, on numerous occasions, I nearly gave up. Like many of the "guides" found in *The Mind of a Missionary*, my negative internal monologue challenged the validity of my efforts. The enemy's incessant chatter confronted my desire to awaken the Church to God's glorious mandate.

I admit that a single book does not do justice to the numerous stories and the broad spectrum of the missions enterprise. Still, I believe that God desires to gather my menial thoughts and infuse them with supernatural potential. I am confident this book will inspire you to join God's glorious plan to redeem the nations and establish His Kingdom wherever you go.

Each of the following twelve chapters highlights a missionary "guide" who gives you keys to thriving on mission today. Some are well-known; others obscure. Many are considered historical legends; others are still alive today, serving in mission fields around the world. These missionary guides are Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, C. T. Studd, Nikolaus Zinzendorf, Robert Moffat, Jackie Pullinger, David Eubank, Nik and Ruth Ripken, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Don Richardson, and Heidi Baker.

The thoughts and experiences of dozens of modern-day global Kingdom workers pepper the pages in *The Mind of a Missionary*, revealing the extensive account of God's past and present work in the world.

Tens of thousands of individuals crossed geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries over the centuries. They left family and country to publicize the name of Christ, often where the Gospel message was little known and understood. Many altruistic Christians sought to win souls and advance the Kingdom of God on the earth. Many of them triumphed by leaving their mark on eternity. Unable to overcome the unforeseen hurdles of missionary life, many more left the field bruised and battered. Others—driven by personal gain, notions of acclaim, or nationalistic ambition—tarnished the purity of the Message by preaching a gospel Christ would never affirm. For these reasons, many modern-day global Kingdom workers are still trying to rid themselves of the negative connotations surrounding the term “missionary.”

I hope to highlight both the difficulties and delights of joining Jesus' Great Commission command. In the following accounts of obedient sacrifice, you may be motivated to emulate the godly examples found in *The Mind of a Missionary*. Indeed, there are many praiseworthy aspects of the people found within these pages, but they are not perfect. We do well to take the words of David Livingstone to heart: “I am a missionary, heart and soul,” he said. Yet, he pointed us to the perfect missionary prototype by saying, “God had an only Son, and He was a missionary... A poor, poor imitation of Him I am or wish to be.”¹

We have, in the Person of Jesus, the ultimate example of a cross-cultural missionary. He left the glories of Heaven for the people of the earth. He gave up His claim to honor to serve the undeserving. In this manner, He raised to glory all those who call upon the name of the Lord. Beyond belief, God then gave us the mind of Christ. The supreme standard of His Son acts as a catalyst. He calls you to radical obedience and allows you to operate with a missionary mindset, making known His glory in the nations.

CHAPTER SIX

A POSTURE OF EXPECTANCY

Without a Care in the World

David Eubank's jaw was chiseled for military service. Cut square and clean-shaven in the manner Hollywood depicts soldiers of war, symmetrical lines crease his cheeks when pulled back in half smile. His cunning grin reveals a youthful mirth; his hazel eyes glint with pleasure. His favorite army-green *Free Burma Rangers* cap covers his receding hairline, shading the wrinkles on his brow. He appears both pensive and playful. The God-fearing military man exudes optimism. His presence is commanding, but not in a conceited, militant manner. Eubank's personality is the perfect mix of masculinity and modesty.

Never short of breath, Eubank is a master storyteller. His words flow at a million miles per minute. His jaw-dropping tales of risk and adventure need no embellishment; he simply recounts the facts as he remembers them, and the stories speak for themselves. He peppers each narrative with his high opinion of Jesus. Happily postured in a position of expectancy, the man is always on call and ready to respond to the purposes of his Master.

On January 16, 2018, my family and I ran into Eubank at the United States consulate in Chiang Mai, Thailand. David's wife, Karen, and their three children, Sahale, Suuzanne, and Peter—ages sixteen, fourteen, and eleven, respectively—accompanied him to the consulate. They sat in the last row of chairs in the outdoor waiting space while their passports were

being renewed. The Eubank family had just returned from Iraq, one of the many conflict areas where they care for families and provide medical aid to victims of war. David's left forearm was wrapped in a bandage, still recovering from a recent bullet wound in Mosul.

