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THE CRY

FOR SERVICE



word MADE flesh
INTERNATIONAL

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Prior to this year, my vision of service was exclusive to the day to day around my college campus and tight knit community. From volunteering on the weekends, to dropping my schedule for a friend in need, to late night calls from younger sisters states away needing help with their homework – I had yet to experience the fullness of the word service. Of course, these are opportunities to help, but I now struggle to believe that any of them reflect the truer meaning of the word. Since being led to Word Made Flesh, I have been rediscovering the meaning of this word as a lifestyle.

I graduated college with nothing other than an inkling inside me saying, “*I want to change the world*”, outpacing every other possible desire of a twenty-two-year-old eager to follow her dreams. To make a long story short, I had been praying for a God-sized mission to say yes to, and He led me directly to the digital doorstep of Word Made Flesh. My eyes widened to the needs of the world, and my desire to serve naturally grew. Before crossing paths with Word Made Flesh, I had yet to come into contact with an opportunity that allowed me to move closer and learn firsthand how to respond to suffering that exists across our world. My intensely tender heart endured a rollercoaster of emotions as I simply observed the service of those who have come before me at Word Made Flesh, and so, I said yes.

It quickly felt impossible to reconcile the needs of the world with my small part. The more I was exposed to the suffering and hardships, the less it felt appropriate to pay attention to my inner world. But this way of service isn’t true. Losing yourself in the needs of others isn’t helping anyone. The service that I am first being tasked with is to search the inner workings of my own heart. God doesn’t ask us to lose ourselves for the sake of others, but to be moved into truer communion with Him so we can see His face everywhere. We are meant to live in the fullness of receiving His love and extending His love as One.

In the book *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen shares,

“We may be little, insignificant servants in the eyes of a world motivated by efficiency, control, and success. But when we realize that God has chosen us from all eternity, sent us into the world as the blessed ones, handed us over to suffering, can’t we, then, also trust that our little lives will multiply themselves and be able to fulfill the needs of countless people?”

We have to look within with love before we can look upon the world with love. I am learning what it means to serve from a response of my belovedness.

I AM NOT LOVED BECAUSE I SAID YES. I AM LOVED, AND SO I CONTINUE TO SAY YES.

This edition of *The Cry for Service* features those whose expression of service is tangible both in their occupation and their day to day presence in relationships in the Word Made Flesh community. Service is not exclusive to full-time missionaries, but a lifestyle celebration that we may all embody. You are given a lifetime of opportunities to serve exactly where you are at, with what you have been given, and it only takes an inkling of awareness of God’s love for you to lead the way. All God asks is our willingness to say yes.

I hope the following stories stir you into personal reflection of how God is working through you and asking you to share your life with others. May we open ourselves up to the inner working of our hearts that lead us to serve others open handedly and multiply our love.

The Cry is an advocacy journal that illuminates the rhythms and practices of the Word Made Flesh community. Our Lifestyle Celebrations center our motivations and actions as we seek to emulate Jesus’s life in all we do. In each edition of *The Cry*, we feature one of our nine Lifestyle Celebrations and invite staff, interns, and friends to write a reflection of what God is teaching them through their participation in serving Jesus among the vulnerable. In this issue of *The Cry*, we reflect on *service* and invite you to read, learn, and celebrate with us.



EMILY FALES
Communications
Coordinator

Emily Fales joined Word Made Flesh in May of 2023. With a natural bend for understanding and connecting with people, she has trusted that God will lead her to spaces where voices need to be elevated.



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SERVING JESUS AMONG THE MOST VULNERABLE OF THE WORLD'S POOR

WORD MADE FLESH INTERNATIONAL is made up of people called and committed to serving Jesus among those who find themselves in some of the most vulnerable, poverty-stricken and oppressive situations in the world.

LIFESTYLE CELEBRATIONS

Intimacy – We celebrate intimacy with Jesus to be our highest calling and our created purpose.

Simplicity – We celebrate simplicity as a privilege in identification with Jesus and the poor.

Obedience – We celebrate obedience as our loving response to the grace of Jesus.

Submission – We celebrate submission to Jesus, each other and the poor.

Humility – We celebrate humility before God and humanity.

Brokenness – We celebrate brokenness as our responsibility in ministry among the broken.

Community – We celebrate community as a means for discipleship and service.

Suffering – We celebrate suffering as a willing sacrifice in serving Jesus.

Service – We celebrate service as an expression of our fellowship.



STOP SERVICE

BY CAMI GOBLE

“STOP throwing things!” I yell angrily, slapping my five-year-old son’s hand. He had chucked his glasses. AGAIN. Daniel Tiger’s song plays in my head, a moment too late, “Take a deep breath and count to four. One...two...three...four.” Then, swirling eddies of regret, shame, and self-loathing flood in.

Perhaps you are like me? I am a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde. In the morning, when I am rested, I am usually calm, patient, and kind. My son repeatedly hurls things, and I am unruffled. With gentle eye contact and a smile, I effortlessly respond to his perpetual tossing, “Go pick it up, My Love.” Then, at some point later in the day, often unbeknownst to me, I switch and become cruel. Why?

