

Working Inside Afghanistan Seminar – Wednesday

By John Weaver

John Weaver:

Shows that God's doing something in your life and you're concerned about what he's doing in a country like Afghanistan. And that is even more encouraging because I know you didn't just come to see my bearded face. So everybody doing okay today? Everybody glad to be here? Glad to be alive and enjoying the fact that you're a son or daughter of God and that in Him, you're living and moving and have your being today? Okay, let's see here.

Mr. Decker just got me sidetracked about something else. I might have to gather my thoughts here. And just like a good professor, to get the speaker sidetracked. I want to read something from the Word first, if that's okay. In Psalm 67, this is my favorite psalm, and I hope to share a few things today to illustrate some of the teachings that are in this psalm by illustrating what we've been doing in Afghanistan and hopefully to illustrate what you've been seeing. The three signs.

Anybody know what's on the three signs? About every block or two, you've been seeing these little signs. Everybody know what's written on them?

Audience:

Seeds and growth.

Weaver:

Seeds and growth and fruit. And so hopefully today, Kim, am I supposed to do something else with this thing?

Speaker 1:

Not that I know of.

Weaver:

That you know of. Is it okay? Can you guys hear me okay back there? Even when it goes back and forth? Okay, well, is this generation okay with that? I did that at one church and it was a lot of older people. Boy, I thought they were going to kick me out of the place. Let's do that. Would everybody like to come forward, please? That would be great. Why don't we do that?

Some of you already said you have to leave early, and if you do, that's understandable. But I'll try to come forward because actually we're going to break up at the end of the time and pray for what God's doing in Afghanistan. Join in with Him in prayer. So why don't you come a little bit closer? I did put my deodorant on this morning. If you didn't put yours on, that's okay. Don't worry about it.

Okay. It doesn't say when we end, so I guess we stop whenever we want to stop. Well, guess what? God is working in Afghanistan. He is doing some amazing things in Afghanistan. And it's a wonderful privilege to be a part of what God our Father is doing and bringing in a harvest in Afghanistan, helping people rebuild their lives. I've had the privilege of living there off and on

for the past two and a half years, and it's been like a dream come true. It's been full of, what can I say? Sometimes almost like miraculous events for the Lord to actually get me there and open up the door and to join a team and to join the organization that I'll be telling you more about in a minute.

And before I do it, though. I want to read Psalm 67. Anybody know what Psalm 67 is about? All of you good Bible students, you should have this memorized. If you don't, may you commit it to memory, or at least read it and think about it and maybe make it a prayer for your own life, maybe for your family, maybe for your friends, maybe for the school. And it kind of goes like this: "May God be gracious to us and bless us. May He cause His face to shine upon us."

Why? "So that his ways may be known on the earth." And why else? "So that His salvation may be made known among all the nations. May the peoples praise You, oh God. May all the peoples praise You. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise You, O God. May all the peoples praise You. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our very own God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear Him."

The reason why I love this psalm is because it seems to capture the very heart of God. It seems to capture, in at least one particular poetic version, kind of what all of history is all about, where God is taking the initiative and providing mercy and grace and forgiveness to His people. And why is He doing that? Because as He relates with his people, and His people relate with the other

people that live around them, His ways are being known. And so therefore they come to experience His mercy and grace as well.

And what's the result of all of it? He is praised. And what is God worthy of? He's worthy of all praise. What is Jesus waiting for? He's waiting for the day where He receives unto Himself His bride from every tribe, every nation, kind of like as this illustrates that His salvation will be made known among all the nations.

And this is probably the primary reason why I prayed for about seven years with another group of believers that God kind of formed as a team to go to a place like Afghanistan. It was not just the great need. Afghanistan is the home of about 22 million people. It has had its share of difficulties and hardships because of droughts, because of wars, because of famines, because of earthquakes, because of-- you can imagine almost any type of natural disaster. Afghanistan has experienced that.

But even beyond that, as the brother was sharing this morning, Afghanistan is the home of 20 million people that know absolutely nothing about Jesus Christ. Not only are their lives devastated by natural disasters and by wars and by false religions, but they're lost and they're in darkness. They're without hope, they're without peace. And Afghanistan still remains to be the only country without a church. Now, all of you know because you're good Bible believing Christians, you realize you don't have to have a church building to gather for worship.