I approached Eubank and shook his hand. "David, thank you so much for your service," I said. "We're blessed by what you and your family are doing." He smiled humbly. "Thank you," he replied. "It's an honor to serve where God calls us."

I recently read articles from major news sources covering the family's daring feats. The headlines spoke for themselves: "Thousands of Iraqis Have Fled Mosul, But This American Family Moved In" on *The Washington Post*. "Ex-US Soldier Says 'God Opened a Way' to Save Girl Trapped by ISIS" on *CBN News*; "The Man Who Willingly Takes His Family to War" on *ABC Australia*. *BBC*, *CNN*, *CBS*, *Fox News*; a slew of other well-known news agencies covered the Eubanks' outreach.

For thirty minutes, I stood speechless as David relayed the details of their work in Iraq. His account filled with words like "AK-47s" and "RPGs," "enemy fire," "dead bodies," and "near-death escapes." He told me about his rescue of a five-year-old girl with pink pigtails. "I saw about seventy dead bodies strewn all over the ground," he said, "women, children, guys in wheelchairs—all shot dead." In the center of the horrific scene, he saw movement. A little girl peeked out from underneath a black burqa. "'Jesus, help me,' I whispered under my breath," he told me, and he ran headfirst into ISIS gunfire. Smoke dropped by Allied Forces and firepower from Iraqi soldiers gave him the cover he needed. Buried in rubble, the little girl hid under her dead mother's burqa for two days until her rescue on June 2, 2017. "As I began to run, I thought, 'If I die today trying to save this child, my wife and kids will understand.'" He said he did it simply for love. "I remembered the scripture that says, 'Greater love...'" David closed his eyes, paused, and choked back his tears. "'...has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'"

Our conversation came to a close as my family and I were called inside for our scheduled appointment. Apologetic, I shook David's hand and entered the main office. Our passports did not take long to process, and in ten minutes, we returned to the outdoor seating area where the Eubank family awaited their appointment. Sahale, Suuzanne, and Peter still sat in

the last row of seats. David reclined on three chairs on their left, his head nestled in Karen's lap. He was fast asleep, without a care in the world.

Unlimited Possibility

The previous two chapters were all about inner and outer expectations, and how global Kingdom workers respond to them. We continue to inspect the missionary mind by exploring the neighboring (yet, vastly different) word, *expectancy*.

The definitions¹ of the two neighboring words are as follows:

- *Expectation* is “a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future.”
- *Expectancy* is “the state of thinking or hoping that something, especially something pleasant, will happen or be the case.”

At first glance, there seems to be little difference between the two. The practical application, however, reveals that these two words are in direct opposition to one another. Expectation assumes a certain outcome, or that the outcome will occur a certain way. There is nothing wrong with having an expectation. The downfall, however, is that our expectations (or the expectations of others) can imprison us in a box of presuppositions. This can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit by blinding us to anything outside the box of our expectation. In contrast, expectancy does not limit outcomes. Expectancy is full of hope. It trusts the results to God. It requires an open mind and gives room for the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes as He sees fit. When we posture ourselves in expectancy rather than cling to expectations, we set ourselves up for unlimited possibility.

I would go out on a limb and say that David Eubank undoubtedly deals with inner and outer expectations. He is no stranger to the voice of the negative inner monologue. He has his own set of expectations, and frustration exerts itself when things don't go as planned. He needs the help of the Holy Spirit to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Because he lives in the public limelight, people have their own expectations of him. But noble as they may be, he is not meant to bend to their every wish. He requires an ample dose of grace to follow God's unique leading in his life. And as he does, the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard his heart and mind.