I peel back the layers of the onion. I have become mean because I am exhausted and depleted.

Why? I have tried to cram too much into my day, and I didn’t take breaks. Why? I feel inadequate, so I try to make up for this by proving myself with productivity. Why? I have forgotten I am God’s beloved daughter.

Thomas Merton observes, “There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”

Sometimes the best service is to STOP to remember who and whose we are. I was reminded of the times Jesus abruptly stopped his activities with people, slipping away to pray in solitude. I wonder why.

I try to imagine what that was like. Did Jesus suddenly become aware that he needed to hear God’s loving voice and reorient to essential purpose? When was the last time you or I did this?

“Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy.” The ten commandments make STOPPING imperative. Did God know that we would get busy, distracted, and overwhelmed with unnecessary things? Did He really graciously give us a day to remember, receive, and abide in His love? A gift of time to be child-like and free? To STOP being violent, I need to STOP to remember I am beloved.

SOMETIMES THE BEST SERVICE IS TO STOP TO REMEMBER WHO AND WHOSE WE ARE.

PHOTO WMF SIERRA LEONE

If I am honest, it is arduous to STOP. Breaking entrenched autopilot habits of compulsive doing by replacing practices that cultivate awareness of His love takes intentional, consistent effort. Stumbling forward like a toddler learning to walk.

Henri Nouwen reminds us, “When we no longer pray, no longer listen to the voice of love that speaks to us in the moment, our lives become absurd lives in which we are thrown back and forth between the past and the future. If we could just be, for a few minutes each day, fully where we are, we would indeed discover that we are not alone and that the One who is with us wants only one thing: to give us love.”

I’M CURIOUS. HOW DO YOU STOP? WHAT HELPS YOU RECEIVE GOD’S LOVE?



CAMI GOBLE

Regional Coordinator for Europe and Africa

Cami grew up in Colorado. Compassion welled in her heart at a young age, watching commercials for famine relief in Africa during Saturday morning cartoons. Cami moved to Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 2003. Since then she has been working among Lighthouse youth, and assisting with the Good News Club in Kroo Bay. During her sabbatical in 2010, she met Alan Goble at the Iona Christian Community in Scotland. They were very happily married in September 2011. Cami serves with the International Office as Regional Coordinator for Europe and Africa. She also loves to dance, swim, cook, bake, read, hike, and watch birds.

I AM STOPPING BY:

- 1 Starting each day with the Lectio 365 app.
- 2 Setting an 11 alarm on my phone to gaze at Rembrandt’s Return of the Prodigal Son painting for a couple of minutes during a coffee break.
- 3 Walking by the coast or in the hills for at least 20 minutes 4 days a week.
- 4 Creating space in the evenings to listen, play, and pray with my son.

THE LEAST OF THESE

BY JENNIFER SEO NEY

Eleven years ago, when I was an intern from Canada with Word Made Flesh Sierra Leone (WMF SL), one of the books that influenced me to move to the edge of the Kroo Bay slum area in Sierra Leone was Ron Sider’s book, *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger*. In his book, he shares with us about Matthew 25:35-40. “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink... I needed clothes and you clothed me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (vv. 35-36, 40). He then challenged me with these words, “What does it mean that whatever we did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Jesus’, we did for Jesus (v.40) in a world where millions die each year of starvation while rich Christians live in affluence?”

Not that I knew exactly what to do to answer his question, but I appreciated Word Made Flesh’s vision to serve Jesus among the most vulnerable of the world’s poor. I wanted to serve Jesus by practicing solidarity with those who are poor. I ate the same food as the Sierra Leonean family I lived with and developed friendships with my neighbors. I became somewhat comfortable with a communal lifestyle with hardly any personal space - and even that space I shared with mice. Eleven years later, the vision of WMF is something I still strongly believe in and I want to continue to serve Jesus among friends who are struggling with poverty[1].

THE LONGER I SERVE JESUS AMONG FRIENDS WHO ARE POOR, THE MORE I UNDERSTAND THE CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES OF THIS TASK.

I have been married for 8 years and have two Sierra Leonean boys. God has blessed us and our children. I struggle with chronic illnesses that limit my ability to engage with my friends who are poor as much as I would like to. A year ago, our family made a difficult decision to move further from Kroo Bay for a more sustainable lifestyle.

So with these changes in my life, what does it mean to continue to serve Jesus among those who are poor? Though this is a question I won’t likely find an easy answer to, one of the things I am aware is how the kind of power I possess, as an educated Western missionary, is often making it difficult to develop true friendships with those who are struggling with poverty. I know that power can often make me proud, which prevents me from serving Jesus well in my context. When we serve Jesus among friends who are poor, service is expressed through physical proximity to the poor, but it also is expressed through relinquishing power through humility.

Recently I had an opportunity to choose service over power[2] with one of the youth we work with. “Jeremy” has been a friend of WMF SL for many years. He is loved by the WMF SL community because he is considered to be trustworthy, faithful, kind and helpful. I have known him for many years and I too trusted him deeply. I would have given him the key to my house without hesitation.

