



PARTNERING WITH CHURCHES



Framework for Transformation
Book 4

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Introduction: Seven Core Principles

This is just one of seven core principles in this Framework for Transformation. All seven work together and reinforce one another as we seek to see God bring transformation to the brokenness in our world. The principles are:

- **Depending on God** - It's God who transforms. We need to look to Him for wisdom, provision, and supernatural intervention.
- **Nurturing Truth and Confronting Lies** - To see transformation in physical poverty and injustice, we must confront the wrong beliefs that undergird them.
- **Integrating Physical and Spiritual** - The biblical teaching that all of life is meant to be lived for God's glory changes how we understand poverty and the way we seek to address it.
- **Partnering with the Church** - The local church, Christ's bride, is key to addressing brokenness.
- **Focusing on the Vulnerable** - To see lives transformed, we must help vulnerable people to reclaim their identity as image-bearers of their Creator and stewards of the earth.
- **Mobilizing Local Resources** - As people stuck in poverty discover and use their God-given resources for God's glory, their thinking is transformed.
- **Pursuing God's Ways** - We need to be intentional and faithful to choose God's ways, which are higher than our own.

You can download PDFs of the other booklets (or request hard copies) and access additional articles, stories, and blogs about these seven core principles at frameworkfortransformation.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Partnering with the Church	1
The church is precious	4
We are ONE—a body, a family	5
The local church is an essential part of addressing brokenness	7
Addressing the needs of vulnerable people is the local church's role	8
It points people to God	8
It strengthens the local church	10
It heals relationships with the community and leaders	11
It recognizes that God is at work in and through the church	12
We need it	13
And yet...a word of caution	14
Healthy partnerships develop appropriate roles	17
Examine our beliefs	18
Recognize and challenge our partner's beliefs	21
Healthy partnerships are long term and slow	22
Invest time	25
Limit the number of partnerships	28
Move at the speed of our partner's capacity	29
Build trust	30
Healthy partnerships exercise caution around money	35
We are ALL called to steward wisely and to give	36
Beliefs about money have created wrong expectations and practices	37

God blesses those who give	38
So, when do we give?	40
Healthy partnerships bring appropriate inputs	43
Bring expertise	44
Find the right training content	47
Expect your partner to contribute	52
Healthy partnerships are mutually accountable	52
Accountability for follow-through	52
Accountability for results	54
How to hold a partner accountable	55
Healthy partnerships share decision-making	57
Commit to getting your partner's perspective	58
Be slow to give input	59
Be aware of the immovables and where you can take risks	60
Selecting partners	62
Expect a lot from your partners	62
Allow partners to choose you	63
Get recommendations from someone in the country	64
Partner with denominations or organizations	65
Pray	66
Conclusion	66
Reflect and Apply	69

PARTNERING WITH THE CHURCH

My relationship with the Church in the Majority World started out with some unhelpful baggage. I arrived and started teaching English. While I wouldn't have admitted it in so many words, I felt I was better than the people I came to serve. Teaching English didn't really improve my attitude, since I did, on that topic, know more. I attended a local church, and when I finally learned enough of the language to follow the sermons a bit, the misapplication of scripture drove me nuts. It also served to affirm my belief that these people were desperately behind. I felt pity for them—all Bible colleges had been closed for more than 25 years by then. They had so little access to information. There were very few Christian books in their language, the internet was non-existent, and Christian gatherings were very, very restricted. In my mind, we missionaries were definitely urgently needed.

In 1999, I went to a conference where we were challenged to work through the local church in our efforts to alleviate poverty. At that time, it was illegal for a registered organization to work with churches, so engaging with the Church had solely been something that I had done with my free time. However, feeling convicted by the messages at the conference—and after much prayer—I decided to try to work with churches. So we closed down the registered organization and started an unregistered program seeking to partner with rural churches (and thus began the program now called Truth Centered Transformation, or TCT).

As we began working closely with churches, I started to see a very different side of the Church. I learned that all church leaders met for the first three days each month to pray and fast. I had fasted a few times for three days when facing major decisions, but certainly not every month. But for these pastors, who faced endless arrests and persecution, it was the norm.

The more closely I worked with the church, the more I was inspired. We employed 16 part-time trainers to go out and train churches in our program. They all made training plans and set to work. Within one week I heard that one had been arrested and was locked up! I felt sick, and questioned the whole idea of working with the churches. Was it really worth it to put people's lives in danger?

A week later the trainer called. "Anna," she said, "I need to ask you something."

I thought I knew what she was going to say: she was resigning. (I certainly would.)

“I was wondering,” she continued, “can I change my training plan? While I was sitting in the cell, I thought of two more churches that need to be trained. Can I add them to my plan?”

I was both confused and sobered. She wanted to do more, not less. For the first time, it occurred to me that maybe I wasn’t worthy to have these people call me “boss.”

As time went on, what the churches achieved equally humbled me. I was amazed at the stories the trainers brought back of how churches were loving their communities—everyone giving time and material goods to serve their neighbors. They worked in fields, built houses, and repaired water systems. Within four years, the first churches announced that the communities where they were situated had moved out of poverty—purely on the basis of their hard work and God’s intervention. I had never in a million years dreamed that they could achieve that. My assessment of their capacity and God’s goodness had been way off.

When it comes to the topic of partnering with Majority World churches, we arrive with a wide variety of experiences and opinions. Some have seen the brokenness and corruption that exist and declare the Church too broken to work with. Others feel that local churches are so poor it’s just not fair to expect too much. Still others stand in admiration of pastors who spend hours a day in prayer; they believe these spiritual giants can do no wrong. Whatever our experiences, they need to be balanced with a few basic, biblical truths.

The church is precious

Two days ago a man with a machete hid in my living room while I was on the phone with my husband who was traveling. After I went to bed, he stole a few things. (I know he had a machete because he mysteriously left it behind for me to find in the morning.) When we realized what had happened, I was relieved. I lost a handbag, not a hand. My body was fine. New handbags can be purchased, but bodies are precious. My husband, on the other hand, was beside himself. He would have much rather that the roles were reversed—that he had faced a burglar while I was far away. There was nothing worse in his mind than the idea that his bride was in danger and he couldn't help.

Both of our reactions were quite natural. We are designed to cherish and protect our bodies. In a healthy marriage, a husband deeply loves his bride and wants what's best for her. And these are the two metaphors that God uses for His people, the Church: Christ's body and His bride¹. It gives me pause.

“ Christ calls the Church "My body" and "My bride." ”

Do we feel the same concern and protectiveness about the Church as we do for our body and bride? If I get even a small ear infection, everything else grinds to a halt. Even more so if I were to break a leg—nothing would be more important than getting it into a cast. I certainly wouldn't just declare my leg useless and ignore it. Likewise, I would never dare to approach

¹ Ephesians 4:15-16, Ephesians 5:23-32, Revelation 19:7

a friend and tell them everything that annoys and irritates me about their spouse. Yet, there are times I've spent hours critiquing the Church.

“ *If the Church is broken, we're called to seek her healing as we would for our own bodies.*”

If the Church is broken, we have been called to seek her healing, in the same way we would be quick to seek healing for our own bodies. We can't turn our back on the Church because of its brokenness. Likewise, our role is not to critique and criticize Christ's bride. Instead, we need to get involved to help her where she is struggling.

We are ONE—a body, a family

Unity is an idea repeated often in the Bible—especially in the New Testament, once the Church was founded. Jesus, maybe predicting the chaos ahead, prayed that we would be one². Paul kept coming back to the idea that we are called to be one.³ Again and again we are reminded that we are one body with many members, all with different functions but called to work together and honor each other. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all

² John 17:20-21

³ For example: Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 1 Corinthians 12, Philipians 2:2

reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

While it's easy to pretend (at least for me) that these passages are referring to our own lovely church, there is absolutely no indication that's the case. We aren't lots of ones. All of us—every Christian in every church everywhere in the world—are one. One body. If we fly to another country, go to a neighborhood, and minister to people, while ignoring the part of the body that God has already put there, that is strange. It's every bit as strange as if I always used one side of my body and neglected the other side. After a while, my left hand, should it have a mind of its own, would be perfectly entitled to wonder why I always insist on twisting around to pick up things on the left of my body when my left hand is available, right there, and able to pick up things as well. It might even be a little miffed or feel undermined—sentiments that the Church around the world has also expressed about church groups showing up and serving in their communities without even acknowledging their presence.

Further, woven all throughout the New Testament is also the idea of the Church as a family. I grew up in a largely independent culture. Every person was expected to be responsible for him or herself. Then I married into a collective culture, where everyone is highly interdependent. Here, family is everything, and it's unthinkable that someone would visit a town without stopping to say hello to any family they have in that town.

The Bible was written to equally collective people. They understood family as my husband does—not as a bunch of

independent people who happen to share a genealogy. When the New Testament refers to us as “the family of God” and “the family of believers,”⁴ the original audience understood that we are responsible for one another, that we sacrifice for one another, that if we do well while others in our family aren’t doing well then we’ve failed.

The Bible doesn’t spell it out because the people knew and lived it. They knew that, when we became sons and daughters of one Father, we became one family. And that means everything. We no longer stand alone. And we definitely can’t swoop into town to help the vulnerable while ignoring the very people God has raised up there to do that job.

If there is any one reason why we should partner with the local church, it’s because the Bible leaves us little alternative. While it may be cleaner and easier to go it alone, it simply isn’t God’s design.

“As members of God’s family, we’re responsible for one another.”