Eugene Peterson, the translator of *The Message*, encourages a posture of peaceful surrender to God's will by writing:

Hoping does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It means going about our assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and the conclusions. It is not compelled to work away at keeping up appearances with a bogus spirituality. It is the opposite of desperate and panicky manipulations or scurrying and worrying. And hoping is not dreaming. It is not spinning an illusion or fantasy to protect us from our boredom or our pain. It means a confident, alert expectation that God will do what He said He will do. It is imagination put in the harness of faith. It is a willingness to let God do it His way and in His time.²

The missionary mind brims with ambition, is built on belief, and resides in the realm of reliance. It hopes to make headway among the bruised and broken and witness God's rule and reign in the earth. The catch is that Kingdom workers must cast aside conjecture and relinquish assumed notions of success. Our vision is finite; God's perspective is eternal. We perceive a small part of the puzzle; God fits each piece into perfect harmony. We are bound by space and time; God sees the entire panorama from beginning to end. It is impossible to thrive on mission when our opinions or conclusions are formed on the basis of incomplete information. God's global plan *will* be accomplished. Every knee *will* one day bow before His breathtaking might, but most likely not in the manner we presently imagine.

"Expectancy is absolutely critical to the missionary," says Bradley Bell, a former missionary in East Africa and the author of *The Sending Church Defined*. "God delights to fill the open hands of expectant missionaries—to infuse them with the mystery of Christ Himself, in whom is hidden all treasure."³

The expectant Christian does not only seek an end product or an outcome; his prize is the very Person of Christ Himself. Naturally, he desires to be of use to his Master—to hear Him say, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." Above all else, his greatest reward is the pleasure of intimacy with God. He need not strive to meet unwarranted expectations; sonship permits a calm and peaceful spirit.

Scripture points us toward a posture of expectancy; it prompts us to action while residing in a calm state of trust. “I wait expectantly for your salvation,” wrote the author of Psalm 119. “God, I do what You tell me.”⁴ In great distress and amid Saul’s persecution, David wrote, “I wait expectantly, trusting God to help, for He has promised.”⁵ Notice how the posture of expectancy combines with a forward progression and obedient behavior. “Hope does not involve what we already have or see,” Paul wrote. “For who goes around hoping for what he already has? But if we wait expectantly for things we have never seen, then we hope with true perseverance and eager anticipation.”⁶

Are you a Christian who seeks to reach your city with the Gospel? God wants you to know that He is continually moving in the hearts of people around you. With eager anticipation, make His glory known in word and by deed, and trust the results to Him. Are you an overseas missionary who desires to see God’s Kingdom established in a foreign culture? Continue to shine the light of Jesus wherever you go, knowing that the Holy Spirit is in full control.

If you want to thrive on mission, you must cast your expectations at the foot of the cross. God desires to establish His Kingdom on earth more than you could ever wish. He delights to include you in His redemptive narrative. Undoubtedly, you are an integral part of God’s global plan, but it’s better to be a small part of a big thing than a big part of a small thing.

This Is Our Place in God’s Kingdom Work

I first met David Eubank on June 21, 2003. My friend, Andrew Marshall, a British journalist who then worked as a foreign correspondent for *TIME Asia*, heard about the former U.S. Special Forces operative-turned aid worker. He had to meet Eubank, and he invited me to tag along.

Less than two years earlier, Marshall was on a fact-finding mission for his forthcoming book, *The Trouser People*, which chronicled Burma’s tumultuous history as a British colony to its then junta-ran narco nation. He needed a Mandarin-speaking interpreter to accompany him across the border but came up empty-handed. Perhaps it had something to do with his pitch: “Do you want to come and look for a semi-mythical mountain lake not seen by white man since 1937, and now protected by one of Southeast Asia’s

largest drug-trafficking organizations?” Marshall asked.⁷ Apparently, I was foolhardy and audacious enough to concede. For one week, we hiked over mountain and valley in the rain, hoping to dodge ethnic insurgents. Our hair-raising trip culminated in our capture and interrogation by the United Wa State Army, who was armed to the hilt with assault rifles and M-22s. You can read about our adventure in the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist’s book, *The Trouser People: Burma in the Shadows of the Empire*.

With our shared interest in Burma, Marshall and I showed up at Eubank’s home in Chiang Mai, Thailand. We were excited to meet the legendary missionary. The moment we disembarked our taxi, Eubank sprinted toward us, tossed us two pairs of shorts, and slapped us on the backs. “Put these on quick!” he panted. “We’re in the middle of a serious soccer game, and we need you on the field now!” Andrew and I hurriedly suited up and ran out to the makeshift field. The rough-and-tumble pickup game revealed the weak links on the field. We gasped and wheezed as we ran back and forth across the field. Eubank’s superhuman Free Burma Rangers easily outmatched us. The game culminated with Eubank’s impressive goal from midfield. “Good game, guys!” he laughed, breathing normally. Drenched in perspiration, Andrew and I panted toward the sideline for a cup of water. “You were a huge help today, Marshall!” I quipped. He smirked. “Yea, you were amazing, too!”