But Afghanistan still remains to be the only country on this planet, unless you count the [inaudible] as a country--most people don't--that does not have an official church building. Even in Saudi Arabia, there is a building that's built for the glory of God where people go every Sunday and gather for worship. Afghanistan does not have one of those particular places. It's a country unique in that particular way. There was a church about 25, 30 years ago, actually about 32 years ago, and it was in existence for a couple of months, and there was a change in the government, and somehow someone in the government thought that he was mandated by God to tear down the church building, and they bulldozed it down.

Right before he did that, someone told him that "If you do this, if you bulldoze down this church that has been dedicated for Christians to gather for worship, greater judgment will come upon your country." And history teaches that after the bulldozer tore down the church, within seven days, the Russians came in, invaded Afghanistan, and then the country broke into a whole another war and then resulted in a whole other civil war. And Afghanistan has kind of been fighting for her life for years and years.

So in September of 2000--I don't know if I like this mic--in September of 2000, I actually went to Afghanistan with an organization called Shelter for Life. Reason why I wanted you guys to write. I tell you what, brother. Why don't we turn this thing off? That might help. There we go. Everybody's awake now. You wake in? Yeah. Good. All right.

In September of 2000, I had the privilege of joining an organization called Shelter for Life. If you'd like to know more about Shelter for Life, you can find them on the Net. I didn't bring a

whole lot of information today because I knew there'd be hundreds of booths in the whatever that building is over there. I thought I would save you from having to get flyers and pamphlets and all that kind of stuff. You guys are Internet generation, so just click www.shelter.org if you haven't already found that on the Net, some of you already have, because I've at least heard there were a few people from Biola that have contacted the organization and wanted to inquire about relief and development work. But it's www.shelter.org if you'd like to know more about the mission organization that I work with, I did bring some information from them.

It's called People International, which is peopleintl.org. peopleintl.org if you want to learn more about them. Now, the best way I thought you could learn about both of them and what we've been doing in Afghanistan on the development and relief side is by giving you this book. Some of you have probably already seen it, some of you have already read it, unfortunately. UPS, well, let me be honest.

Unfortunately, I called in to order probably later than I should have. I'm kind of not oriented to time and distance here. I've been speaking a lot in Nashville. I mean Tennessee and South Carolina and Georgia and Virginia and North Carolina. So when I order from the bookstore or the book company in Nashville, it usually gets there in a day or two.

I didn't realize that California was on the other side of the country, and it might take a little bit longer to ship it. So books probably won't come till Friday. But if you'll be honest, if you don't have the book, if you'll sign your name, put your box number and put an extension or some way for SMU to be able to get in touch with you, then we will do our very best to get a book in your

hands. I ordered 72 of them and looks like we may have 50 or more here even today. But that's a little bit about the book that God gave me the privilege to write.

Now we're going to take a journey here for about maybe 30 minutes, if the Lord will help me and put all this together, because there is a whole lot to tell you. We're going to take a journey for about 30 minutes, and then hopefully we're going to spend a little bit of time in prayer. And hopefully after sharing a little bit about this journey and about what God has been doing there and some needs, hopefully you'll be inspired and you want to pray. And then there's a couple of things I want to share real personally about my own self, if that's okay for you to be praying for me as well. Is that all right?

So in September of 2000, I fly in a little UN airplane into northern Afghanistan. Please keep in mind that most of what I'm going to tell you today is about northern Afghanistan. I don't know everything about Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not only the home of probably now 22 million people, because they say that since the world on terrorism has liberated the country within the span of about a year, there's over a million refugees that have returned from Iran, Pakistan, the former Soviet Union, and even Western countries. So the population is kind of growing, so it could be around 22 million.

Afghanistan is also the size of Texas. So if I speak about the northern part of Afghanistan, please keep in mind that may not necessarily be the case in the southern part of Afghanistan. Quite like if I was going to be speaking about Dallas, that may not be actually true of San Antonio or Houston or some other particular place. So most of what I'm going to share is about the northern

part of Afghanistan. The organization I work with, Shelter for Life, gets its mandate or its philosophy from a verse in Isaiah 58 where it says to provide the poor wonder with shelter.