The local church is an essential part of addressing brokenness

If we really want to see the lives of those who are vulnerable transformed, then we must work with the churches in the

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:10 and 1 Peter 2:17

communities where those vulnerable people are. There are so many reasons why. Here are a few:

Addressing the needs of vulnerable people is the local church's role

Local churches are called to serve those who are vulnerable. James 1:27 tells us that “religion that God accepts as pure and faultless” involves caring for orphans and widows. Throughout the book of Acts, we see the Church caring for the needy in their community—even setting up special systems to make sure their needs were met (Acts 6). And in Galatians 2:10, when Paul was sent out to preach the gospel and plant churches, he was given one additional command—to “remember the poor.” The role of the church in engaging with vulnerable people, in being ministers of reconciliation, and in building God's Kingdom was never in doubt in the early Church. It's not a role just given to the wealthy church but to every believer. If we, as outsiders, swoop in to do the ministry for local churches, we undermine their God-given role in their community.

It points people to God

In one country that restricted Christianity and actively persecuted believers, a small, rural church decided to help some orphans living in a nearby non-Christian village. So they built the orphans a new house. The next Sunday, they were surprised to see an extremely violent gang leader turn up in church. His random acts of violence were so well known and extreme that even the police and government officials avoided

him. The pastor was shocked and asked why he was there. The gang leader shared that he wanted to become a Christian! He explained that when he was young he was also an orphan, but no one had cared for him. When he saw the love of the church towards orphans, he knew their God was real, so he wanted to follow the God of the Christians. That day he gave his life to Christ and completely changed. The community where he lived was so amazed when they saw the change in this man that they decided the God of the Christians was both real and the most powerful of any spirits, so 107 more people decided to commit their lives to Christ! The officials (who had been trying to stamp out Christianity) were so pleased that the gang leader no longer attacked them that they agreed to allow the Christians to build a church in the area.

For years, I worked for an organization that ran literacy programs, vocational trainings, and micro-enterprise loan programs. We certainly never saw results like that little church did. It was normal for people to

thank us profusely for our work in their community. Even if we pointed to God, they still praised us or the organization. They didn't see God, they saw us as the heroes. The fact is, outsiders are seen as having plenty of resources, so they are expected to do projects like this. However, when people see the sacrificial love of their local church, instead of feeling like the church is fulfilling an obligation, they see the love of God through them.

“ *The local church is called to engage with vulnerable people, to minister reconciliation, and to build God's kingdom.* ”

It strengthens the local church

A few years into our program working with rural churches, trainers were reporting great spiritual growth. I was really confused. We only provided two three-day trainings per year, and yet people were reporting great strides in their faith. However, when they explained, it made sense. Before, Christianity had been seen as a type of “fire insurance”—something to ensure that life after death went well. With their background in animism, believers saw things like Bible reading, attending church, and prayer as ways to gain merit, ensuring that they really would get to heaven. There was no real sense of a relationship with God that might impact daily life.

As they started to understand that God cares about things like health, they were moved. They couldn't believe that God loved them so much that it mattered to Him if they were healthy or sick. Similarly, when they went out to serve their neighbors, they got stuck. When they got stuck, they prayed. When they prayed, God turned up in all sorts of ways. They realized He actually cared about their projects and their needs. So, as they saw God act, their desire to know Him increased. No longer was He an abstract being that promised heaven after death, but He was an intimate God involved in their lives.

“ *When people see the sacrificial love of their local church, they see the love of God through them.* ”

There is something about needing God to turn up that does wonders for strengthening our prayer life. It's the same for the villagers where we work. Their faith is strengthened as they step out, take risks in obedience to God, and experience Him answering prayer.

It heals relationships with the community and leaders

As mentioned, I worked in a country that aggressively opposed Christianity. I was shocked when, only a few months after starting to work with churches, I started to see reports of healed relationships with the local government and non-Christian neighbors. Persecution dropped dramatically in many of the areas where churches were reaching out to show love to their communities. We often heard stories of local leaders who were so pleased to see roads fixed, bridges built, and water sources restored that they started to work with the church on various efforts, gave them praise certificates, and told all other community members that they too should join the church. Local government officials also started to welcome Christians into areas where there was no church, asking them to go and share their faith there as well.

As the program has spread to other nations, we've heard similar stories. In India they reported that, in the past, the Church had the reputation of "snatching" people and converting them. Families would warn their children, "Don't go near the church. They will snatch you!" Everyone was fearful and didn't want to be the next "victim." As churches have started to show love to their communities, this is changing. No longer is the Church

considered a dangerous entity, but families are sending their children to church and attending themselves. Churches are growing rapidly.

While in some nations the Church is well respected, in too many it isn't. As churches reach out to love the vulnerable in their communities, it's a powerful witness that brings healing. Coming as outsiders just doesn't have the same impact. The community doesn't see their local church in the spotlight and doesn't recognize our actions as the sacrificial love of Christ.

It recognizes that God is at work in and through the church

In reality, God is already at work through His bride. They might not have everything right, but who does? Most churches are filled with people who are sincerely seeking Him. Anywhere we go to reach out, we are really just joining the story of what God is already at work doing in that place. Partnering with the local church recognizes that reality. It recognizes that God is as likely—maybe more so—to speak to them about what needs doing as He is to speak to us.

God can give them the needed wisdom and help them see the resources available to do whatever He is calling them to do.

“*Anywhere we go, we are joining the work that God is already doing.*”

We need it

Years of living in a different country and cross-cultural marriage have significantly changed the way I understand many Bible passages. Counting the cost of discipleship is much less theoretical. As mentioned, the concept of “family” took on a whole new meaning for me.

We all read the Bible through our own worldview. Without others challenging our understanding, we miss so much. We end up with a warped gospel. If anything, we in the West are more in danger of getting it wrong than our brothers and sisters who come from cultures that are much more reflective of the context in which the Bible was written. People living in rural villages in the Majority World know what it is to hang out at the well. They understand the horrible hardship of being a widow. They recognize how God’s incredible love was demonstrated by leading the Israelites through the desert with a cloud because they know what it is to walk in the hot sun. The Bible reads differently in these cultures.

Interacting with the Church in the Majority World, I am routinely challenged by her incredible prayerfulness and the miracles that seem commonplace. In many of the areas we work, it’s hard to get them to tell stories of miracles because to them a miracle only includes someone rising from the dead or something equally mind-blowing. The nearly weekly examples of God intervening—changing hearts of government leaders, giving them ideas, and providing

“Without others challenging our understanding, we end up with a warped gospel.”

resources—are considered so normal that they would never think to call them miracles. And yet, when I share these stories with Westerners, the most common reaction is, “My God was too small. Why don’t we see God doing the same things?”

God, in His goodness, has given each of us a part. If we are wise, we will learn from each other. There is so much to gain. We need to be careful that we don’t make the mistake that I did—turning up thinking I had the answers, ready to help these ‘uneducated’ pastors to learn while missing the fact that I had so much to learn from them.

There are many more reasons why partnering with the church is important. It multiplies impact. (You can only be in one place at a time. If you equip churches, then they can all be involved.) It creates ownership and sustainability. (It’s their project, so they will look after it long term.) It ensures longevity. (The church isn’t leaving.)

“ God has given each of us a role; we are to learn from each other.”

And yet...a word of caution

As much as I believe partnering with the local churches in the communities we seek to serve is important, I also feel cautious. For years I listened while leaders in the Majority World bemoaned the influence of foreign missionaries (all the while wondering if they knew I was actually a foreign missionary). “We used to depend on God. We used to pray and fast. And the church grew so quickly,” they complained, “We were united.

We stood together. Now we depend on outside money, we don't pray and fast, we implement programs instead, and we've forgotten we need God. All that money has divided us. We spend all our time fighting."

Sadly, they weren't wrong. I had lived in the country for about 10 years at the time I first heard this. When I arrived there were, at the most, 30 foreign missionaries in our city of millions. Ten years later, the average denominational leader boasted of balancing relationships with 30, 40, or even 80 different partners from places as diverse as South Korea, Brazil, Europe, Australia and the USA. Swarms of people would turn up every week, and training centers were packed with multiple conferences running in different rooms simultaneously. Our program leaders (who were also pastors) would complain of having to go to endless "useless" trainings where they kept learning the same (sometimes irrelevant) things again and again, and therefore were left with no time to pastor or teach. These trainings were organized, not because anyone saw them as useful to strengthen the churches, but because they brought in money—training money that could be siphoned off to pay for other denominational expenses or donations expected from the outsiders who had come to do the training. So denomination leaders assigned people to attend these trainings because they needed people to fill the room. The pastors weren't there to learn. They were there to raise funds for their denomination.

While the misuse of training is disappointing, the misuse of children is tragic. In one country, pastors told me they start orphanages as a way to raise funds. "Foreigners like to give to orphans," they assured me. So children are taken from their

families and kept in group homes to make a profit for the denomination. The leader maximizes his income by getting each child sponsored multiple times, hosting teams that give, or raising funds that don't actually go toward the children and their needs. The pastor often genuinely believes that the children are better off because they can go to a city school, which has better quality education than those in the rural areas. The creative accounting is all justified because his denomination needs money and orphanages are what foreigners like to give to.

Another tragedy I've watched unfold is the corrupting of godly pastors that I admired. As groups come handing over large (to them) sums of money, these pastors have been tempted and made unwise decisions. With little accountability required, it's easy to move a little money from its intended use to meet an essential need. Over time, that little becomes larger and larger amounts, and the "essential needs" become a new car or home for themselves.

In many ways, the Church is more beautiful than I could have ever imagined. It's also very broken. As we—one part of the broken Church—seek to partner with other parts of the broken Church, we need to be careful. The reality is that it is much easier to do harm than good. So we need to be intentional in creating healthy partnerships.