We spent the rest of the afternoon learning about the Free Burma Rangers, Eubank’s multi-ethnic humanitarian service movement. He described in detail the suffering and injustice he saw. “Little girls raped, villages burned,” he reminisced, “I wanted to help in any way I could. I said, ‘Lord, should I do something? Can I do something?’ And I just felt God say, ‘Go!’” The Free Burma Rangers conducted humanitarian missions in Burma’s war zones, pushed past enemy fire, treated the wounded, and shared the love of God to internally displaced peoples. “This is our place in God’s Kingdom work,” David said. “It’s not more or less important than anyone else’s place. It’s just our place. And we love it!”

Peculiarly, Eubank’s story finds its origins way back on April 2, 1948, at the end of World War II. Even before David’s birth, God arranged the pieces of the puzzle to fit perfectly into His timeline. God uses subtle and seemingly menial moments in history to cast considerable ripples along the landscape of time.

The conflict between the Burma (now Myanmar) government and ethnic minority militia commenced after the conclusion of the second world war and at the end of British colonial rule. The fighting has ebbed and flowed across the country for more than sixty years and is labeled the world's longest-running civil war.⁸ It is called the "Internal Conflict in Myanmar," otherwise known as "The Burma Conflict."

For more than six decades, a series of dictators controlled Burma ever since it gained independence in 1948. The army attacked the ethnic peoples who comprise almost half the population of the country. Fighting was largely fueled by feuds, competition over natural resources, and demands for more autonomy.⁹ There are no less than fifteen different armed rebel groups active in Myanmar. Some of them, like the Kachin Independence Army and the United Wa State Army, have controlled and administered large swaths of territory for years.¹⁰ The complicated conflict pits ethnic guerrilla fighters toting a hodgepodge of weapons—from rusty carbines to M-16s—against Burmese army battalions. Land mines litter jungle paths, driving more than 150,000 ethnic people into refugee camps along neighboring country borders.¹¹ To date, more than a million people have been internally displaced.

In August 1961, when David Eubank was an infant, his parents, Allan and Joan, moved from America to Thailand, just East of Burma. After language study, Allan and Joan spent eight years planting churches and conducting rural development among the Thai and Lao Song people in Central Thailand. Unwilling to shield their son from real-world poverty and suffering, David joined his parents on village trips by bus, river excursions by canoe, and jungle expeditions by elephant. He grew up a missionary kid on the forefront of adventure and Christian service.

At the age of eighteen, following in his father's footsteps, David returned to America and enlisted in the U.S. armed forces. He commanded units in the Infantry, Rangers, and Special Forces, and ran missions in Central and South America. In 1992, after nearly ten years in the military, he left the Army and enrolled at Fuller Theological Seminary. At Fuller, David met his wife-to-be, Karen, who was studying to become a teacher. They married the following year.

In 1996, Christian members of the Wa tribe—one of the many ethnic peoples in Burma—approached the United States government asking for

military help. They said the Burmese government was attacking them and they had no way of protecting themselves. The U.S. government denied help, and so they turned to the missionary community. Well-known among the ethnic peoples in the region, Allan and Joan hosted a meeting of Wa leaders in their home. At that time, one of the Wa leaders saw a photo of the Eubanks' son, David, outfitted in Green Beret fatigues.

"Is he a follower of Jesus?" the Wa man asked.

"Yes, he is in seminary in America," Allan replied.

"We are a warrior people," the man said. "Most of the Wa do not believe in Jesus. They are animists. We need a Christian man with warrior skills who can help us."¹² The Wa leader requested the Eubanks' son to come and teach them survival and military skills.

Allan immediately called his son in America and explained the situation. David felt the Holy Spirit's leading in the matter and promised to help where possible. In 1996, David and Karen flew to Thailand, "extra-legally" (without government-issued visas) crossed the border into Burma and began providing aid to the local resistance.