A few weeks ago, Jeremy contacted me and told me that he needed money (about \$20 USD) urgently because one of his neighbors was sick. He showed me a list of medications with prices. Since I knew the neighbor Jeremy was talking about, I was ready to make an arrangement with the WMF SL administrator so that Jeremy could have access to the fund for the medicine. Shortly after that, I realized that there were some things about the list Jeremy gave me that made me suspect that he wasn’t telling me the truth. I was 99% sure he lied to me.

I was angry, hurt and sad. ‘How could Jeremy do this to me? Out of every youth I know, I trusted him more than anyone!’ Part of me was tempted to use my power and authority as a Field Director to shame him. But as I was praying for him, God revealed my pride to me. I became aware of how I too was a sinner saved only by God’s grace.

I had planned to have Jeremy meet with a few colleagues of mine to investigate the matter fully and perhaps to reveal to everyone what a terrible thing he has done to me. But I felt led to meet with him one on one instead. In my conversation with him, it became 100% clear that he had indeed lied to me. With God’s help, however, I was able to lovingly rebuke him, then communicate forgiveness and love to him. When he cried and thanked me, I knew he was doing so with all sincerity. I am thankful that God convicted me of my pride. Pride prevents people from serving others.



PHOTO WMF SIERRA LEONE



JENNIFER SEO NEY

Field Director

Jennifer Seo Ney was born in Seoul, South Korea. She first served in the inner city of Vancouver working with people struggling with drug addiction, homelessness and mental illness. From 2012 to 2017, Jennifer served in the Kroo Bay area of Sierra Leone’s capital city of Freetown with Word Made Flesh. During that time, she focused on ministry with vulnerable women and children. She lives in Freetown with her husband, Stephen Ney, and serves as a Field Director of Word Made Flesh Sierra Leone. Jennifer enjoys running and reading.

When I thought that I was better than Jeremy and, thus, overpowered him with my moral superiority and pride, I wasn't able to truly forgive him. I couldn't honor his dignity because of my pride. Serving Jesus among the friends who are poor is to draw near to them with humility.

It is mind boggling to think of the kind of humility Jesus had to become human to serve humanity. Because Jesus served me first, I can learn from Him what it means to serve. Also, friendship with people like Jeremy gives me – a broken soul with pride and selfishness – a privilege to be transformed to be more like Jesus.

I would like to go back to the question Sider challenged me with, "What does Matthew 25:40 mean in a world where millions die each year of starvation while rich Christians live in affluence?" Perhaps the first step is to go near those who are poor with humility - wherever one is in the world,

Only when we have the eyes to see the infinite value that God ascribes to those who are struggling with poverty, can one begin to think about what serving Jesus means in a world where millions die each year of starvation while rich Christians live in affluence.

[1] One of the books I found helpful in better understanding WMF's theology and praxis of developing friendships with those who are marginalized is Chris Heuertz and Christine Pohl's book, *Friendship at the Margins*.

[2] In his book, *The Celebration of the Disciplined Life*, Richard Foster talks about service as an antidote to the temptation of destructive power.

WE CAN PRAY THAT GOD WOULD OPEN OUR EYES TO SEE PEOPLE WHO ARE POOR AS PEOPLE WITH NAMES AND STORIES, RATHER THAN FACELESS, NAMELESS STATISTICS. THEY ARE PRECIOUS PEOPLE WHO ARE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE AND WHO ARE DEARLY LOVED BY GOD.