Healthy partnerships develop appropriate roles

With God's help, local churches can and do play a powerful role in seeing their communities transformed. In our work, we have seen more than 1,000 communities move out of poverty as churches reached out to love their community, as they sought God, and as they gave sacrificially. We've witnessed churches address the issues of domestic violence and debt, honor and equip people with disabilities, and care for orphans and elderly widows. No outside resources were given to any of those churches.

So what is our role as outsiders? If the local churches' role is to transform communities, then what should we do? We strengthen churches. A quick look around the world tells us that, while churches can and should be transforming their communities, most aren't doing it. Long after a church is planted in a community, the people live in absolute poverty, disease remains rampant, and church members still head off to witch doctors when they need healing. You can go from a mostly-Christian community to one with no known Christians and see absolutely no difference in how they live. Unless you were to turn up on Sunday morning or some other time when the church speakers were booming, you would never guess which was which.

So, if churches are more than able to bring transformation to their community, why aren't they?

In part it's because churches have absolutely no idea that this is something they could and should do. Our role is to open

their eyes to the calling God has given them, to help them see how to get started, and to encourage them as they move forward. Our role is to cheer them on, to pray with them when things get difficult, and to help them develop the skills they need. Our place is on the edges, often invisible, while the local church takes the spotlight.

“If the local churches' role is to transform their communities, then our role is to strengthen churches.”

There are a few things we must do in order to make sure we are a healthy partner in an appropriate role:

Examine our beliefs

There are a number of beliefs that can trip us up, but there are two common misconceptions that are the most critical.

Misconception 1: The local church is too poor to contribute

The churches we first partnered with were housed in rickety shacks, the people filled their bellies with grass and bark for months of the year, and their Bible knowledge was desperately lacking. Some of the churches had never heard of baptism and had very limited knowledge of who Jesus was. It was easy to declare them “too poor.” It was definitely hard to imagine what they were really going to contribute. My expectation was that they would do a few things and then get stuck. And then we, as the outside organization, would turn up with all the resources and expertise that they would need. If you have read other

booklets, you know that isn't even close to what happened. Instead, while I was still trying to work out what we were doing, churches started to report that there were no more needs in their communities. They had been transformed. There was no more hunger. There were wells and toilets, rubbish pits and vegetable gardens. Their children were in school, relationships in the community had been healed, and the churches were

“*God has given each person gifts, talents, and resources.*”

packed with those eager to serve. They were now off to help neighboring communities (sometimes creating roads to get there).

God has not forgotten some of His children and left them with nothing. Each of the people in a local church has been given gifts and talents appropriate to their situation. They have resources—sometimes time, materials, or tools, and always prayer and the power of God. We hear the most stories of miracles from those churches who are materially poorest. God hasn't abandoned them in their physical poverty. In fact, with a little encouragement, they are able to do the most remarkable things.

Misconception 2: Projects are the best way for outsiders to help

Marketing departments (also called “development departments”) of non-profit organizations have had a tough job. They've had to convince us to part with our hard-earned money to help someone halfway around the planet whom we will never meet. And they had to do so with content that we would consume in less than 30 seconds. The immensely

complex issues around poverty had to be simplified into short, easily-digestible sound bites.

Unfortunately, while all of this was done with good intentions, we've been left with an overly-simplified understanding of the problem of poverty and its solution. We see that people are carrying water a mile or two from a dubious water source and declare that they need a well. And while we are right—they do need a well—we don't usually take time to ask, "Who should dig the well?" How we answer that question has a long-term impact.

We outsiders can turn up with the money and equipment (or hand the church the money), the well will get dug, and the community will have a safe water source for about five years. For a few years, there will be a reduction in illness, but there won't be a reduction in the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and shame that most people in poverty express.⁵ The well will do nothing to increase their capacity to look to God for answers and to solve community problems. It won't help them gain the ability to see what resources God has given them and how to steward them. Instead that well reinforces the belief that outside funding really is the answer. To top it all off, by the five-year mark (sometimes sooner), the well has gotten dirty or it's broken, and so it sits neglected while people go back to carrying water. So while they did get

“The question is not so much, "Do they need a well?" but, "Who should dig the well?"”

⁵ We take an in-depth look at these ideas in the booklet "Focusing on the Vulnerable."

water for a time, the community never really moved toward the transformation we had hoped for when we contributed to the well project.

But what if the local church takes on the well project? I have received reports and seen photos of hundreds of churches building hundreds of wells. Beyond that, I would very conservatively estimate that at least 1,000 churches have cleaned the well or water source in their community (which only goes to testify how many are sitting neglected around the world). The churches can make it happen. And in doing so, they break the lies that Satan has used to trap them in poverty. They see what they are able to do with God's help and the resources He has already given them. The community also sees what the church is doing for them, and it changes their perspective. They recognize the church's sacrificial love and want to know the God who cares about their needs. After seeing the change they were able to make with clean water, the church and community go on to address other problems. In five years, when the well breaks down, they are quick to fix it. The well project truly has helped them along the path toward transformation.

Recognize and challenge our partner's beliefs

So again we are left with the question, "Why isn't this happening everywhere?" Again, the answer is beliefs. We Westerners aren't the only ones who turn up in the relationship with some distorted ideas; so do our partners. Probably the most common is the belief that they are poor and needy and, as such, should receive from those who have more.

The lie “we are lacking” probably holds more people in poverty than any other factor. It robs God’s glory because it keeps people from recognizing His goodness to them. And it keeps people from stewarding well what they do have. Instead of giving, they are left waiting for others to give to them.

Our role is to challenge these beliefs and present the truth. We can help them to see what they have and to know that God can take even a mustard seed and turn it into a mighty tree.⁶

“*The lie 'we are lacking' holds more people in poverty than any other factor.*”

Healthy partnerships are long term and slow

I love to mark things off my to-do list. There have even been times I have added completed tasks to my to-do list just so I can cross them off. I’m told this is common in the West, but I would never even confess this to my husband. Being from the Majority World, he would probably assume it was a joke... or else just add it to my long list of peculiarities. It’s a good reminder that this obsession with getting things done and making things happen—while normal to us Westerners—isn’t a universal value.

⁶ The booklet “Nurturing Truth and Confronting Lies” explains how beliefs affect behavior and outlines some key beliefs—ours, theirs, and societies—that hold people in poverty. The booklet “Focusing on the Vulnerable” goes much deeper into a few truths that are needed.

When it comes to meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable, those of us with a Western mindset love executing projects—the faster the better. And because the needs are immense, we come up with projects big enough to tackle them. With hearts full of compassion, we want to solve problems as quickly and efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, all that passion isn't actually bringing about the results that we hoped.

Imagine for a moment the average pastor in a Majority World country. Only 15 years ago he probably didn't have a mobile phone and had never heard of the internet; his world was limited to the people around him (including the very few who might visit his village). Today he's carrying a smartphone. Via social media, he's now able to have relationships that were unimaginable 15 years ago. In a number of nations, it's not unusual for a senior pastor to be juggling relationships with people from South Korea, North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Brazil simultaneously. All turn up with different agendas and expectations. All offer seemingly wonderful things. After years of scarcity, looking at the needs of his congregation and his meager collection plate, it's not hard to imagine why he says "yes" to all of them. His Bible school never gave any lessons on how to evaluate these opportunities, how to work with foreign partners, or when to say "no."

“ *Our passion for getting things done isn't actually bringing about the results that we hoped.* ”

Even if he was trained well to discern which partnerships are helpful and which are harmful, he barely has time to think through it. We

often turn up on brief trips, ready to make something happen. We want immediate answers to questions like, “What do you need?” and are excited to make a difference.

A friend told me about one interaction he had in rural Cambodia. He met Westerners who were cycling through the small town where he was living. They had stayed the night and attended church that morning. Later, he happened to bump into them in the town’s one small “restaurant.” The pastor at the church where they had attended had told the couple about a small savings program that the church had. The man, a venture capitalist, was excited by the idea of adding significant capital and expanding the program. My friend warned him that the church might not be ready, that no one would be able to do the accounting, and that bigger isn’t always better. But these were ideas that the cyclist couldn’t seem to grasp. He was used to big, fast deals. A world where small and slow is better was such a foreign concept to him that it just didn’t make sense.

While I have no idea how that story ended, I know how many similar stories do end—in disaster. Throwing large amounts of money into a church that isn’t ready for it and then demanding extraordinary results that the pastor can barely comprehend and has never been trained to deliver doesn’t end well.

Let’s remember our roles: we strengthen churches, and churches—through God’s power—transform communities. All of that takes time.

Transformation requires changing a whole lot of beliefs that people (on both sides of the ocean) have had for their entire

lifetimes. That's tough. To give an overly simple example, when I was growing up, it was common knowledge that, if you wanted to improve your health, you needed to eat a low-fat diet; high cholesterol levels and heart disease came as the result of too much of the wrong fat. As a result, I regard fatty food with suspicion. Today, there is a trend around eating low-carb, high-fat diets. No matter how many times I hear that, it just doesn't make sense. I watch friends chug down cream and eat piles of bacon, and I just can't bring myself to believe that could be even remotely good for you. I quite frankly refuse to change my beliefs despite my friends' cheerful testimonies

“ *Transformation requires changing lifelong beliefs, and that takes time.* ”

and informative YouTube videos. Some have lost significant weight eating this way and they do appear to still be healthy. But even with the evidence in front of my eyes, I still can't believe it.

We are asking our partners to change their thinking in far more significant and dramatic ways. That is not going to happen quickly or easily. If changing my beliefs about healthy eating is hard, then how much more difficult is changing beliefs about God, yourself, what you are able to do, and what you have? It all takes time and trust.