The same year, Eubank flew to Rangoon to hear Aung San Suu Kyi speak during a brief period of freedom between house arrests. As the youngest daughter of Aung San, Father of the Nation of modern-day Myanmar, Suu Kyi was the General Secretary of the National League for Democracy (NLD). The Nobel Peace Prize laureate publicly criticized the ruling military junta, and spent almost fifteen years under house arrest, becoming one of the world's most prominent political prisoners.

Eubank secured a chance meeting with Suu Kyi and spoke with her for thirty minutes. "We need unity," she said. "We will never have peace without unity. And we need prayer. Please pray for us."¹³ Impressed by the spirited, Buddhist woman, Eubank gave Suu Kyi his Special Forces crest. She took the insignia with its two silver arrows crossed with a dagger, and inscription, "De Oppresso Liber," which translated from Latin means, "To Free the Oppressed."

Suu Kyi said, "Aren't the things of war often very beautiful?"

Eubank then gave her his Bible. "This is the most valuable thing I own," he told her.

"I read the Bible every day," she replied. She quoted her favorite scripture: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹⁴

Stirred by the providential meeting, in 1996, Eubank initiated the *Global Day of Prayer for Burma*, a publication and annual prayer event that now takes place on the second Sunday of March each year. During the Burma Army offensives of 1997, Eubank formed the Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian service movement that conducts relief, advocacy, leadership development, and unity missions among the people of Burma.

Eubank's *modus operandi* ran counter to typical Christian missionary work. His grassroots movement accepted volunteers from multi-faith backgrounds. Some Free Burma Rangers carried guns into the jungle to protect staff and volunteers from hostile attacks. Dangerous territory called for extreme measures. But Eubank made his intentions clear: "We exist to free the oppressed," he said. "We stand for human dignity, justice, and reconciliation. We bring help, hope, and love to people of all faiths and ethnicities in the conflict areas."¹⁵ I'd rather do something than just talk about it."¹⁶

To date, the Free Burma Rangers have trained 300 ethnic relief teams, conducted over 1,000 relief missions, treated over 550,000 patients, and helped more than 1,200,000 people.¹⁷

"I want to be where I'm most needed," Eubank said, "and I feel that's where people are being attacked or where they're in trouble." When asked if the former U.S.-Special-Forces-soldier-turned-combat-missionary second guesses his walk on the wild side, Eubank said,

I sometimes wonder what I'm doing out here. Is it worth the risk?
Am I making any difference at all? Do I have the wrong motives?
But when I think of the people who have suffered great injustice
and pain, I know our place is to stand with them.¹⁸

For Me, This is Normal

David Eubank blows up our paradigms of what the normative Christian life should be. Most of us will never experience dodging bullets in a fast-paced sprint through the jungles of Burma. The rough-and-tumble, raw reality of war zone outreach is a foreign concept to us. But to Eubank, a keyed up, high-octane mission is the normal Christian life. I say this not to glorify one man's calling over another, but in hopes to unlock the secret behind a radical commitment to Christ and a dedicated service to

mankind. Too often, the average disciple finds it difficult to minister to his next-door neighbor, let alone believe that God can use him in conflict areas around the world. Perhaps Eubank's example will reset our portrait of "normalcy."

In 2014, word of the Free Burma Rangers spread around the world, and they were invited to Sudan's Nuba mountains to help displaced people. The next year, friends who worked in Kurdistan asked them to come and assist there. They also spent time in Syria and Iraq, delivering food and medical supplies to people on the frontline of war.¹⁹

There's something else you need to understand about David Eubank: he rarely ventures into war zones alone. His wife, Karen, often accompanies him to conflict areas. He also takes his three young children to the frontlines of battle. "Our kids have all experienced gunfire, mortars, and machine guns," Eubank said.