According to the NIV translation, it's translated that way to provide the poor wonder with shelter. And so shelter for life's main purpose is to respond with God's compassion when there is a need to provide people with shelter, which could be a war, which could be a famine, which could be a drought, which could be some type of other reason where people would have to migrate from one area to the other. So normally when we go into an area in Afghanistan or any other country, it looks like now we're on our way to Iraq. When we go into a country, it's primarily to respond with compassion in terms of an emergency relief response.

So when I went into Afghanistan in September of 2000, those of you know a bit about what may have been going on there, there was a civil war that was going on. And because of the civil war the Taliban would go into an area, they would destroy a village and maybe in an instant, meaning in a day, there would be thousands of families that would become displaced. And sometimes we refer to them as refugees. But refugees are really people who leave their country and are displaced to another country. The people we've been serving in Afghanistan are displaced within their own country.

So here I found myself right in the middle of a great humanitarian crisis. My background is more pastoral training, preaching and teaching. I thought I was going to Afghanistan to do a development program and to do an educational program. But God, somehow in His sovereignty, changed all that. And here we were responding to an emergency crisis.

Thankfully, God put us at the right place at the right time. He even put me with the right people at the right place at the right time. And even in an area where they were speaking a language that I had studied the year before in Uzbekistan. So here's God in his great mercy takes this guy from North Carolina who really doesn't know much anything and thinks he's going to go there to teach, puts him in an area where now there are 5000 families that are displaced. And in Afghan culture that's about 20, 22, 25000 people, because the average family is four to five, sometimes six people because they believe in having a lot of children.

And the area where the families were displaced was an Uzbek speaking area. And I had spent the year before that in Uzbekistan. So my very first week in Afghanistan, I began work, didn't have time to do any language learning and didn't have any time to do any other things that we probably would normally want to do. And I would encourage you to take time to study the language if you go to a country. But I was thrown into a situation that was really quite overwhelming because of the crisis that was going on.

Literally, one particular day, we drove to this open field and there literally were 5000 families living out in the middle of this. And I still cry when I think about it out in the middle of this field literally with nothing. They literally fled their village with absolutely nothing but the shirts on their back. Some of them were able to grab plastic sheeting and some blankets and some things from their home, but unfortunately most of them left with what they could actually grab in like one five minute burst and leave their particular village.

So here we are building houses. We were digging wells. We were doing food-for-work programs where if the men would work and rebuild a house or dig a well or help repair a road, we would give them food. If they were widows, of course we would give them the food for free. If they were orphans, of course we would give them the food for free. And here I am, kind of learning relief and development and emergency response stuff on the job. It was on-the-job training.

It was very, very difficult. It was very, very stressful. The Taliban were just located just a few miles from where we were actually stationed and doing our relief project. Now, I want to give you the context to relate this to how or to show you how this relates to seeds and what was the other one? Growth and fruit. Now please understand that when we are there in this particular area, we are the only Christian presence in this whole particular area. The 27-something thousand people that we were trying to serve, if we had time to survey all of them, they would all tell you, "We've never read the Bible because we're Uzbek's, it's not even written in our language. We've never heard someone share the gospel with us. We don't know what a Christian is. We don't know what a Christian looks like."

And if you ask them even more specific questions, they would say, "Well, we think Christians are immoral people. We think Christians probably hate Muslims. We think Christians probably don't pray. We think Christians probably don't do this and they don't do this and they don't do that." And so here we were at the right place at the right time in God's sovereign plan of history, being able to model before people what it means to follow Jesus Christ. And I'm okay with telling you that it was quite some time before I ever shared verbally the gospel with someone.

But what I learned from the experience is that when God opened up the opportunity to verbally share the gospel, many people were ready to listen.

And why was that? Because someone was feeding them. Someone was taking care of them. Someone was loving them. Someone was not treating them like the Taliban was treating them. Someone was in their life, as the brother was saying today, touching them and feeling them and living with them and praying with them and trying to care for them, trying to show them God's compassion and God's love in action.

And guess what? That is very attractive. That is very, very compelling for someone to see that. And it has a drawing effect. Now, no doubt Jesus said no one can come to him unless the Father's drawing them. And that is the work of God's Spirit. But how does God's spirit work here on earth? He works through us. And what does Psalm 67 say that we just read? God wants His ways to be known here on Earth. How are His ways going to be known here on earth but through us?