Invest time

In the first year of the TCT program, we only expect churches to do two Acts of Love—two small projects that take one day

or less to complete. A typical first-year Act of Love is picking up litter for a few hours. Another, as mentioned, is cleaning and desilting a water source. For most churches, serving their community like this is a brand new idea. So while it may seem wildly unimpressive by Western standards of evaluating development projects, these small Acts of Love are a big leap for them. And from our perspective, they are a critical first step on a long journey of transformation.

As we go to the churches and talk to them, we find that, for about 25 percent of them, the first one or two Acts of Love have completely changed how they think about their community and the church's role. Some explain that they used to serve their communities, but after they became Christians they were too busy with church activities. Others share that they've been waiting for years for the government to clean the water source, but it never happened. They tell us about their frustration—putting up with dirty water or a longer walk to get clean water, while no one came to fix the problem. But doing one Act of Love has changed their thinking completely. They have started to believe that they can bring change, so they are no longer victims forced to wait.

In the first two years, most churches just get some small projects done. They usually, quite literally, don't have the resources to do bigger projects. Or even if they do they can't see them, so they must start tiny. But by the end of year two, 75 percent of churches are sharing the realization that they can bring change with their own resources and actions. They are ready to do more. After five years, these communities are completely transformed out of poverty.

The reality is, if we used outside money we could achieve much more impressive project results in the first two years. But we wouldn't see the same transformations because speed doesn't allow for the change of thinking.

Let's go back to my overly simple example. Should I ever, ever decide to give the high-fat diet a try, I will probably remain dubious for the first few months, waiting to see what will actually happen. If I don't get sick, maybe I'll keep trying it. And if I see a positive result in my health, then and only then will I start to change my thinking about what constitutes healthy eating. Even then I might not be willing to say it works until I've tested my cholesterol a year or two later.

“Speed doesn't allow for the change of thinking.”

Again this is a tiny example. We are hoping for much more significant changes from our partners in the Majority World. For most people, it's going to take multiple experiences over time before they truly believe our message, and even more time before they are able to do the scale of projects that their community seems to need.

Are we willing to invest that time? Are we willing to develop long-term relationships, continually going back to spend time together, building trust, and helping our partner overcome challenges?

While the time investment is significant, the costs of speed are huge. New ideas—especially those that confront core beliefs about ourselves and God—only become beliefs once people

have tested them. New experiences create new beliefs, not ideas alone. If we don't change beliefs, we won't see transformation.

Limit the number of partnerships

Lately I've been encouraged to see that more and more organizations and churches are starting to limit the number of places and partners they work with. There was a season when the average megachurch short-term teams board seemed to have more options for where you could go than the local travel agent. I knew of one that had more than 100 partners with two full-time staff managing the relationships (mostly just collecting reports and distributing money).

Transformational partnerships take time. Lots of it! To give you some idea, each of our full-time staff manage eight partnerships. Yes, eight. We visit each partner twice a year, which requires 20 weeks of travel for each person. That means each one is traveling 35 percent of their time—probably more than the average missions pastor (or their family) can really commit. And yet we are only spending about nine days out of the year with each partner.

Another organization that I admire for the partnerships they build was spending five weeks a year with local church leaders. These weeks were spread over three trips each year, and the quality of the training they provided made us more than happy to make time for it. Rather than jetting off as soon as the training ended, they would stay for the weekend just to spend time with my husband and me.

Move at the speed of our partner's capacity

I have definitely been with Majority World churches who have astonished me with what they have achieved. In Benin, one leader took me to a four-floor hospital—one of the many that the denomination had—and shared how it had come about. All the churches in the denomination had given 50 cents. With that money, they built one room where they provided high quality hospital services. Soon they had gained a reputation for excellent medical care, so they started to make a profit—enough to add a few more rooms. Others saw what they were doing and contributed. More profit was made and reinvested. And now the church has a series of hospitals throughout the nation that are considered by far the best in Benin.

“*How fast you can move will depend on who you are partnering with.*”

However, this story isn't reflective of most of our partners (indeed I found myself wondering why this group had asked us to come; they seemed to be far beyond what we could offer). Like the example of the Cambodian pastor and his savings program, the average pastor might be able to manage a relatively simple savings program, with a few borrowers and notes in a notebook. But adding thousands of dollars requires a whole new set of skills.

That said, if the savings program grew step by step then there is no reason he couldn't learn the skills and grow with it. Even the hospital in the example above started as a one-room clinic. How fast you can move will depend on who you are partnering with. Throwing too much money or complexity or people into

a program too soon can cause it all to collapse. However, if they already have experience in using their own resources to do projects, can tell stories of how they have seen God provide, and have experience in doing larger projects, then you will be able to move much more quickly.

Build trust

We come with radical ideas. Before those we partner with are going to change their habits and beliefs based on these ideas, they'll need to be sure that the messenger is credible.

One reason I remain skeptical about fatty food is that it's always some random guy on YouTube teaching about it. I really don't trust YouTube guy. Anyone can sound like an expert on YouTube. If I am going to change my lifelong beliefs about what foods are healthy, the person telling me to eat bacon and butter needs to earn my trust first. Likewise, if we want to influence people's beliefs about themselves, God, and the world around them, we need to build trust.

If we want to establish partnerships where we can strengthen churches so they, through God's power, can bring transformation, then we need relationships built on trust. Here are a few ideas to get started:

Get appropriate experience

In all the healthy partnerships I know of, the foreign partner has at least one person on their team with years of experience living in the host culture. There are a few reasons this is so important:

1. It changes how your partners see you – If you have lived in the host culture for a significant period of time, then your Majority World partners will be much quicker to seek to understand what you have to offer. In their minds, your years abroad show that you are committed to the Church around the world and have taken the time to truly understand.

Rather than instantly seeing you for the money that you could bring, they are willing to take the time to hear about your experiences and ideas.

“ *If we want to influence people's deepest beliefs, we need to build trust first.* ”

2. You are able to read between the lines – I was once with a group of foreigners and locals in rural Malawi when we stopped to ask for directions. The person we asked pointed down the road and gave directions. More than 20 years of living abroad meant my instant reaction was, “Well, that didn't work.” The rest of the foreigners in the car were baffled because, of course, the man *had* given directions. But to me it was clear that he had no idea how to help us and had just answered because his culture required it. After a minute of conversation, we asked one of the Malawians in the car. He agreed that the man had no idea where we were going. How did I know? I really can't explain it, except to say that, having asked for directions thousands of times, I now recognize the difference between someone who knows the way and someone who doesn't.

Similarly, it takes time to learn to listen well to pastors. Are they spinning a story or completely sincere? And if they are sincere—they really are starting an orphanage—what are their true motives? Asking will nearly always yield the answer, “It’s what God showed me to do.” Experience helps you know when to keep asking questions, to keep digging even when lots of people are saying, “Yes, it’s a great idea! I agree.” Years of living in the culture help you gain a sense for where the landmines are likely to be and how to find them.

- 3. You are better at discerning who would make a great partner** – For the most part, in the Church in the Majority World, there are two common attitudes towards foreign partnerships: one group can’t wait to find their very own foreign benefactor and another group thinks foreigners have largely destroyed the Church and should now leave it alone. Clearly, finding those in group one isn’t terribly hard—they’re probably already sending you emails. However, discerning which of these are willing to actually partner and which really just want cash is a much harder process. More times than I can count, I have witnessed Westerners recommending completely corrupt partners to each other. They are completely unaware that the partner has been misusing their money. Again, the longer you live abroad, the more inside knowledge you gain about the local church culture and the more quickly you can sense when something is wrong. It’s certainly not foolproof—we’ve partnered with recommended ministries only to discover that the leader is corrupt—but those cases are fewer and further apart.

If you don't actually have 10 years of international experience, there are a few options to help you to move forward:

- **Find a guide** – This could be someone you know who has lived in a similar culture and is willing to take some trips with you. It could be an organization that is already working in the country where you want to be involved. It could be a long-term missionary living there.
- **Move** – This suggestion may feel a little over the top. But if our goal is to build relationships that could lead to transformation, an investment of 7–10 years is well worth it. While not everyone can move to a different country, some need to. Relationships that are transformational need to go deep. Depth requires trust. And trust takes time to build. It takes time to prove that you are sincere, committed for the long term, and that you truly care about that nation and her people.

Start small

If we are looking to see beliefs change then we need to start small. I've heard the argument that, by starting small, we are treating rural church leaders like children. But the reality is, expecting too much in the beginning—before we've built trust—can make people justifiably hesitant to get started.

My friends who espouse a high-fat diet would be much more likely to convince me if they said, "Just try for two weeks and see what happens. See if you have more energy or less. See how you feel." Committing for two weeks isn't such a big deal. While I remain exceedingly dubious, I also don't think I am likely to destroy my long-term health in that short time frame.

I often start by asking, “What is the smallest possible first step? What is one tiny thing that could happen in the next six months that is unlikely to fail?” Start with that. It might not bring the dramatic change that you feel is needed. The water source may need to wait. But the long-term impact may be significant.

As I said, in the TCT program we start super small—just two Acts of Love in the first year. Most of the churches we work with have no idea who we are or why they should listen to us. Starting small requires a lot less trust.

“ *What is the smallest possible first step? Start with that.* ”

Similarly, in some of our partnerships, we start by bringing more funding for the first few trainings, knowing it takes time before they believe that they can mobilize their own resources. Encouraging our partner to cover even 10–20 percent of the costs might feel like a lot for them in the first training—something they have never tried. But by the fifth training they are happy to cover all of the costs.