We don't want our kids to die—we try to protect them. But we don't want to protect them from other peoples' needs. We don't want to insulate them from the real situation of the world or inhibit what God can do through their lives to help other people.²⁰

Who willingly takes their family into a war zone? It seems preposterous until you realize that the Eubank children aren't exactly your typical kids. They have been sneaking back and forth across the Burma border since they were in diapers. Picture Bear Grylls hunting, fishing, and handling knives as a kid, and you start to get the picture. The Eubank kids shot caribou when they were shorter than the rifles they were shooting. Peter, the youngest child, ran a five-kilometer fun run in the United States when he was three-years-old. "For me, this is normal," sixteen-year-old Sahale said. "There are people in Burma who live in a war zone all the time, and for them, that is normal. Who's to say what a normal childhood looks like?"²¹

Many Christians tend to shield their children from the world's brokenness. If your missional calling does not include taking your kids into war zones, you should find a way to expose their minds to God's global plan. Do you want your children to grow into faithful Christian disciples? Read the *Trailblazers Series*²² missionary biographies to them. Pin up a map on their bedroom wall and pray for missionaries serving in foreign countries. Gather world events from the news and discuss them around the dinner

table. Let them see the world's needs and permit them to experience the Kingdom of God in action.

My career missionary journey began in 1998 when I moved to Southwest China. I joined an apostolic group of families who regularly took their young children on trips to the rural countryside. They interacted with kids in stilted bamboo homes. They handed out balloons to impoverished children. They saw pigs slaughtered for Chinese New Year, and chickens sacrificed to local ancestors. Their parents did not cover their eyes every time they encountered suffering. They allowed their children to witness God at work among the nations, even when it was uncomfortable. Today, many of those missionary kids are involved in global ministries. They witnessed the wonders of God in a fallen world and were better for it.

The teachings of Jesus were straightforward and in your face: "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me," He said. "Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."²³ You can try to soften His radical statements, but you will be left with a feeble faith and impotent religion. David Platt, director of the International Mission Board, expounded on Matthew 10:37 by saying, "In our culture today, we idolize our children and our marriages... to the point where Jesus Christ gets the leftovers from our affections. This stance is completely un-Christian."²⁴

A posture of expectancy is not only for adults. Your kids need to see what it looks like to thrive on mission, too. The Holy Spirit speaks to the impressionable minds of children because He wants to build them into passionate disciples, even from a young age. Think of the Chinese children in *Visions Beyond the Veil* by H. A. Baker. In the 1930s, during an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at an orphanage in Southwest China, young children saw divine revelations of Heaven. Impassioned, the kids began to share the Gospel with young people and adults alike. Their innocent faith sparked a supernatural revival in the city and surrounding areas.

Or think of three-year-old Colton Burpo's near-death experience on March 5, 2003. During the months after the surgery, Colton told his parents about his experiences in Heaven. He also described events and people that seemed impossible for him to have known. The New York Times best-selling book, *Heaven Is For Real*, recounts his Heavenly visions. Many Christian critics claimed the book, and subsequent movie, were "extra-biblical," but

that is beside the point at hand. The fact remains: children are often more sensitive than adults to things in the supernatural realm. When we create an atmosphere for our children to experience the world's pain and the Holy Spirit's healing balm, the results are immeasurable.

"We found these human bones—backbone, ribcage, and pelvis of a small child—that ISIS murdered. They're just here on the street. We found the clothes and blood stains on the other side." Sahale Eubank kneeled on the dusty Kurdistan road. Her auburn-blond hair tossed in the breeze and a tear streaked down her cheek. Her YouTube channel²⁵ fills with videos about her life as a missionary kid in Burma, Sudan, Kurdistan, and Iraq. She hopes to shine a light on the current conflicts in war-torn countries. In this particular video, the camera pans across an open graveyard of rubble and human bones. "It makes me sad because this could have been my family." She pointed to a decayed cranium on the ground. "That could have been me," she said.²⁶

Sahale has witnessed her fair share of atrocities, but her outlook on life is far from gloomy. Her Instagram account²⁷ reveals a completely different picture. In one photo, a monkey perches on her shoulder. In another, she glides through the air on horseback. She rides dirt bikes in Burma and drives an armored vehicle in Iraq. A group of smiling Rohingya children gathers around her in Bangladesh, and she administers novocaine to a military general in Syria. A broad smile stretches across her face as she shoots a machine gun. She summits a snowy Alaskan peak and lounges in a jungle hammock.