Are you with me? Can I get an Amen? Amen. Amen. Make sure you guys are still with me now. So here we are in a very, very dangerous situation, a very hostile situation, a very stressful situation, but at just the right time, in just the right place in God's sovereignty to be His witness in a practical way. And here are people's hearts being opened by what we're doing. Now, guess what? The first people whose hearts were opened were the people that actually worked for us.

Now, keep in mind, I'm a foreigner, and the team of the guys that work for us, we're all foreigners. We're all from other countries. So we have to hire local Afghans to help us with these

projects that we are implementing among the Afghan people. And it was so amazing to see the staff that God would give us and how God would open up their hearts when they would see the love that God had put in our hearts for not only our staff, but the people that we were serving. And so now this is where, if you don't mind, I'm going to transition a little bit from just the purely relief and development in a practical way of serving and loving people to what God began doing in the hearts of a couple of men.

In some of the projects we do, we build latrines. Now, in northern Afghanistan, there's no running water, there's no sewage, there's no electricity, there's no Internet, there's no telephone system. There's none of those things at all. And one of the things we try to do to help people develop themselves and to learn about sanitation, to learn about even some of the practical ways God would want the universe to kind of work is by building latrines. And when we build Latrines, we can go in and share about sanitation and share about cleanliness, share about disease, share about why sometimes people might get sick. It might be because a lack of sanitation, for example.

And we hired two particular men. Their names were Suleiman and Nadir. For those of you who want to pray later on, will you please remember Steve and Nick? That might be easier for you to remember these two guys. Name these two Afghan men that we hire. One of them is an Uzbek, and one of them is from a mountain tribe called the Shigni people. It's an unreached tribe. The Bible is not written in their language. And so again, keep in mind something that God is about to do here in our Relief and Development response.

He's going to give us a man who's an Uzbek. He's going to give us a man who's a Shigni, and they're going to work with us. And we're going to have the privilege of every day interacting with them and touching them and sharing God's love with them. Now, is everybody with me? One day I'm in my office and I'm just sitting there drinking tea.

Sometimes it was very hard to find time to take a break for this particular day. I knew that if I didn't take a break, I was going to break myself and come apart. Or you're going to tell yourself apart, as Ben Savner said. And that's a summary of what Jesus told the disciples after a big time of ministry. Say, "Hey, that's great, guys. Let's go have a little time to rest." And so I was in my little office one day, just drinking some tea, and guess who come in my office? Steve and Nick. Suleiman and Nadir.

Steve and Nick come in my office and I'm thinking, just regular day, no big deal. I know these guys, and blah, blah, blah. And now in our conversation, they begin to open up and begin to share things that God has been doing in their life, things that they have been observing in our lives as the "Christians" that are there working with them and serving their people. And to make a long story short, they end up asking if I would give them "al'iinjil." "Al'iinjil" is the Arabic word for New Testament or gospel.

And so here I am in this conversation with Steve and Nick. I have not verbally said anything to them yet. They've seen my life, no doubt. They probably have seen us pray. Prayer is one thing that we do a whole lot in Afghanistan, because that's what they do. That's what we should be doing anyway. And so here we are praying. And that's one way we've been sharing. But it's not

like I've been saying, "Hey, Dan, can I share a Romans road with you? Dan, are you sure if you die today, you go to heaven?" I've never asked an Afghan that. And probably never will ask in Afghan that. But here are Steve and Nick being drawn by our Father.

They are tasting the salt of the earth. You realize you're the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth. What does salt do? It makes people thirsty. And so, of course, maybe sometimes we're like the salt that's lost its flavor and therefore it's not good for anything. But here are these two men that are coming to us because they feel drawn, they feel attracted, they feel like they want to know something. They want to learn about this.

And so here I am sitting that day, and of course, I really don't understand exactly how I should respond, but I told Steve and Nick, I said, "Yes, I will. I don't have one right now. Let's create a good opportunity to do this for you guys' own protection, because as I reminded them, a lot of our staff don't believe what I believe." They're not interested in this. They're very antagonistic. They're very against it.

And so we worked out a plan to give them the Bible, and it was a little New Testament, and we picked the right time in the right place, and I gave Steve and Nick the New Testament. Now back to seeds, growth, and fruit. Steve and Nick began reading the New Testament for about a year, and we all just continued sharing with them and loving them and praying with them and working with them.