Ground your teaching in scripture

Scripture is our one agreed-upon standard of truth. While we might not trust a stranger, we do trust scripture. So, as much as possible, we want to use scripture as the basis of our teaching. If you are teaching ideas, rather than skills, it’s good to start with those rooted in scripture.

If we want to develop healthy partnerships then we need to think long term and slow, realizing that partnerships that

bring transformation are going to take a significant investment of time. We need to build trust and be willing to move at the speed our partner can handle. We need to surrender our desire for results. Changing beliefs is a long, slow process, but in the end, so very worth it.

Healthy partnerships exercise caution around money

Anyone who seeks to work in the Majority World will be exposed to so many needs. Our natural response is to give. We can easily slip into thinking that money is always good, solves problems, and is the main way that we can serve.

I have a friend who is completing a PhD around the impact of the Western church on the church in Uganda. He compares foreign giving to Majority World churches to sex. In the context of an appropriate, committed relationship, which has been carefully prayed through, it is a huge blessing. Thrown around casually, handed out whenever the opportunity arises, it causes incredible brokenness. And he is right. Money changes relationships and, while it may seem harmless, unwise giving does lead to brokenness that we may never see.

That said, we are told in scripture to be generous, and every single one of us who is giving generously is doing so out of the goodness of our hearts. We ought to give. But we need to learn to do so in a way that doesn't cause harm to those we seek to serve. When you think about money in the context of church partnerships, there are a few principles to keep in mind:

We are ALL called to steward wisely and to give

The thing that stands out to me most about the parable of the talents is that it was the guy with only one talent who got in trouble for not using it wisely. In my broken paradigm, it almost seems an injustice. The chap got less than everyone else, so couldn't we cut him a break? Why not harass the guy with five talents? Shouldn't he have been a bit more generous? But no, poor one-talent chap loses the little he had and finds himself thrown out. If I were writing this parable, that is not at all how it would have gone down.

“Money changes relationships, and unwise giving leads to brokenness.”

And yet, our holy, loving, wise Savior didn't tell it like we think it should be told. Because He knew better. We are all called to steward wisely what we have regardless of how much or little we believe it to be. And as we do, we will see it multiply. It's a Kingdom principle that Jesus was trying to teach us.

Now we could argue that in this story Mr. One-talent did actually get a lot—a talent was worth years of wages. But again, even this thinking only serves to remind us how blind we are to all that God has given the average 'poor' person. The typical poor person does have a lot health, a network of relationships, local knowledge and wisdom, a remarkable amount of physical resources, and access to God.

Similarly the Bible is loaded with commands to give, and God didn't exclude the poorest from giving. If anything, the

Bible almost seems to take delight in highlighting how the poorest gave. From the widow who served Elijah by giving him her last meal, to the woman who gave her last two coins, to the Macedonians who gave despite their great need. The giving of the poorest is front and center in our Bibles.

“*The commands to give and steward well are not just for the richest half of the world; they’re for everyone.*”

We need to remember that this is what the Bible teaches. The commands to give and steward well are not just for the richest half of the world; they’re for everyone. Indeed, as vulnerable people obey them, we find that these commands actually form a path out of poverty. Instead of being too quick to pull out our wallets, we need to make sure our programs leave room for local Christians to steward what God has given them and to practice generosity.⁷

Beliefs about money have created wrong expectations and practices

The first time I visited the United States, I was baffled by the fact that everything is oversized—from the roads to fridges to milk bottles! But among my friends and acquaintances from the Majority World, the most common observation from their

⁷ The booklets “Mobilizing Local Resources” and “Focusing on the Vulnerable” dive much deeper on this topic.

first U.S. experiences is: there are poor white people. This blows their minds. It upsets all their beliefs about how the world works. So they head home to report it to everyone they know. As they talk about it, their eyes get wide and their voices are mystified. Friends sit around, sipping tea and pondering this news in utter amazement. Remember, those who visit the States are nearly always people with money or influence, who are connected and educated. It's very hard to get a visa otherwise. Yet, in their minds, the world is categorized. White people have money.

Add the "white people have money" belief to the lies they've been told about themselves ("We are needy; our situation is the worst"), and you have a bit of a mess. You end up with Majority World pastors spending their time scouring the internet looking for a foreign benefactor rather than stewarding the resources they already have (for example by planting their land).

We need to be very careful that we don't inadvertently affirm those wrong beliefs. In every interaction, project plan, and opportunity to give, we need to ask ourselves, "Will this help my brother or sister to know God as the provider?"

God blesses those who give

If we truly believe what the Bible says about money, we have a bit of a problem. For one thing, it says it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Additionally, we are told that, in the same measure as we give, we will receive (Luke 6:38). If

we give sacrificially, then we will receive great blessings from God. And if we don't give at all... well, we will miss out.

Do we believe these promises are true for everyone—even people who are poor?

When I speak to the Church in the Majority World, I challenge them strongly: You may have found a foreign benefactor to give you a well (or a church building, or some other thing), but do you really know what it cost? If God blesses those who give, and those in the USA gave for your well, then who got blessed? Those in the USA. All you got was a well. Would you rather have God's blessing, or a well, which (let's be frank) is only going to be broken again in the next five years?

The church leaders look stricken. There's no confusion. Because they realize that, while it is much easier to ask someone for money for a well than to dig it themselves, maybe, in taking the easy path, they are missing out on something so much better.

We do need to be careful. When we pay for something that the local church can and should be giving, we may give them a thing that they (or we) thought they needed, but inadvertently we also take home the blessing. That isn't actually helpful. What vulnerable people (like all of us) need—even more than the church building or any other material thing you can give—is God's blessing in their lives.

God, with His infinite resources, wants to bless them. As we partner with churches, they've shared stories of God changing the hearts of government leaders, reconciling families, making

infertile land suddenly the most fertile for miles around, making arsenic-tainted wells pure, and bringing gang leaders to Christ. We've seen Him cure entire villages of addiction, return daughters who had been trafficked, and cause abusive husbands to become loving. No amount of money from even the most generous donor could have brought the blessings that God lavished on these communities when they gave of what they had.

“More than any thing we could give, vulnerable people need God's blessing in their lives.”

So, when do we give?

Whenever I talk about the topic of money in the West, people ask how we know when to give and how much. It's natural to want a foolproof formula that solves all these issues (I'd love one). But I think that endlessly looking for formulas and programs that provide The Answer is pretty much what got us into this mess to begin with. I don't think God is issuing formulas. I think He wants relationship. I don't think He's set up the world so we can coast on all our great knowledge and leave Him for a 15–30 minute slot first thing in the morning. I think the only real answer is pray, pray, pray.

As you pray, here are some things to keep in mind:

Be very careful about giving what your partner is able to give.

If a random youth group can paint the orphanage, then the local church is equally able to complete the task. They may

not be willing, but they are definitely able. They can also make bricks and collect bamboo and build church buildings. They are equally able to build a house or dig a shallow well. However, if they are in the middle of the desert and need a 2,000-foot deep well, then yes, that's probably beyond their capacity. And they probably can't ensure the prosecution of sex trafficking rings. (You need to have a lot of clout to make sure the traffickers don't just buy off the legal system). Projects like

“ *God doesn't offer formulas for success, but relationship with Himself.* ”

these are going to require outside resources. But if the project isn't going to cost significant amounts of money or take highly technical skills, the local church has the ability (even if they don't realize it). This isn't something you should give to.

Make sure they are giving the part that they can. In those cases where the cost or skills required are outside of the local church's ability, there is still probably a role they can play. In the case of the sex traffickers, the church can actually run campaigns in their community about the dangers of selling your daughters to be “housekeepers.” They can make it everyone's problem to make sure a child never goes “missing” from their community. They can look out for families on the edge and help them find ways to earn money. They can pray with families who have sold daughters (more than once, I have heard stories about them turning up again suddenly freed or able to escape). And they can commit to pray about trafficking in general, because we know it's only by God's power that brokenness and injustice can be overcome. This is just one example. Whatever the issue, if we are giving to needs that

are too big or technical for our partners to handle, then we also need to take time to work out how to partner so the local church has a significant contribution.

Be aware of the percentage of the budget you are giving. In the example of the hospital in Benin, giving a \$10,000 donation to a \$2,000,000 hospital so they can have a new machine isn't really a huge deal. They have proven themselves, they have already made sacrifices, and the percentage of the total budget that you are giving is tiny. However, when a pastor earns \$2,000 a year, giving him \$10,000 is introducing an unfair temptation. Imagine receiving 5 times your salary.

Let's pretend you earn \$50,000 and someone hands you \$250,000 with almost no accountability for how you spend it. Now remember that many pastors have multiple partners. Let's be wildly conservative and say only three give that amount. Now you have the equivalent of \$750,000. If a friend told you they couldn't afford medical care for their child, or your brother desperately needed his car repaired so he could get to work, might you be slightly tempted to redirect some of that money to a good cause? And don't you think you deserve a small raise for all your hard work?

When you give, make sure that the amount you are giving is in proportion to the incomes of the person or organization. You can give however much you want to International Justice Mission to address sex trafficking. However, if you want to work directly with local pastors, then you need to be willing to start with amounts closer to a few hundred dollars.

Be cautious about assuming you are the solution that God intends. Just because we are aware of the problem and we have access to funds doesn't mean God intends us to provide. Maybe—just maybe—He has much more magnificent answers. We need to make sure we saturate the question in prayer, asking God if He wants us to be involved, before we actually give.

Healthy partnerships bring appropriate inputs

So money isn't always the right answer and, indeed, isn't going to lead to transformation. It can be helpful in larger projects—typically given to an established organization with a great track record. But it should never be for things that the church can do themselves, like looking after orphans.