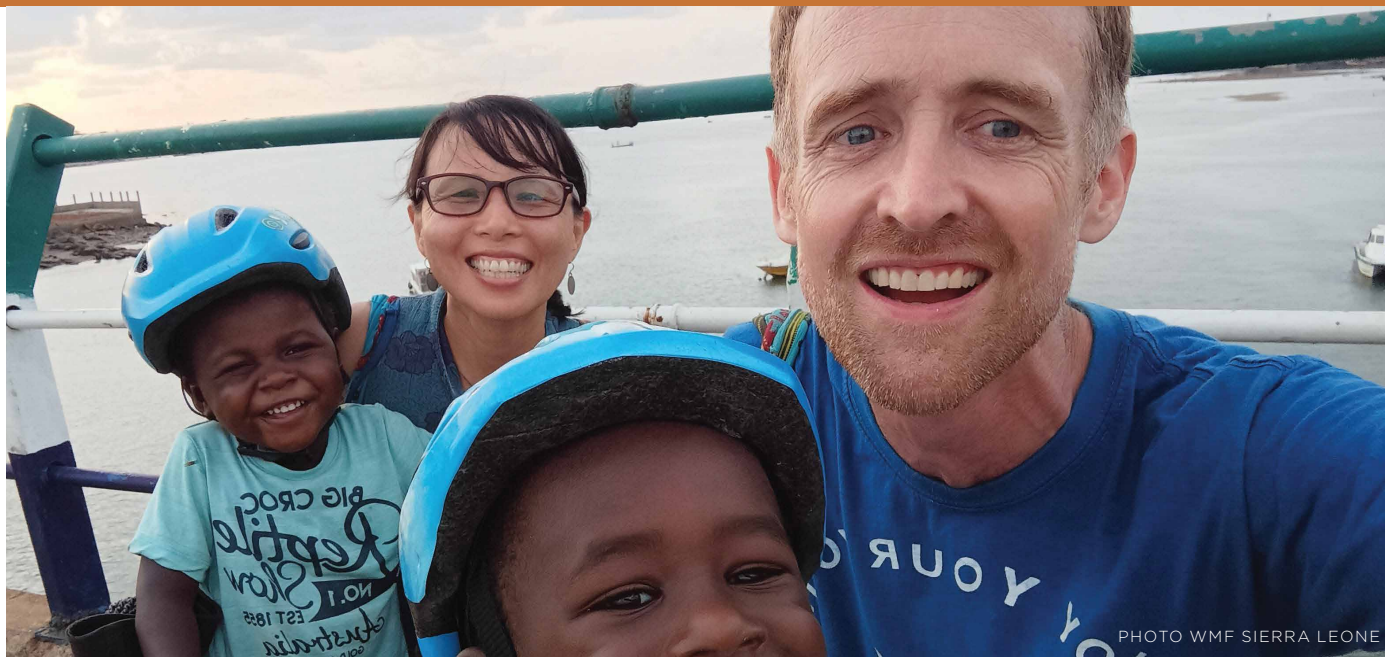


PHOTO WMF SIERRA LEONE

WHO IS THIS GOD THEY WORSHIP?

BY KRYSTAL BORN

Krystal Born wrote this narrative in response to individuals in vulnerable situations who she has listened to and learned from during her service with Word Made Flesh Moldova. She started by scribbling down her own questions, which quickly fell into a narrative illustrating the point of view of someone living on the streets. It is not an echo from a single individual, but an amalgamation of voices and stories from people that are living in vulnerable situations.

[CLICK TO READ WITH KRYSTAL](#)

WHO IS THIS GOD THEY WORSHIP?

How do we live our lives? Are we just saying words, and no action? Are we just acting and not speaking? Are we only speaking and not listening? Are we listening, but not speaking? How do we treat others – the outsider? The poor? The vulnerable? The sick? The non-poor? The “other” in our own personal lives?

Are we with others in the trenches of life? Or are we standing above shouting orders, developing plans, telling others what they should and should not do, should and should not believe, the good news?

Or are we empowering people to discover the Truth, to discover the Good News? Are we remembering that God opens hearts? Are we praying and fasting for those around us?

Are others looking in from the outside - asking questions about the way we live?

Who is this God they worship?
Who is this God they follow, that they do not seek after their well-being alone, but also the well-being of others, that they don't seek after riches, success, and status but sacrifice material things, comfort, personal success and status.

That they look, they look at me and us with love, love in their eyes, in their words, in their actions. It's like they don't see the clothes that are ragged, the same clothes I wear everyday. They don't see the dirt on my face, under my fingernails, embedded in my skin. It's like they don't see the mat I carry, the little possessions I own in my little cart. They don't see that no one talks to me.

It's like they don't care about any of these things. They give me bread, water, and a warm blanket. They don't have a camera in hand recording their “unselfishness.” I don't see superiority in their eyes. They want to stay. They want to talk. Like we're friends. But I don't know. I keep my guard up. I mean what do they want anyways? What are they trying to sell me? What do they want in return?

But also, I see them everyday. They are being kind to everyone. They moved to the neighborhood, just down the street. A neighborhood very few find value in, that others would not dare to venture into. I am still not convinced.

I see my fellow neighbor. I know a little bit about her. She doesn't look like she belongs to this neighborhood but she does. She is impoverished like the rest of us. She has nothing to offer. But she is entering the house of these people. I sit and contemplate.

Who are these people? What do they want from us?
I decide to investigate.
I go to the window.
They are sitting around a table.
They are holding hands.
Their heads bowed.
Suddenly, I see them look at me.
I duck. Oh no. I'm caught.
The door opens and the man comes out.
He crouches beside me and gently takes my hand, welcoming me to come eat.
I stare. I don't know what to say.

I look at my fellow neighbor, the sorrows of life shadow her face. I look down at myself – a shirt full of holes, jeans that have seen much better days, my arms and hands full of sores and dirt. I touch my eye – blackened from a fight.

Yet this man is gently touching me. There is no judgment, no fear, just this look. That I haven't seen since my dad passed away when I was a teen. A look of love. I find myself saying yes. I slowly stand as he helps me up and we go inside. I wash my hands but the dirt won't come out, my hands are stained.

They say come, eat, it's okay.
Yet, I feel shame. I sit. A plate of food is in front of me. I quietly say thank you. They ask me my name and few other questions I quietly answer. And they told me a little bit about them.

They said that they have been meeting with my fellow neighbor for a while now. And today, she was going to tell her story. She had said it was okay that I was there to listen.

