

# DESPITE TROUBLING TIMES

God's protection in the midst of trauma

BY RON BROWN

Civil unrest in Guinea 2007

The guard knocked on the International Worker's bedroom window. He informed her that he could hear the voices of bandits outside the compound walls plotting to scale the wall and break into the house. The worker called her housemate, and they began to pray for God's protection.

These workers had come to Africa to announce the Good News of the Kingdom. It was obvious these two women had been obedient to the heavenly calling, yet in that time of faithful obedience, they found themselves in great need. After time in prayer, they went back to sleep with peace in their hearts.

The guard knocked on the window again.

"They're gone," he said.

"What did you do to make them go?" queried the worker. He told her that he had walked the perimeter of the wall reading his New Testament. The worker recalled that she was inside praying at the same time.

"What happened?" she asked.

The guard explained that he could hear them saying, "We need to move on; there are too many men in white robes standing on these walls, we won't be able to get in." So they left.

As numerous countries in Africa are perceived to be nations of high security alert, traumatic incidents continue to affect the lives of International Workers.

In 2014, 22 Alliance workers in Guinea were evacuated out of the country due to the Ebola crisis. A decade ago, 77 C&MA workers were evacuated out of Ivory Coast



Photo Courtesy Colette Baudais

following a sudden, violent rebel takeover. In 1991, 38 Alliance workers had to suddenly depart from their ministries in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to political unrest.

In a 2005 study,<sup>1</sup> workers who experienced traumatic events during their career in Africa were asked how they could relate to the promise of God's keeping power. Five themes emerged from their thoughts:

## 1. THEY STILL BELIEVED IN GOD'S KEEPING POWER

The overwhelming conclusion arising from the data of 35 testimonies was the fact that the promise of Matthew 28:20 is true. "...I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Not one person questioned this promise.

The data yielded the unanimity of a deep sense of the Presence of God in the midst of trauma. Even during a horrific rape, a worker testified of God's Presence with her. Not once did anyone ask why God had forsaken them; rather, there was strong affirmation of a loving, heavenly Father who cares deeply and walks alongside his beloved children as they go through trials and tribulations.

## 2. THEY SAW THE BIG PICTURE OF REDEMPTION

God is at work in the world and is carrying out his global plan of redemption. Political evacuations, at times, serve to move workers to different portions of God's vineyard. One country's loss was another country's gain. God continues to build a redeemed people for himself despite troubling times. Workers were reminded of what God is doing all

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over the world and how even an evacuation could play a role within the redemptive plan of God for the nations.

### 3. THEY BECAME OPEN TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

One positive outcome in the midst of various traumas was the opportunity to begin a new assignment. One woman said her nature reacted against getting into a rut, so she almost welcomed evacuations, as hard as they are to live through. For her, they opened the door to new and challenging ministry opportunities.

In the past, workers often came to Africa with a career destination involving only one country. Today's workers often have multiple careers in a number of countries. Among those interviewed, only 10 out of 35 were still in the country where they began their service.

The positive side of this kind of transition is that there is a certain opportunity to start with a "fresh page;" mistakes of the past do not have to be repeated in the next venture. Transition has provided opportunity for lessons learned the hard way to be practised in new situations.

### 4. THEY FOSTERED STURDY RELATIONSHIPS

Because of the strong evidence that good relationships served as a key factor in sustaining victims through and after trauma, it goes without saying that building, fostering, and nurturing relationships within teams both nationally and regionally is of utmost importance.

Doing things that contribute to the team's relationships had been a high priority for leadership teams who were later affected by trauma. Strategic plans included team-building events, and budgets provided for things like prayer retreats and field forums to ensure that healthy team relationships were functioning well. Data shows that in the day of trouble, workers were sustained by their healthy network of relationships.

### 5. THEY LIVED IN SCRIPTURE

The workers interviewed were rooted in God's Word. They easily quoted passages that had provided an anchor for their souls. Others used Scripture to explain their understanding of suffering and how they actually expected trials in this life.

Several mentioned the benefit of memorized verses that they repeated during difficult days. Following his trauma, a worker woke up singing and feeling very close to God. God ministered through Scripture, and his voice was heard.

God provided everything needed to carry on the work of the Kingdom. The data revealed that International Workers on the field experienced the protection of God and proved that he walks with them. Through sturdy relationships and God's Word, they found strength and nurturing in the journey.

In high security nations, International Workers continue to walk in the confidence of God's promise: "...I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). 

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1 Brown, Ronald. 2005. Self-identified retention factors by Western missionaries in Africa who have experienced traumatic events. D.Min. project. Trinity International University.