None of us ever said, Where are you guys at in this journey? Who would you say Jesus is? And are you ready to be saved? Do you know for sure if you die right now, you'd go to heaven? None of us asked any of them those questions. We just continued loving them, working with them, being Christ before them. But we knew what we knew that the Word of God was now in their hands. Now, you said well, John, you said a while ago it wasn't in their language. Well, let me make sure you understand.

In Afghanistan, everybody speaks Dari. Dari is a form of Persian. That's the national language to some degree. And so we gave them the New Testament in Dari. As I told you, Nick or Nadir is Uzbek. The scriptures are not yet in his language, but some friends of ours in the western part of the country are in the process of translating that. And Nadir, Nick has even had an opportunity to be a part of that to a small degree.

Steve, or Suleiman is Shigni. The Bible is not in his language, but he's reading it in a second language. So we know that the Word of God is now in their hands. And what is the word of God? It is the seed. It is the incorruptible word by which all of us have been born again. So the seeds in their heart, they begin reading it. Now, what does Steve begin doing? He says, man, this is good stuff. So what does he do? He starts reading it with his wife. He starts reading it with his kids. He starts reading it with his relatives.

And so now we're going to add one more character to this story, a guy named Faiser Rachman, which we call him Frank. Okay, that's a little bit easier. You with me? So you got Steve, you got Nick, and you got Frank. Steve shares the word of God with Frank. Now, in this particular

process or journey, Steve and Nick at times would come to us and ask if we would give them more NGOs or more New Testaments for them to give to their friends. Now, keep in mind, none of us have actually confronted them, are you a Christian? Have you become a Christian? None of us have done that yet. We're just patiently allowing God to allow his own seed, the incorruptible word of God, to work in their hearts.

And so we would feed them and fuel them and give them what they would ask for so that they could spread the seed, the word of God, with those that were around them. So there's other people that were added to this picture, but I just want to keep it right now with these three guys, Steve, Nick and Frank, because they became mainly the foundation of the church that God's planting in Afghanistan. Everybody stay with me? All right.

Now, somewhere in the process, we thought, wow, we really should ask the Lord for an opportunity to show these guys a Jesus film, because they've been reading the Word, they're asking us some questions, and we're answering your questions. We're praying for them. We know God is working in their heart. They are, in an excited way, sharing this with their friends. So no doubt something's going on in their spirit, something's going on in their heart, God's revealing Himself to them.

And so one day, it was actually Christmas. It was the two days after Christmas. One of my most memorable Christmases was in Afghanistan, where on Christmas Day, we watched the GS film with some of our staff that really weren't very interested, but they were curious and they knew it was Christmas. And we had told them we were going to watch it anyway because that's what we

believe. And out of the relationship we had with them, they watched it, but none of them have become believers. The seed was planted, but they really are not really interested.

Two days later, we watch it with Steve, Nick, Frank and another guy, who I'm not going to add to the picture because I just want to focus on these three guys. And we watched the film with them, and again, we let the end of the tape play. Everybody's heard the end of the tape. You know what I'm saying? You pray a prayer, but none of us at the end ask them, hey, did you pray the prayer? None of us did. Okay.

Now, I probably should tell you that the most of our team at this particular time were just a bunch of young rebel guys like me. And we look back on this experience and see that we are quite amazed that God gave us a measure of grace and a measure of patience just to wait, because I've had the Campus Crusade stuff and the Evangelism explosion stuff and gone door to door and done all this type stuff. And that's how I normally would approach. Things here, and so were the other guys that were with me and the other couples. But thankfully, God somehow his mercy just allowed us just to relax, just to be still, to share our love for them, to share their Word with them and allow Him to work as he would want them to work.

Now, so guess what the next thing was? They said something like this: "We want to study the Bible." Now, keep in mind, they've been reading it now for about a year and a half, and they have asked questions and they have expressed interest. And we probably, in our mind, have already thought, these guys believe. These guys are probably more aware of who Jesus is than most of our friends, even in the States. I mean, the word of God is just transforming their lives.

It was very hard to have a conversation with one of these guys and not hear something related to God's word come out of their heart, because it's out of your heart to just speak. And so anyway, they begin asking questions like, "Why don't you guys get with us to study the Word of God?" And at different times, different ones of our team would do that again, we didn't want it to get too big, too soon. We didn't want it to draw too much attention to these guys. So keep in mind, this is Afghanistan. These guys could easily be killed for their association with Christianity.