Good, I thought. Now I will see their true colors. Once they hear her story, that will be the end. But as she tells of addiction, of prostitution, of her pain and suffering, about losing her kid and aborting the next.

I saw no disgust.
I saw no judgment, no red faces of anger.
I didn't see the common expression “I'm holier than thou.”
But in their eyes was the same look of love, of empathy.
The woman takes her hand – a tear following down her cheek – crying with my fellow neighbor.

What is this?

Even the man has tears in his eyes. They thank her for sharing her story with them. The woman says she understands the struggle of addiction. She's an addict?

They say they see her, they hear her, and if she wants, will walk with her in this journey towards healing, towards a different life.

I look in amazement.

The woman asked my fellow neighbor if she wanted to join a bible study with several other women from the neighborhood. And to my surprise she said yes.

Bible study? Isn't that the book those Christians read. The book about a God. About a man named Jesus?

I saw someone once shouting into a megaphone, “Believe in Jesus, Repent. Or you'll go to hell.” I kept walking.
Who is this Jesus?

He'll send me to hell if I don't repent?
He was just a man.

Another time a van with “something Church” pulled right outside our neighborhood. A small group of people piled out. They handed out some food and pamphlets. I could tell they didn't want to be here with us. Just something they had to do for this church. Some propaganda to sell. They quickly walked back to their car. One of the street dogs came to see if they had any food for them. One of them kicked him away. He yelped and ran.

I look at the pamphlet with disgust on my face. Do you know Jesus? Then something about salvation.

I saw the words kindness and love. Umph. I threw the pamphlet down. I didn't see love and kindness. We were just some social project. They didn't really want anything to do with us. Later, I found the dog and gave him my last piece of bread. We've been friends ever since.

Another time, I saw a bunch of angry Christians debating about their faith. I quickly walked away.

Another time, a person with a cross on their shirt – That is the Christian symbol, right? – said to another person as they walked past, if he wasn't so lazy he wouldn't be poor. And look at him smoking a cigarette, should have saved up for an apartment.

Actually I've worked really hard in my life harder probably then they ever had, and yes, cigarettes are the reason I can't get an apartment. I scoffed. They have no idea of my story. I've seen judgment. I've seen pity. I've seen disgust. On so many different faces. But I don't know. This seems different. They asked if they could pray with her. Prayer? They took each other's hands and extended theirs to mine.

WHO IS THIS GOD THEY WORSHIP?

I looked at my hands, I looked at theirs, not sure. Slowly I placed my hands in theirs and gently grasped.

Almighty God we know you are here, presence with us. Our light in this dark world. We thank you for being so near to us, for this opportunity to come before you, to get to know you. Thank you that you see us, that you hear our prayers. Father God, thank you for sending your son for us.

Thank you Jesus for coming down from the richness of heaven, demoting your status as God and becoming like us. You didn't use your status as God to be used for your advantage but instead walked with us - sinful humanity.

You didn't see our sins and condemn us, you didn't see our sins and walk away.

But you sat with us, ate with us, talked with us. You did look at us as a prostitute, a tax collector, a drunk, as a person who is sick, as a person who is poor, as a person who is rich.

But looked at us with this unconditional love. Desiring for us to enter into a relationship with you. Desiring to be our friend.

You see us as a person with value and dignity. You reached out your hand and touched the leper - the man who wanted to become clean. You looked with kindness and said I am willing - be clean And he was clean - Lord - oh thank you for your willingness to touch us when no one else is willing.

You invited those who have nothing to offer to the King's table. To eat and have fellowship with you.

You know everything about us. You know all the bad and good we have done, all the hurt, all the suffering we have gone through and have caused, you know everything.

What is mankind that you are mindful of us, human beings that you care for us. We have nothing to offer to the God of the universe - yet you offer us everything.

You Jesus gave your perfect life out of love for us. So that we may come to you and you give us true life. You tore the veil that separated us from you You then gave us the Holy Spirit - to help us in this life - to guide us to transform our lives.

You are our helper, our wise counselor, our prince of peace, our everlasting Father, our teacher.

You call us to repent and turn away from what is evil, what is wrong.

You give us grace, mercy, love and power of the Spirit to turn to you.

To turn to pure goodness, pure love.

To be welcomed and adopted into a new life-giving family.

Lord, we stand before you, in awe of your kindness and patience with us. We stand in awe that your blood, Jesus, covers every sin and reconciles us to the Father.

So now we regard no one from a worldly point of view. But regard everyone as made in your image. We are all your creation. And you call us to be stewards of that creation - to kindness and goodness to all creation - your earth, your animals, to each other. And through your Spirit we will grow in love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control.

Thank you Lord that you desire all to come to you, all to come to a knowledge of truth.

Here we are Lord humbly before you, Asking for our sister here, our friend.

May her heart be open,
May she feel your everlasting love,
Peace beyond understanding,
May your grace and mercy wash over here,
May what is stained become clean,
May you lead us,
May you help us as we move forward together in healing and transformation,
Help us to walk humbly before you, seeking justice and loving mercy,
In the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we pray ,
Amen.