“ *Appropriate inputs are those that strengthen the local church.* ”

So what inputs should we bring? Remember: our role is to strengthen the local church so that she—through God's power—can transform the community. Our inputs should reflect what is helpful for strengthening the church. Here are a few ideas we need to keep in mind:

Bring expertise

As mentioned, we need to bring people who are trustworthy and have a great track record. They should be experts in the ideas you are seeking to introduce. One of the best partnerships that I have been part of brings pastors who have years of experience to teach Majority World pastors how to prepare sermons. Those who are teaching have been preparing sermons for at least 10 years—usually 20 or more—so these aren't theoretical principles; they come from long practice. The local pastors appreciate the training and feel respected that these pastors are teaching from a place of experience. Trust is high.

Another organization I admire helps churches to set up job-training programs. They set up their own job-training program in their community first...and it failed. They learned from experience and got better. Only after they were truly experts in how to get people into jobs did they start multiplying the program with other churches. They were experts in how to get people into jobs.

But this isn't always the case. Too often, we send teams of enthusiastic volunteers, many of whom are looking for an experience that draws them closer to God. This is great on one level—we all need to keep growing in our walk with God, and cross-cultural experiences can be powerful. However, if we aren't looking at the expertise of the team members, we are in danger of undermining our partner for our own benefit.

“ *When we send teams of experts, we add value and our partners feel respected.* ”

One of the most horrifying experiences of my life happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I met with some top church leaders. Somewhere in the conversation, I got the impression that there was something slightly off. Westerners seemed to be deemed just a little too right by virtue of being Western. So I asked, "What is it that people here in the Congo do better than people in America?" I was met with deafening silence, so I assumed that the question wasn't really clear. I explained, "In the country where I live, they would say they are better at math, science, martial arts, ping pong...lots of things. Now those people might be right or wrong. That's not really the point. I am just curious, what would people in the Congo say they do better?"

More painful silence. Then finally, "We don't do anything better."

To be honest I thought that they might be joking. I guess the confusion showed on my face, because they went on to explain, "There are reasons why we see ourselves as inferior. When missionaries first came to our country, we were not allowed in their houses—we had to sit on the porch. We were not allowed in their cars—we had to sit in the cargo area."

Now, we certainly aren't doing anything like that anymore. However, these stories are known and remembered. And Satan has used them in horrid ways to build great dysfunction into our relationships. Our actions are evaluated through years of hurt. We might say, "We see you as equal and respect and honor you." Yet, sometimes our actions don't affirm that.

While we know we are sending our youth teams for an experience that will shape their lives, our partners don't necessarily understand that. We inadvertently communicate, like those who went before us, that even our youth have the superiority to come and help. While it's not our intention, we are saying, "Our group of youth are better than your group of youth (or pastors or others). We have more resources and can do more. We can paint the orphanage, and you can't."

Now that doesn't mean we can never send youth teams. But we do need to ask ourselves what they uniquely offer and who they should serve. Clearly any group of youth—Mexican, Nepalese, or American—can paint a church building. If our youth go do it, then we don't challenge the local church youth to serve and grow in their relationship with God. However, in many cases the American youth actually have more expertise in conversational English. On university campuses all over Asia, there are thousands (even millions!) of young people working to learn English. Many of them have never heard of Jesus and many of them would love to speak English to a native English speaker. Well-trained in how to have evangelistic conversations (and with a good follow-up connection in the country) this youth team can serve a legitimate need.

“What do our youth teams offer and who should they serve?”

Alternatively, we can reposition teams so that it is clear to all involved that they are learning experiences. For instance, budding musicians can get together with some great Ugandan youth worship leaders and write music together. I promise that the American youth have a lot to learn from the Ugandans

about rhythm (and our Ugandan brothers and sisters would benefit from realizing they aren't actually inferior...we can't even keep up with their many styles of clapping).

Find the right training content

Unfortunately, too much training misses the mark. It's either too hard, too easy, too Western, or just completely disconnected from the lived experiences of those we seek to train. We can teach about marriage in Uganda, but if we don't address the issue of the man's relationship with his mother, then it's not going to have any impact. Absolutely nothing and no one rules like Mama. However, we can far too easily miss that the biggest struggle in many Ugandan marriages is Mama. Likewise, we can teach couples that women are equally valuable, but perhaps we aren't prepared for the women to fight us on it. The first time I taught on marriage in Uganda, I was shocked at the way the women resisted ideas like, "Wives, you could eat with your husbands rather than eating last."

Whatever the topic we want to train on cross-culturally, we can be sure that there will be surprises like this. Here are a few suggestions of how to bring training that makes a difference:

- 1. Use curriculum that is already well-tested.** There is training content out there that has been prepared and tested and refined throughout the years. There are organizations that will train you to know how to use that content. That's a great way to go.
- 2. Make sure you understand your audience.** Another part of making sure you have the right content is understand-

ing your audience. Have they been to Bible college? Do they have PhDs? Or are they from rural areas with little access to new ideas? You'll want completely different training for each group.

My husband once provided translation for a training led by a university professor on the topic "The End Times." The training was attended by rural pastors whose educational opportunities ended at third grade. My husband shared that, while he was fascinated by what he was learning, it was almost impossible to translate the material in a way that these rural pastors could understand. They had never heard of the second coming, so a detailed exposition on Isaiah 65 was extremely confusing. Had the training been for my husband, it would have been perfect. For the intended audience, it wasn't helpful.

On the other hand, I've been with African brothers who said of a Bible teacher, "He taught us as if we were in kindergarten." That teacher failed to recognize that these brothers had plenty of training—some had Masters of Theology—and they didn't appreciate going back to the basics. They felt like they had been disrespected.

“Find out the education level of your audience.”

Make sure you know what your audience has already learned. What has been helpful in the past? What hasn't been helpful? What do they wish they knew more about? In some cultures, this question can be hard for people to answer. Providing a list of options can be helpful; most

can quickly put them into order by interest. Then you can ask them why they chose to put specific things high or low to help you understand better what their thoughts are around their training needs. Sometimes they've placed something low because it is already a strength for them. Sometimes it's because they have had endless training on that topic already. And sometimes it's low because past experiences with training on that topic have been unhelpful.

3. Start with the Bible. Unless you are teaching skills like hand washing (in which case go back to #1: Use curriculum that is well tested; there is almost never a need to develop your own curriculum on skills), start with the Bible. You can draw out a principle—women have equal value as men, for instance—and then allow them to apply it. Ask questions like, “When do you see this not applied? What would God say about that?” By starting with the Bible and drawing out the application from their observations and experiences, you are less likely to get lost in Western ideas. If you can't think of a passage that clearly presents your point, then you need to ask yourself if what you are teaching is actually a biblical principle or a cultural idea.

4. Make it participatory. Make sure the training includes plenty of participation, small group discussion, and time for attendees to think about how to apply what you are teaching. As you hear

“ *Start with a biblical principle and then ask them how to apply it.* ”

their ideas, you will quickly start to see where things are getting lost or misunderstood. Once, when I was teaching about servant leadership, I had the group circle words on a page that they aspired to. They circled leader, famous, great, successful, popular, wealthy, and servant. Confused, I asked them how they saw servant fitting with all the other words. They shared that, in Christian circles, “servant” was the highest title, one they wouldn’t dare to give themselves but definitely aspire to. Paul was a servant, they pointed out, so a servant of God was really the greatest of all. They had all attended other training that included the idea of servant leadership. However, through their cultural filter, what they were hearing was ‘the greatest of all’ not the least. If the training had not been participatory, I too would have missed that their warm embrace of servant leadership was not because they loved to serve but because they thought of it as a position of power.

- 5. Make it concrete.** Most people in the Majority World grew up with rote learning school systems. They weren’t taught to think abstractly. This makes it is even more important that any content we teach always lands the idea in a practical way. We must get to, “What does it really mean for our lives, here and now?” I have friends who teach Biblical Worldview seminars. They estimate that between four and seven percent of the audience understands it well enough to apply it on their own. For those that get it, the concepts are powerful. That’s great for them.

“Always land the idea in a practical way.”

For the other 93 percent, it needs to be broken down more concretely.

- 6. Encourage application.** Beliefs of a lifetime don't just fall away because someone presented new information. Training (or reading a booklet) purely serves to introduce a new idea. We don't truly change our beliefs until we have tested the new idea and experienced that it works. For example, if the ideas in these booklets are new you, you're probably left wondering, "Is this really going to work?" However, if you try applying some of the ideas and they work, your own experience will build your belief.

“*Training introduces new ideas. Experiences change beliefs.*”

Good training content will not only make ideas concrete, but it will help people think through exactly

how they are going to apply what we are teaching. If we don't include application in our training time, it probably won't happen. Most of us have been to a conference, walked out full of knowledge, and failed to apply any of it. However, if the last hour of that conference had been dedicated to quietly praying through how to apply the ideas and making a plan that was entered into our to-do lists, the amount applied would significantly increase. It's true in the Majority World as well. Make sure you take time to help people think all the way through to application.

Expect your partner to contribute

Nothing will tell you quicker whether people actually want what you are offering than asking your partner to make significant financial sacrifices to get it. Their response is a great measure of how much value they place on the project. After working in more than 20 countries, I can assure you that churches are able and willing to move ahead with training—if they truly believe it's helpful—even if the foreigners aren't providing full funding.

Healthy partnerships are mutually accountable

As we go into partnerships we need to be accountable to one another. While many of the people that we work with are amazing, Satan is also on the prowl to destroy them (and us). Accountability is good for both of us. Accountability for use of money removes some of the temptation to misuse funds (you will find a section on that in the Mobilizing Local Resources booklet). Accountability for follow-through puts the burden on both partners to do what we have promised, and accountability for results puts responsibility on us to bring programs that work.