So the thing continues. They begin still asking if we will study the Word of God within. We begin doing that. And then this past year, Steve and Frank especially just were really hungry for God's Word, really growing, really asking questions. And so I had the privilege for about three months, every day at 5:00, we would sit down in the afternoon and read the Word of God together. And it is amazing just to see how God's Word has again transformed and is transforming your life.

Now guess what the next question was? "John, we want to get baptized." And now we're really thinking, now wait a second, guys. This is serious stuff, and this is Afghanistan. This is not Alabama or Arkansas. You know what I'm saying? This is Afghanistan. Now, just between us. It's changed now, but just between us. Prior to this story I'm about to tell you, I have never met an Afghan believer who's been baptized in his own country. I've met some that have been baptized in Iran and in Pakistan, the former Soviet Union, in Western countries, but I've never met an Afghan believer that's been baptized in his own country. So you can imagine the initial

reaction of kind of a natural fear that kind of came over us when these guys were saying, hey, we want to be baptized. So what we decided to do was for about a month.

We just began studying the Scriptures about what it teaches and what it implies. And we're just going to kind of see how God worked in their life. To see if was this just maybe an impulse because they read something or was this really what God has done in their heart now during that month. That was August of 2002 and September of 2002. Just a little bit last year around the anniversary of 9/11. And that was one of the most remarkable or memorable months of my life, every day being able to get with these guys.

By this time when it would come to pray, normally I would pray or normally someone else would pray. But here these guys, it was amazing. First of all, what they did was they memorized the Lord's Prayer and that's how they began praying. And then it was once they started praying that and once they started realizing that something has happened in their heart, they have come to faith. They have confessed that Jesus Christ is their Lord. They have confessed that he is the Son of God and he is alive. That means that they're alive. And that means that they are now united with God, their Father, reconciled to Him.

And so here they are just from their heart, they just begin praying. And keep in mind, none of us at this point have said anything about salvation. We haven't said anything about the Romans Road. We haven't said anything about how someone comes to faith. It was just something God began doing in their heart by His Word. You still with me?

Well, now it's about the first week of September, and these guys are still San Jose John. We want to get baptized. And so our thought was, well, why don't we baptize these guys on September 11, the anniversary of September 11, 9/11. What a better testimony to the principalities and powers of what God's transforming grace does in taking two Afghans who no doubt by most of the world had been blamed for the atrocities and the terrorism in the world, and to baptize them on the anniversary of 9/11 to show that God's grace has transformed their life. The blood of Christ has washed their sins away and they are now followers of Christ.

Well, we didn't do it on September 11, and partly because that was a Wednesday. In an Afghan culture, Wednesday is a busy day. That's the market day, the bazaar day. And there's camels and donkeys and hundreds of peoples and people all over the place and just not a good day to kind of do something that might draw some attention. So we thought we would do it on September the 13th because September the 13th was a Friday. Hopefully none of you guys are superstitious. It was Friday the 13th. And if you are, give up that trash.

And here it is. It's September the 13th. It's a Friday. These guys are serious about this. They've confessed their faith in Christ, that he is Lord that he's the Son of God, and they've come to faith in him.

And it's obvious they've been sharing it, too, with their families. At this point, we think that Steve has already led his wife to the Lord. Frank's in the process of doing the same with his wife. They're reading it with their kids. They've shared with other people that are there's actually about

seven men that are in the picture now. But I just want you guys to focus on these three guys right now Steve, Frank and Nick.

So anyway, on September 13, I have the unique privilege of getting in our little truck. We have a little truck that we use to do our relief and development work bought by the American government. Praise God for the American government who supports most of our relief and development projects. And I go and pick Steve and Frank up.

Nick was not in town. And I'll tell you the story in a minute how this has progressed, which is kind of neat, the way the Lord worked this out. Nick was not in town. He was out doing a project. But Steve and Frank still wanted to do this on this particular Friday. And so I go and pick them up, and we're driving in the car. We got some Doughty worship tapes and some scripture tapes. We're just having a wonderful time worshipping in the truck. We go about an hour out of the city in the northern part of Afghanistan on the bank of the river, right in the valley, right near the Hindu Kush. Absolutely beautiful place, wish I could take all of you guys there.