I looked up. My fellow neighbor's face - it's different - like a weight has been lifted.

"I'm confused I don't completely understand. Yet there is something different about me as well.

What is this feeling?
What were those words?
Who are these people?
Is a better life possible? For me?
Am I welcome at this King's table?
Who is this King?
These people welcomed me.
Will this Jesus welcome me?
I need to know more.
I look straight into the man's eyes.
Who is this Jesus?



KRYSTAL BORN

Field Staff in
Word Made Flesh Moldova

Krystal attended Asbury University and in 2016 received her intercultural degree and became acquainted with Word Made Flesh. God has given her great compassion for those who are most vulnerable, of those who are often on the outskirts of society, and also a great love for children. She joined WMF Moldova in January 2022, joining God in his mission in Chisinau, being with children and their families, and helping show God's great love!

THE UPSIDE DOWN NATURE OF SERVICE

BY ARIEL ALEXANDER

Service is one of those buzzwords that permeates Christian culture. A lot of talk about service centers around the idea of “servant-leadership:” defined as emulating Jesus’s leadership style. Service can indeed qualify Jesus’ type of leadership, but we do his example a disservice when we limit service to the sphere of leadership and don’t consider the deeper invitation that Jesus makes to all his followers.

One of my favorite stories in Scripture and about Jesus’ transformative invitation to his followers through service is found in Matthew 20:20-28. In this story, James and John’s mother goes up to Jesus and kneels before him. Jesus asks what she wants and she states, “Give your word that these two sons of mine will be awarded the highest places of honor in your kingdom, one at your right hand, one at your left hand.”

JESUS RESPONDS, “YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU ARE ASKING,”

and turns to James and John who we can imagine are standing right there, maybe a little behind their mother, one to her right and one to her left. And Jesus asks them if they are capable of drinking the cup that he was about to drink. They said, “Sure, why not?” Jesus said, “Come to think of it, you *are* going to drink my cup. But as to awarding places of honor, that’s not my business. My Father is taking care of that.” (Matthew 20:21-23 MSG)

First of all, I love this story. I can imagine James and John’s mother, in full mother hen mode, seeking the best for her boys, willing to intercede with Jesus himself on their behalf. This story also shows, not just a mother’s determination, but also her closeness to Jesus himself. Perhaps she was a part of meals or gatherings, or she hosted him in her house. There is a relationship there that gives her the confidence to approach him and make her request.

It is also worth noting that Jesus does not get angry with her, or her boys for that matter. Rather, I imagine him responding with a pained expression on his face and maybe a tightness in his chest as he imagines the road and sacrifice that is before him and hears her request. The Message paraphrase helps to imagine this posture in Jesus’ response of “You have no idea what you’re asking...”

Even with the uncomfortable question, the passage shows the beautiful depth of relationship that Jesus has, not just with James and John, but with their mother as well.

Though Jesus does not get upset by the mother’s question, the rest of the twelve disciples do when they find out.



PHOTO WMF BOLIVIA

Again, the Message paints a colorful picture of their reaction: “When the ten others heard about this, they lost their tempers, thoroughly disgusted with the two brothers” (MSG Matthew 20:24). Of course they were ticked off. Here’s the sign that in the group of the twelve chosen ones, two are trying to get above the rest! It is only after the rest of the disciples go off on the brothers that Jesus shares more about what he meant in his “can you drink the cup” answer.

So Jesus got them together to settle things down. He said, “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to serve, not be served—and then to give away his life in exchange for the many who are held hostage.” (Matthew 20:24-28 MSG)

His explanation shows what he expects of them as his followers and qualifies what He came to do. It is in Jesus’ explanation that we understand service as the antithesis to the world’s way of wielding power. We know the world’s way of grasping for positions of influence, authority, and even celebrity.

All of these places involve being above others: to direct, to receive preferential treatment, to be admired and even envied. In some cases we would even expect this power to then be used to decide over others, in indirect and direct ways. That is not the way of Christ or what he expects from his followers.

We’ve probably heard it said many times, that in positions of leadership we should orient ourselves to serving others, but service is a quality that should apply to all Christ followers, not just as an adjective to those chosen for, or aspiring to positions of leadership.

In this story Jesus directs his disciples to serve the others if they aspire to be first, not because He chose them to be leaders, but because they will be emulating Christ’s example. When we orient ourselves to this type of service, as an outpouring of our decision to follow Jesus, we also receive the opportunity to reflect on the varying degrees of privilege we might have through various accidents of life, roles or positions. Positioning ourselves in a Service mindset can invite us to recognize where those privileges have removed obstacles for us and recognize that others might still have to face those obstacles..

SERVICE THEN INVITES US TO RELINQUISH SOME OF OUR PRIVILEGE OR STEP ASIDE AND OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS TO GROW INTO ROLES WE MIGHT HAVE NATURALLY FOUND OURSELVES IN.