Fourteen-year-old Suuzanne is named after the Burmese Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi. Though she realizes her life is atypical of her peers, she does not consider her family's lifestyle abnormal. "Some of my friends think our life is pretty crazy," she admitted with a smile. "I dunno. It feels pretty normal to me." Her life is a series of exciting snapshots. When she was eight-years-old, she caught and killed a five-foot python. She posts adventurous photos on her Instagram account²⁸ for her friends to see. She smiles atop a camel in the Syrian Desert and rafts down a river on the Thailand-Burma border. In one post, the text reads: "I live with fear and danger, but sometimes I leave them behind and go skydiving." The image shows her jumping headfirst out of a prop plane in the Czech Republic. Another photo shows a young Syrian girl covering her mouth in mid-laughter. Her eyes

glint with joy as she gazes at the camera. “Just a laugh can change a day,” Suuzanne wrote, “and just a day can change the world for someone.”

I am riveted by all the beautiful images. The Eubanks’ normalcy is strikingly different from the normalcy of the general population. Suuzanne shrugs it off as she poses horseback beside a military Humvee that is back-dropped by a bombed-out Iraqi building. The text of another post reads,

Happy birthday to the best dad in the whole world! Thank you for always pushing me through the hard stuff, even when I want to quit... I’m blessed to have a father that follows God with all his heart and trusts Him no matter what. I love you so much, and I can’t imagine life without you! Happy birthday, daddy!²⁹

The photo shows David Eubank pushing an Iraqi child in a wheelchair. The boy laughs hysterically as David pops a wheelie and takes him on the ride of his life.

Dressed in a camouflage sweatshirt and army pants, Peter Eubank stood at the threshold of a bombed-out house in Kurdistan. His somber demeanor concealed the carefree mannerisms of a typical eleven-year-old boy. “You can still smell the scent of dead, decaying bodies under the rubble,” he said, pointing past the darkened doorway. “It makes me sad. We should do more to help.” The Eubank family is fond of asking, “Whose life is more valuable?” Peter knows the answer to the rhetorical question. In the midst of such evil and sadness, his voice rang out with the rest of the relief team: “I love you! You are my friend!” He sang songs about God’s love, performed skits for the children, and taught about basic health care. That day, the dusty plains of Kurdistan resounded with children’s laughter.

The children’s programs Karen and the kids run are usually held out of harm’s way, but that definition is a little loose in conflict areas. One day, while working with children in a local school in Mosul, they came under attack. They huddled inside as bullets battered the outside of the building. The Eubanks were shaken, but not ready to call it quits. Karen said, “When the Iraqis saw that, they said, ‘You really do think that we are as valuable as you are.’”³⁰ Their testimony changed paradigms and opened hearts to the God’s love.

The Eubanks understand that they are a small part of the puzzle. They realize the world is broken and in need of repair, and the complicated

issues in conflict areas must be mended in increments. “Our team barely scratched the surface of such a large and dynamic problem,” Sahale said. “But we believe that God has called us to stand with the oppressed; to bring help, hope, and love to the children and families. We want to let them know that they’re not forgotten, and to remind them that in the midst of their suffering, God has a special plan for their lives.”³¹

People around the world hail the Eubanks as heroes—a label they themselves do not necessarily subscribe to. Such lofty definitions do not fit within their family framework. They live by the Golden Rule: “Do to others what you would have them do to you.”³² These global Kingdom workers challenge us to consider our response to the commands of Christ. Are we truly sold out and radically committed to God’s global plan? Do we actively seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? Are we willing to allow God access to every part of our hearts and minds? If we really want to thrive on mission, we must allow God to redefine our definition of the normal Christian life.

There Will Be Perfect Harmony

The Eubank family has earnest expectations. They pray for peace to overcome conflict. They hope for love to conquer war. They long to see God’s Kingdom established wherever they go. They eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of God’s complete rule and reign on earth. However, these outcomes will not be accomplished effortlessly and often not in the way we might imagine. Just as a single pebble dropped in water casts far-reaching ripples, God uses the actions of His people to create widespread transformation.