And we stopped the truck, and this was the place that they wanted to do this at. And we walked down there. And again, we've been talking about this for months. We've been planning this for months. And the conclusion of our team and the conclusion of Steve and Frank was that I would baptize Steve and then he would baptize Frank. And then next appropriate time, when Nadir, Nick came back, they would baptize him. And that's how this thing would continue to spread.

Only one of us would baptize one of them. They would baptize the rest, and they would continue this thing on and on and on with those that were interested.

So here we are, on September 13, in the Kokcha River. And for those of you who have the chance to read the book, you're going to learn that the year before, the Kokcha River was the front line. It was the actual natural barrier, or front line barrier, that separated our work from the evil activity of the Taliban. And here I am, a year later in the same river that used to kind of symbolize my protection from the front line and my protection from and all of our staff and all of our workers protection from the tyranny and the terrorism of the Taliban in terms of their civil war. Here we are a year later in the river with two Afghan men who say, we love Jesus Christ. He is our Lord. He is the Son of God.

And as they say in Old Hillbilly, North Carolina English, "Come hell or high water, we're going to follow Him." We believe in Him. We're willing to lay down our lives for Him, and we want his kingdom to come to our family, to our relatives, to these mountains, to this area where we live. And I don't really have words to describe how sweet it was to be able to look into Steve's eyes and question him about his faith, because I already know you believe. You know what I'm saying? But you kind of had to do that because that's what we do in the west. You've got to ask certain questions before you baptize somebody.

And so here I am, looking at this man whom I admire and respect and kind of feel like a Jonathan, David's situation with him as a brother and asked him about his faith and pray for him

and then baptize him in the name of the Lord. And then he calls, of course, Frank standing there, but he brings Frank to himself and does the same thing for Frank and then baptizes him.

And then here we stand in the river a year after September 11, an American and two Afghans, and to simply lift up our hands to heaven and just spontaneous joy and love and worship and gratitude and gratefulness for what? The seeds, the growth and the first fruits. And these guys actually believe that that's what happened, that they are the first fruits of what God wants to do in northern Afghanistan. They believe that God wants a church planting movement to take place in northern Afghanistan. And I want to invite all of you, please, to partner with them and partner with God our Father and what he is doing there, if nothing else, by praying for them.

These are your brothers. And everywhere I go, they know I tell stories about them and what God has been doing in their life. So they would probably want me to say thanks for your prayers and thanks for your involvement. It's amazing. Since September 11, God has not only maybe refocused the world in the Muslim world, but in a big way, He refocused our attention on Afghanistan.

And those of you who kept up with history in terms of what was the events that were going on around September 11, you probably know that all the Christian workers pretty much had to leave the country after September 11. And at one particular time, there only were a handful of, as we would say, cross-cultural Christian workers in Afghanistan. And guess what? Now, just a little bit more than a year and a half later, there very well could be 200 dedicated Christian workers in Afghanistan.

Why? Because people have been praying and asking, as it was said today, "Lord of the harvest, send laborers to Afghanistan." And today I want to invite you to pray that the Lord of the Harvest would send laborers to Afghanistan and invite you to pray that God would take Steve and Frank and Nick and their wives and their children. These are all grown men. This is not a student movement. We ask God for it not to be that way because usually in the Muslim world where it's a student movement, it doesn't go very far. I don't mean that negative. I know you guys are students. We're in a Western culture. This is totally different. We're in the United States, but in a Muslim country, usually it only can go so far.

You study the Book of Acts, you see a lot of household salvations. You see a lot of the elder of the leader or the older one in the family becoming a believer, and then the rest of the family kind of followed. And that's what the cry of our heart was, that in Afghanistan, God would allow something to take place in terms of seeds, growth, and fruit that would bring whole families to himself. And so now I want to invite you to pray for Steve and Frank and Nick and for their wives and for their children that God would sustain them, that God would protect them.

They're like little lambs among a bunch of wolves. And would you pray that they would be the first fruits and that God would allow a church planting movement to take place in northern Afghanistan? Are you with me on that? You got those three names and that association, that story. Maybe the way God kind of used the relief and kind of allowed it to go into building intimate relationships with people and ministering to them and sharing the word of God with them.

You see the cycle that one man plants, someone else waters. God gives the increase. And those that God chooses to use in the process, the Bible says, are nothing because it's God who gives increase. We just have the privilege to partner with God in planning or in watering. It's God who gives forth the increase.