Service then invites us to relinquish some of our privilege or step aside and offer opportunities for others to grow into roles we might have naturally found ourselves in. We can choose to serve, and not be served.

Lastly, service is also one of the signposts of God’s upside down kingdom coming to this world. Jesus’ affirmation that “it is not going to be that way with you” points to the prophetic way of relating to each other that should characterize the people of God. For followers of Christ there shouldn’t be “rulers” in our midst who “throw their weight around” or “lord their authority over others.” Rather, the call for each and every one of us should be to follow Christ’s example of service to others, even to the point of laying down one’s life.

Jesus’ question to each of us in the end, as his followers, is also “can you drink the cup?” Can we seek to serve instead of just lead? Can we let Jesus’ invitation to service allow us to recognize the different privileges we might have and to set those aside, to become last? Can we face what is commonly shown us as success, authority, a privileged place in this world and choose the upside down kingdom path of service to others? Jesus’ invitation is not just for would-be leaders but for anyone who would follow him. Can we drink the cup and show the beauty of God’s kingdom come in our service to others.



ARIEL ALEXANDER

Regional Coordinator for Latin America

Ariel grew up in Córdoba, Argentina, and has called La Paz, Bolivia home since 2009. She joined Word Made Flesh in 2012 and has supported survivors of abuse and sexual exploitation as program coordinator, researcher, advocate, and inter-cultural formation facilitator within the WMF community in Bolivia. At the beginning of 2023 she stepped into the role of Regional Coordinator for Latin America. She desires to support WMF communities in Latin America and create bridges of partnership between individuals and organizations serving those in vulnerable situations in the region.

SITTING IN THE DISCOMFORT OF SERVICE

BY KRISTEN STIEFEL

"Sometimes I wish serving others was easier." I told this to my husband over dinner last week. The previous evening we had the opportunity to host our friend Gus* in our home for dinner. He hadn't been over in a while, and it gave us quality time to catch up while he ran a few loads of laundry and took a shower. Gus has been living outside in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park for about three years now, and we got to know him through the weekly pancake picnics in Golden Gate Park that our church hosts for our unhoused neighbors. Gus has also become a beloved and committed member of our church, showing up each week, engaging in the service and a small group, and always asking for updates on how people are doing if he hasn't seen them in a while. Access to hot running water while living in Golden Gate Park is hard to come by, so it felt easy to share the resources we have.

We were happy to add another setting to our dinner table. We were glad to provide a welcoming space to be supportive friends. It was easy to provide a fresh towel, good-smelling soap, and other toiletries for a shower. We are glad to live in an apartment with a washer and dryer in the unit so friends can use them.



But then, it got hard.

Like most San Franciscans, we have a shoeless house to keep the sidewalk dirt and dust on the sidewalk. Most guests see our stack of shoes by the front door and instinctively take theirs off or ask if they should. Not only did Gus not follow either of these social cues, but when we informed him that we have a shoeless house, he kindly replied that he would feel more comfortable continuing to wear his boots. Yes, okay, but... You see, we have this rug, and it was new, and it was a light, neutral color.

And Gus was wearing boots...boots that have traveled all over San Francisco and traversed miles in the park. Boots could have accumulated who knows what on the bottom of them. And again, the rug was new, and I thought it was beautiful.

"Sometimes I wish serving others was easier" was the start of my confession. As much as I wanted to welcome Gus into our home, I wanted service to be on my terms. I wanted Gus to behave in a certain way. I wanted my rug to not have boots on it!

We did reach an easy compromise. We gave Gus the option to take his boots off and hang out inside our home, or if he wanted to keep his boots on, we could hang out in our fun and peaceful backyard since it was a bright and warm summer evening. He opted to be outside, and it was a lovely time. We brought dinner out and sat around our patio table. Over dinner and dessert, I learned that Gus loved quesadillas with sour cream. He showed us some rocks he found recently. Being at our house, we were able to show Gus the rocks we had picked up while on walks and talk about some of our favorite foods, too.

But we were not outside the whole time, and there was still the issue of the rug, which began to look more and more like a lake of lava that needed to be avoided. On one side of the rug was the backyard and the kitchen. On the other side was Gus' coat and backpack and the bathroom. Each time Gus happened to walk across the rug, I fought an urge to butt in. I wanted Gus to feel at home. I, in my "inside shoes", could easily cross this lake of lava and grab what he needed from down the hall; he didn't need to do it. I wanted to reroute Gus' movements. And I knew I was placing my need for a clean house above my love for Gus. Lord, have mercy on me!

We had placed this rug down so our living room would feel more homey and comfortable. We wanted the living room to be a place that draws people in and invites them to linger over long conversations and tea. Ironically, I was using this rug for the exact opposite reason we put it there in the first place.



PHOTO WMF

I wonder what other ways I am trying to serve others but end up erecting barriers instead. I want to serve others with a fuller heart and open hands. I wish that I didn't place so much importance on the things that I have. I desire to have fewer barriers to keep me from others. I wish that generous service came more easily. Gus was simply grateful for the time with us, his friends. The opportunities to do laundry and take a shower were added bonuses. And you know what? When he left, there weren't any boot marks on the rug. Despite my best, but deeply misaligned efforts to keep him off of it, there were times when he had to cross over to go to the bathroom or get his bag down the hall. This rug looked the same as it had before Gus came over. Why was I so preoccupied by this?