The Christian postured in faith fills with expectancy. She hopes in the Lord and fixes her eyes on His promises. She remembers that the storms of life silent themselves at the command of Jesus. This truth calms her soul and pacifies her anxious mind. God promises perfect peace to those whose minds are set on Him.³³ He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”³⁴

Global Kingdom workers around the world are in a similar spot. They cross cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries to build God’s Kingdom in the earth. There are a lot of things worth doing in the world, and missionary life is their expression of devotion to God. Will they encounter

speed bumps and hiccups along the way? Absolutely. And when they do, they are left with a choice: tackle the problems in their own strength or trust in God's capacity to overcome all odds.

The dilemmas that overseas missionaries meet are analogous to the struggles of every Christian believer. Regardless of your place or position in the body of Christ, you too will face physical challenges, emotional struggles, and spiritual hurdles. Your circumstances may look different on the exterior, but the crux of the matter remains the same: when you are weak, then you are strong. This notion runs counter to human comprehension. Nevertheless, God rigged the world in such a way that His might manifests through human deficiency.

Apostle Paul explained this reality to the Corinthian church: "But [God] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'" Paul's response challenges our concept of competence:

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, [and] in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.³⁵

Peace of mind comes in the acceptance of God's sovereignty. We do what little we can; the Holy Spirit then does the real work of altering circumstances and transforming hearts. I have a hunch that David Eubank understands this truth. When I saw him at the U.S. Consulate in Chiang Mai, Thailand, he still had shrapnel in his leg from Iraq; his left forearm bandaged from a bullet wound. Instead of a man battered by the battles of life, I saw an enthusiastic agent of peace.

The Eubank family lives in a paradigm unlike any others I know. Yet, there is a commonality between their lives and ours. God meets all of us in our particular circumstances. He calls us to obedience to His commands, sensitivity to His voice, and clarity to know what matters and what doesn't. He beckons us to display sacrificial love, and to lay our lives on the line for the sake of others. This is the commonality that links us together as the body of Christ.

Their narrative is an incredible expression of God's faithfulness working in and through mankind. In a world where many people see pacifism as the only way of life, the Eubanks' story calls into question what we value

most. I am both moved and terrified by such stories of sacrificial service for the Kingdom of God. Their extraordinary generosity in such violent settings confuses my perception of what missional living ought to look like. The Eubanks set before us a vivid example of risk-takers who lay their lives on the line for Jesus Christ and for people.

“I didn’t choose these battles,” Eubank said. “God opened the doors, and I simply walked through them. That’s what God had for me and what the people involved needed most.” He then told me about his rescue of an Iraqi woman buried amongst the dead in Mosul. For three days, she hid in the heat under ISIS gunfire, pretending to be dead. He threw her a severed electric wire and she tied it around her arm. Eubank dragged her blood-drenched body across the rubble to safety. She looked him in the eye, and cried, “Thank you for not leaving me behind.”

“I have often found that evil is so great and humans so weak that we cannot accomplish the mission,” David said. “But when we ask for God’s help, He overcomes our weakness to defeat evil, and empowers us to carry the wounded to safety. To me, that is the essence of the Gospel. In dire circumstances, I often feel overwhelmed. But I believe that is good for my heart.”³⁶

As I listened, the truth of Eubank’s words struck me deeply. Come hell or high water, God’s sovereignty is ever relevant to our daily lives. His power overshadows our inabilities and His dominion exceeds our deficiencies. He does not question His authority. God knows what He is doing. He provides perfect peace for those whose minds are centered on Him.

“God is bigger than all these issues,” Eubank said.

He will give each of us—from the plumber to the president—the answers we need for today. The answer He gives you will be different than the answer He has for me. And if we follow His answers, there will be perfect harmony—like an orchestra of instruments that play in sync.³⁷

Perhaps that was the key to David’s untroubled rest at the U.S. Consulate that day. The world raged, but his mind fixed on the promises of God. Sprawled out on three waiting room chairs, his head nestled in Karen’s lap. Fast asleep, without a care in the world, I imagined his dreams filled with the resonance of a Heavenly symphony.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Joannes is the founder and president of Within Reach Global, which serves the advance of the Gospel in some of Southeast Asia's most difficult places. He is the author of *The Space Between Memories: Recollections from a 21st Century Missionary*. David has a love for language, culture, and creative writing, and for the last 20 years, he has witnessed God's Kingdom established in forgotten parts of the globe. David lives in Chiang Mai, Thailand with his wife, Lorna, and their daughter, Cara.

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