Accountability for follow-through

One of our partners had committed to do three days of training with each of their churches. But we later found that they were

doing just a half day. As we sought to understand the situation, we discovered that in some areas they didn't have the money to make copies of teacher's books, so they just did without. The training had gotten much shorter because that was what they could remember. This partner was already making significant sacrifices to have the training, so in that situation the best solution was for us to provide the teacher's books.

In a different country, my husband and I brought a training and asked the attendees to teach it to three churches each. They enthusiastically agreed. Six months later, we visited and found that no one had done what they had committed to. They explained, "Well other people tell us what to do, but they never return, so we thought you were the same. We didn't realize you were serious." Clearly something went horribly wrong with our training, if they thought they were obeying us rather than God. However, it does illustrate an important point. No one had ever followed-up with them before, so after the training they naturally went back to life as usual.

“ *Accountability for use of money removes some of the temptation to misuse funds.* ”

In both of these examples, where the partner didn't actually do the work they had committed to, the bigger question is why? Was our training not useful? Are we expecting too much sacrifice from our partner? Is there a need to adjust what we are providing? The problem isn't always on our partner's end. We can't assume that everything we do is helpful. We need to make sure we get feedback and hold ourselves accountable to bringing the best possible inputs. In

cultures and relationships where our partners may hesitate to challenge us, one clear signpost of our effectiveness is what happens as a result of our efforts.

We also need to be accountable to completing the work we committed to do. Each time we start our program in a new area, inevitably someone asks, “How can we be sure that you will keep coming back for five years?” In the minds of many church leaders, foreigners are unreliable. They make commitments and don’t honor them. Now, I believe our unreliability is only part of the story. Their optimism may mean that when we give a non-committal, “We’ll do our best,” they hear that it will happen. They cannot conceive that we could do our best and fail. We need to be careful and clear in what we are (or are not) committing to, and we need to make sure our “yes” is “yes.”

Accountability for results

Our partner should hold us accountable for results. If we are presenting a program and asking them to make sacrifices to participate, then we also need to share what will happen as a result. If it’s a savings program, we extol the benefits of saving—financial improvement and stronger community relationships. If it’s a job creation program, we might say that, typically, 50 percent of those who do this program will get into a job. If it’s Bible training, then we might say, “In x amount of time pastors will be able to prepare a sermon that is based on scripture and meets the needs of their congregation.”

“ *Be clear in what you're committing to, and make sure your 'yes' is 'yes'.* ”

We need to think through what results we're committing to and how we are going to measure them. Everything from talking with partners over tea to formal evaluations might be appropriate. Encourage your partner to share the results they're seeing and if they're happy with them. If the results are lacking, we need to try to understand why. It's possible our program wasn't well adapted to the culture and context. That feedback, while a little painful, does help us to make needed changes.

How to hold a partner accountable

When we read "accountability," many of us automatically think of written reports. I would suggest that written reports are not exactly the way to go. A remarkable number of godly people think that making them up is perfectly fine. One of my dearest friends (who has now gone to be with the Lord) used to complain to me about the necessity of lying on foreign reports. She was a woman of God whom I highly respected, and her perspective wasn't that she was wrong to lie, but that foreigners were wrong to expect reports that necessitated lying. Similarly, I have been in a room of bishops while they debated if they should lie on reports. They seemed pained as they considered the dire consequences of telling the truth about how money was spent—they may not get more money, widows wouldn't receive food, and (as a few got honest enough to point out) they wouldn't have money for their salaries, offices, or cars. Their final conclusion: the only way is to lie.

Faked reporting is so rampant that African colleagues have told me that one only needs to drive into a community in a car, and the community members will all gather around so they can sign a training participant list and get a small amount of money. They are more than happy to line up for photos holding the training materials. The training never happened, but the participant list is filled in and the 'trainer' pockets the difference between the amount provided for the training and the amount paid for signatures.

“ *Written reports are not the best way to create accountability. Face-to-face conversations are.* ”

In reality, the only way to get a transparent report is to sit with your partner, face-to-face, and ask, “How did it go?” Settle in and pour lots of tea. Ask plenty of questions like, “How did you see God move?”, “Where did the resources come from?”, and “How did the people respond?” The truth will eventually come out. Those in oral cultures are way less comfortable making up their reports when they are sitting there in person looking you in the eye—especially when you keep asking for more details. And, indeed, you will learn so much more. You’ll hear far better stories and, if things didn’t go as expected, you’ll really have the opportunity to understand the reasons and mutually decide on course corrections.

Healthy partnerships share decision-making

One of the common complaints that I often hear in the Majority World is that the voices and opinions of partners are not invited. As one African friend said, “Most Westerners just dictate to you what you should do. They don’t listen when you have an opinion. If you don’t give us a chance to give our ideas, then we just say to ourselves, ‘Okay, you have the money, so you can control.’ We might know that what you are planning to do won’t work. We know that it’s going to cause problems. But you aren’t willing to listen. We have no say.”

“ *Understand your partner's context and have strategies to facilitate shared decision-making.* ”

Unfortunately it’s a common scenario. The world is full of people executing plans they know won’t work because someone is funding it and hasn’t listened to the opinions of those on the ground.

To be fair, in most cases Westerners want to hear the ideas of our local partners. We may ask their opinions of our ideas. But for a variety of reasons that we’re about to unpack, people tend to tell us what they think we want to hear. We have to understand our partner’s context and have some strategies to facilitate shared decision-making.

In a successful partnership, both partners recognize that you both have some of the answers and that God holds a whole lot

more answers than either of you. This recognition plays out in several concrete ways:

Commit to getting your partner's perspective

I have actually managed to get into a yelling match with one partner while trying to extract his opinion (not my finest moment). In his frustration at me for not providing clear decisions, but repeatedly asking for his perspective, he declared, "I am African and you are a Westerner, so you tell me what to do, and I follow you."

We need to realize that we are trying to overcome years of hurt and misunderstanding. It's going to take commitment. The first step is agreeing it's important and worth the investment of time to ensure we get our partner's input into decisions. I can assure you it would have been far quicker and saved a lot of strain for both of us if I had just made the decisions for my African brother. But I would have only added to the damage.

More than once, I have found myself in a conversation or email exchange *about* a Majority World leader—conversations that leader was not invited to. Decisions were being made and they had no input. It's a curious thing that I don't understand. It always feels a bit like we are moving pieces on a chess board rather than working together with real people.

Lots of tea drinking and seemingly unimportant discussions may be required before enough trust is built that our partner feels it is safe to disagree or share their opinions. That shouting match with my African brother could have been avoided

if I'd had more patience and didn't try to push for quick decisions. I was indeed wrong and have since learned that, if someone is that hesitant to give input or make decisions, then I need to move more slowly.

We must make the commitment that we will, no matter how long the investment of time, involve our partner in the decision-making.

Be slow to give input

In much of the world it's almost impossible for your partner to disagree with you or offer an opinion other than what they think you want to hear. They have long been conditioned that their role is to please people with power. And in their minds,

“*The minute you give your opinion, you've left your partner unable to give his.*”

since you have the money, you have the power. They have learned to appease the spirits and the authorities to get blessings, so they extend that broken worldview to you.

We need to be slow to offer our opinions or hint at the choices we want made. There are times I have to bite my tongue because I know that the minute I give my opinion I stop everyone else from doing so. It leaves our partner unable to question or offer a better way because to do so is to disagree with me. It is fine to offer guidelines, especially where there are limitations on what decision is acceptable. However, we need to be careful about actually making decisions. So we might say, for exam-

ple, “The total budget is x. How do you think that we should best use that amount?” Guidelines like this actually bring a level of safety; you’re less likely to turn around and tell them they were wrong because it’s clear what they can and can’t make decisions about.

Be aware of the immovables and where you can take risks

Similar to setting guidelines, I tend to decide the few things we aren’t willing to be flexible on and then give freedom with the rest. For example, I know in the TCT program that the results go down if you speed up the program, so I don’t let partners decide that they will squash the five-year program into three years. If they aren’t willing to commit to five years, I’m not willing to partner.

However, part of sharing decision-making is creating space for our partners to take risks. Our church partners need space to follow what they believe God is saying. While their decision might not be our recommended path, if we want joint decision-making then we need to allow our partners to actually make decisions—even ones we might not agree with.

“Decide the few things you won't be flexible on and give freedom with the rest.”

More often than I like to admit, I tend to think I know the best way. I get tempted to take things that are flexible and declare them immovable. Two questions that I try to ask myself when deciding if something is really immovable are: “What’s the

worst that can happen?” and “Do I really know that to be true?” The TCT program was designed for rural communities, but in Africa they insisted on teaching it to urban churches (apparently we managed to get them empowered enough to express their opinion). And so I relented. I told them I had concerns, but if they wanted to pilot it in an urban area then they were more than welcome to.

“*Our partners need space to follow what they believe God is saying, to experiment, and to fail.*”

In this case, the worst that could happen was the community wouldn't be transformed. However, odds had to be reasonable that some people would be helped somewhat. Teaching

people to love their neighbor and steward well was hardly going to wreak havoc on people's lives. And I hadn't actually tested it in an urban setting; since the program wasn't written for that setting, I was very sure it couldn't work. And yet, God had not said, “Don't do it in an urban area.” So why not let them try? It was, in my opinion, a questionable decision. It seemed to me that their time and energy would be better spent on areas where we knew it would work. However, I could be wrong, and honoring my brothers' opinion is more important than my perception of “wasted time.” Since it passed the “What's the worst that could happen” test, we moved ahead. As I write this, it's too early to tell the result, but they are seeing positive fruit.