Now, if you guys don't mind, I think we've got a few more minutes, if you guys don't mind, is that paper still being passed around? We may have more than 72 people, but that's fine. If we have more than 72 people, I'll order some more books because I really would like for every one of you to have one if you don't already have one. So if you haven't signed that, please sign it now.

Can I tell you something a little bit personal? And then can we go to prayer? Is that okay? How many of you have ever heard a song that Twilight Paris sings called "The Warrior is a Child"? Anybody ever heard that song? And I'm going to cry just trying to share it with you. I'm not a singer. If I were, I would sing it but it talks about how that at times, soldiers need a quiet place to rest. It talks about soldiers getting wounded in the fight, even though they have the armor that's the best, even though we are clothing the righteousness of Christ, and even though we have the teachings of Ephesians, chapter 6. There's a lot of injury and woundedness that takes place on the mission field among those that are on the front lines.

And it can happen anywhere. It doesn't necessarily have to be in Afghanistan or the Muslim country. I want to tell all of you this because I know you're going to be praying for me, is that I

am learning it's funny you even said that. I am learning just how much the past three years of my life has worn on me. And honestly, there are times where I don't even have the strength to speak. There's times where I just feel totally exhausted. It's like I've been totally spent.

And I really would want to say that to you to be vulnerable and to be honest and to be real, that sometimes missions and ministry can be messy and sometimes it can leave people somewhat frazzled because they've been in an environment where there's been a natural war going on around them, but even a spiritual war going on. And no doubt the devil lives like a rowing line he's trying to seek those that he may devour and no doubt there's the pressures of life, the stress of life and all these things. So I just want to confess to you that I really covet your prayers and would really ask for your prayers for me personally and resettling to the States. It's very difficult. I know all of you understand this.

I feel like I don't have a home. I was just back in Afghanistan last month, and I go back there and I cry when I get there because I know my heart is there. And then I had to leave and I came back. And I cry when I'm here because I don't know where my heart is.

And sometimes I have to sing the old hymn. "This world is not my home I'm just a passing through and my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." So I want to share it to you to ask that you really not think, wow. John, some "hero of the faith." No, I put my shoes on the same way you do, and I go through the same struggles that you do, probably. I've gone through more the past couple of years than most of you have yet to face because experience is still in progress for most of you.

So would you really pray for me individually and personally? I really would like that. Now, to get even more personal in this 1 minute closing, I recently got engaged. God has brought a wonderful gift into my life. Her name is April Zeiss and she's studying at Columbia International University, and we are trying to build our relationship and our engagement.

But guess what? Let's be honest. It's very hard to build a relationship when you're very stressed out and you feel all of this pressure and burden from ministry and you're traveling a whole lot. So I know some of you don't know me from Adam, and that's okay. I just want to be honest with you, because we're the body of Christ.

We should be honest and we should be real with one another. And I probably am also experiencing some natural struggles just being able to build a relationship with the sister that I believe God has given me. And part of it may be and I don't want to go into any stories because you may not understand it. You realize I lived in Afghanistan, and I never talked to a woman. I don't have any interaction with women in Afghanistan.

Now, I'm not trying to say that that means I'm so culturally unadjusted. I don't have a conversation with a woman. But maybe some of you would also pray for my fiancée, April, that God would give her grace in this process where her fiance at times doesn't know where he's at, doesn't know what he's doing, doesn't know what's up and what's down, and just being real vulnerable and real honest with all of you. So in a nutshell, we're praying for laborers to be sent to Afghanistan. We're praying for Steve and Frank and Nick, that God would protect them,

protect their wives and their children, and that the house church that he's forming among them would be the first fruits that would spread throughout that area in northern Afghanistan.

And then you're going to be praying for me and for my fiance, April. And maybe when you're in your little group, you can pray for one another as well, is this, what I've shared, relates to maybe what's going on in your own life. So can we take the next--I'll tell you what. We'll do this. If you need to leave, that's okay. But I think if you're okay with it, can we take the next ten minutes and just pray in relation to what we've just talked about? And then if some of you need to leave, that'll be okay. But if you don't have to leave, you can stay here. And we'll do some questions and answers as long as you guys would want to.

Is that okay? All right. So can we get, like, in a little? Hopefully you guys are okay with that. Maybe get with your neighbor or someone you know, someone you feel comfortable with, and just spend some time praying for these requests.