Selecting partners

Let's be honest, finding the right partner is hard. Those who want to be found aren't always the ones we want to partner with. They come with lots of preconceived ideas. Having prayed for years for a foreign benefactor, they are beside themselves excited when you respond to their email message or facebook chat. Your money is, in their minds, an answer from God. They aren't really looking for you to tell them to contribute, sacrifice, and be accountable.

Alternatively, those who would be fabulous partners are often hiding from foreigners. They have seen the destruction that has happened, and they want nothing to do with it. They are typically God-fearing leaders not driven by money but by what is best for their congregations. They're hard to find because, for the most part, they don't want to be found.

So what to do? There is no fail-safe formula. My organization has had mis-starts. But here's some advice to keep in mind:

Expect a lot from your partners

I was speaking to someone recently who has partnerships with 50 different churches. They told me I was too relaxed about partnering. They have a list of requirements for their potential partners that includes completing an online course, completing a detailed application, and committing significant resources. Even then, only 1 in 10 who apply are invited to partner. This organization believes that 9 out of 10 applicants aren't interested in being equipped to serve, but are just looking

to make money. The people leading this program are Africans. They explained that high standards honor your partners and help to weed out those who only want a benefactor.

Those I know who do have healthy partnerships have high expectations of their Majority World partners. They have to prove themselves first to become a partner and then are expected to bring a lot to the partnership. In our case, we expect our partners to commit to multiply the training using their own resources. Others expect the partners to volunteer their time to establish something like a savings program.

“High standards honor your partners and help to weed out those who only want a benefactor.”

Allow partners to choose you

Take time to fully explain what you will and won't provide. We start with a three-day orientation during which we explain clearly who we are, what our program entails, and what we do and don't provide. Then we ask attendees to go home, pray about it, and contact us if they want to partner. Since there are significant sacrifices needed on our partners' side, they most certainly don't all come back. If there are ten potential partners in the room, perhaps only three may contact us again. That is absolutely fine with us. We really only want to work with those who God has moved to the place where they are willing to commit to true partnership. We also know this: if a program is great, then word will spread. Once the early adopt-

ers experience results, those who weren't willing to try at first will suddenly be eager to get started.

“ *If you require significant sacrifice, not everyone will want to partner. That's okay.*”

We also need to be willing to have no one agree to partner. I have seen people pushing and prodding their Majority World friends, trying to be the Holy Spirit in their lives. “Don't you want this program?” they

plead. Rather than trying to persuade them, we need to go back to prayer. Maybe God will prompt them to join us. Maybe He'll show us where we still have more to learn before we move forward.

Get recommendations from someone in the country

Use your network of relationships to get recommendations of potential partners. But be careful of taking recommendations from those who have, perhaps, visited, but don't live in the country where you want to work. I have seen friends abroad give some very questionable recommendations. Unfortunately, some of the most corrupt pastors are also by far the best at interacting with foreigners and presenting themselves in ways that make them seem like they would be terrific partners. I have watched them work—they are smooth. Similarly, our worst partner came from a recommendation of a foreigner who only travelled to the country.

On the other hand, those who live in the country where you want to work—and have lived there for years—typically know a bit more of the inside scoop. And what they don't know, they can usually find out. If they are working with the church, then they have contacts who they can ask. They can visit the orphanage you want to partner with, dropping in at random times to see if it is significantly different than when a team is there (a sure sign that something is up). If—as is all too com-

“*Get recommendations from people living in-country, not those who have only visited.*”

mon—the gifts brought by outsiders for the children are gathered up and sold the minute the team flies out, your in-country connection will know about it.

Partner with denominations or organizations

There is something satisfying about sitting under the mango tree and teaching. It sort of feels like it meets our idea of missions somehow. Or maybe that's just me. However, in reality it is much more effective to train trainers. Our early evaluations showed that training was much more effectively delivered at a community level by someone from a similar background. There are several reasons, including the obvious cross-cultural gaps when a foreigner brings training. But the false expectations created by the presence of an outsider are even more difficult to navigate. An outsider turning up in a community unquestionably means “money” to most people living in the community. If the money doesn't materialize, then they automatically believe that the person who introduced you

to the community pocketed the money. Endless arguments follow. It's incomprehensible to them that a foreigner visited just to teach.

My recommendation would be to partner with denominations or organizations. This gives you the opportunity to train trainers who can work at a community level. The local trainers can help you contextualize the training and understand the areas you are working in better. By training trainers you can also reach so many more communities.

Pray

Just as a reminder because it's hugely important here: You are going to need supernatural discernment. The very worst partner probably looks like the best. And the guy whom God has chosen to use powerfully might be hiding at the back of the class, shaking with fear (that story is in the booklet "Focusing on the Vulnerable").

Conclusion

All the suggestions in this booklet work together. Pray. Enlist experts and find really valuable content. Set high expectations and make them very clear. Pray again. Ask people in the country to recommend possible partners. Bring them together and share your expectations, and then pray. Let your partner choose you. Then take time to build trust and genuine relationship. Seek their input and don't move forward without

their decisions. Require a lot. Don't be quick to give money. Hold each other accountable. Pray, pray, pray. It will take a long time, and there will probably be challenges and misunderstandings and failures along the way. But in the end, the partnership that develops will be transformational—both for vulnerable people in the Majority World, and for us in the West and our churches.

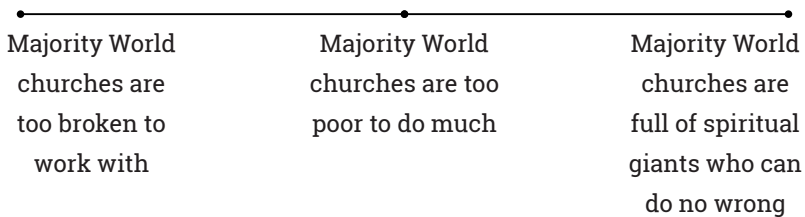
REFLECT AND APPLY

Throughout this booklet, Anna gives a very complex picture of the Church in the Majority World. The Church seems both deeply broken and incredibly vital and powerful. How does this resonate with your own lived experiences?

What stories and observations felt familiar to you?

What stood out to you or made you pause?

2. On page 4, Anna acknowledges the variety of perspectives with which we've arrived at this booklet. Where would you have put yourself on this sliding scale, as you began to read?



Do you sense the Holy Spirit wants to shift your perspective?

3. Think about the overseas work you have been a part of in the past. List the projects and countries as they come to mind.

Reflecting on your list, how would you rate each project in terms of its engagement with the local church?

1. Our work was completely separate from the local church. We may have left the local church feeling overlooked or slighted—like a brother finding out you were in town and never tried to see him.
2. Our work may have undermined the local church. We did things for them that they were probably capable of doing, reinforcing the lie that we are able and they are not. We worked with them, but we made most of the decisions and provided the resources.
3. We tried to get the local church's opinions, perspectives, and involvement, but they mostly deferred to us. We may

have moved too fast and not built enough trust for them to feel safe in taking the lead.

4. We tried to work with the local church and got burned. They said whatever they thought we wanted to hear. Looking back, they really just wanted our money with little accountability.
5. We had a healthy partnership of mutual trust and accountability. We moved at the speed the local church was able, both contributed appropriate resources, and we saw God strengthen both us and them.

We're all on a journey and learning as we go. It may be painful to be honest with ourselves about some of our international partnerships. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you grace and insight as you do this exercise. If you feel weighed down or defensive, lift that to the Lord. Repent of past mistakes and release them to God. He is rich in love and full of mercy; He wants to do a new thing in and through you.

4. Now consider the overseas work you are currently involved in. Write the projects in the chart below and make a note of anything you might do to strengthen your partnership with the local church in the key areas listed. Where possible, include a date when you plan to take action on each item.

Project Description	Are we engaging with the local church? If not, what first step can we take to working together?	Have we invested sufficient time in building relationship? When can we set aside time to simply sit face to face, drink tea, and talk?
Project 1		
Project 2		

<p>Does our partner trust us? What step can we take toward earning that trust?</p>	<p>Is our giving appropriate and paired with mutual accountability? Is there room for the local church's contribution? Are we relying too much on written reports?</p>	<p>Are we sharing decision-making? What will we do to empower our partner to express their opinions?</p>

5. What overseas work do you hope or plan for the future? How could you build a healthy partnership from the outset that strengthens the Body of Christ and brings transformation to the areas of brokenness God has laid on your heart? Consider:

What do we want to see accomplished and where?

Have we examined our beliefs? Will they hold us back from seeing real transformation? (Refer to page 18)?

Do we have someone living in-country who is part of our leadership and decision-making? If not, is God calling one of us to move there?

How can we connect with potential local partners?

- Can we get reliable recommendations from someone living in-country?
- What will we ask our partner to contribute?
- Are we allowing our partner to choose us?

What would it look like to start small enough and move slowly enough to build our partner's capacity step by step?

Will our partnership strengthen the local church so they can be God's tool for transformation in their community?

- In what ways will we bring expertise?
- What will we ask them to be responsible for? How will we hold them accountable?
- What will we be accountable for?

What will our prayer strategy be and who are our committed intercessors?

Most of us will not be able to fully complete this exercise. There are probably unknowns and more questions than answers. The blank spaces and question marks in your plan reflect areas to continue to bathe in prayer and to seek wise counsel, careful not to rush ahead of God. We trust that, as you pray, He will guide your steps, graft you into healthy partnership with His bride, and bring transformation to our broken world.

May [the Lord] give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.

May we shout for joy over your victory
and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the Lord grant all your requests.

Psalm 20:4-5



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