That night, parts of serving Gus were easy. But, quite quickly and unexpectedly, it turned out to be harder than I thought it would be. Outwardly, my motives were in the right place, but inwardly, my priorities were completely off the mark.



KRISTEN STIEFEL

Director of Community Care

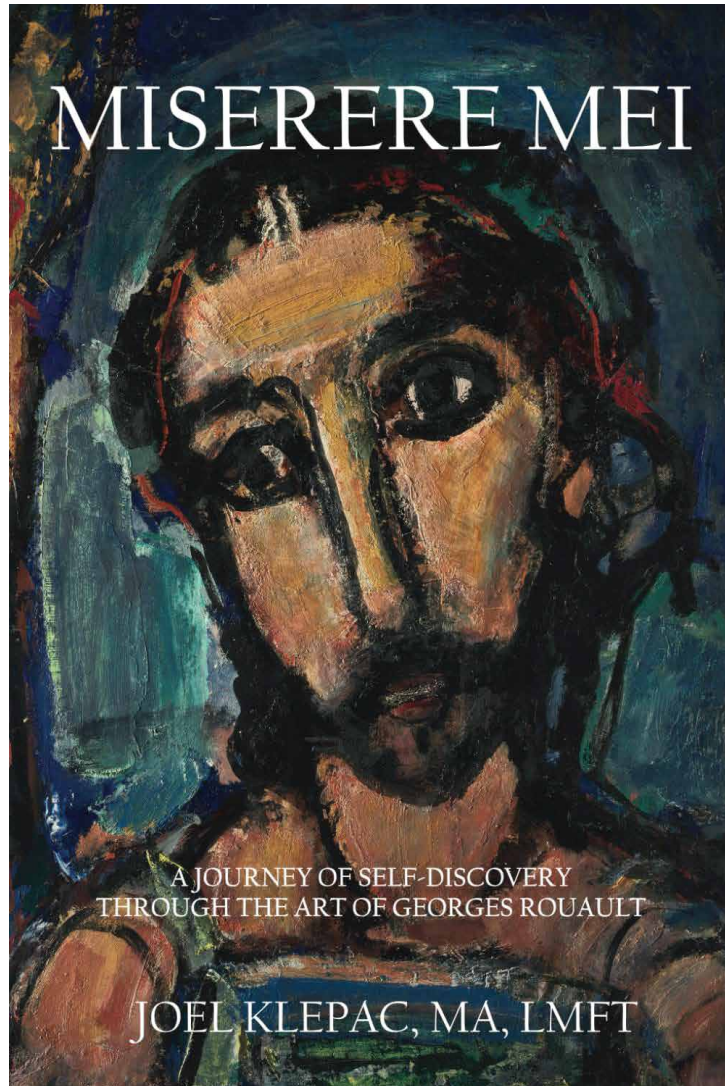
Kristen joined Word Made Flesh as the Director of Community Care in 2018. She desires to offer a space for reflection, rest, and a listening ear to the WMF community as we live out our vocational callings around the world. Before joining Word Made Flesh, she worked in experiential learning and study abroad programs for college students in both Lithuania and San Francisco. She loves exploring the sacred space where identity and spiritual formation collide with cross-cultural experiences. Kristen currently lives in San Francisco and can be found either hiking in the mountains or searching for the perfect lavender latte with friends.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT OPENING THE DOOR TO GUS THAT EVENING WOULD MEAN SHINING A LIGHT ON THE WAYS THAT I NEED TO CHANGE.

Noticing my reactions revealed the spaces that I want to invite Jesus into...places where my heart needs further softening and the places where I have disordered attachments. May I take what was illuminated to me that evening to love others more deeply, authentically, and generously.

*name changed to protect their identity

MISERERE MEI: A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY THROUGH THE ART OF GEORGES ROUAULT



"KLEPAC GUIDES READERS INTO A STUDY OF THEIR OWN INNER ABANDONMENT AND FORSAKENNESS. A DEEP MEDITATION ON MANY LEVELS."

BR. PAUL QUENON, OCSO, TRAPPIST AT THE ABBEY OF GETHSEMANI WHERE THOMAS MERTON WAS HIS NOVICE MENTOR.



JOEL KLEPAC

Former Word Made Flesh
Staff in Romania

Joel spent 8.5 years serving with the Word Made Flesh Romania community and has since become a Marriage and Family Therapist. In his newly published book, *Miserere Mei*, he draws on his clinical experience with Internal Family Systems Therapy and pulls back to many of the experiences of working among the poor in Galati, Romania to draw readers into the timeless themes of Georges Rouault that call us all to grow in compassion for others and for ourselves. Rouault's works were intended to be something of a lenten journey towards growth and self-discovery, and Joel builds on Rouault's work to make entry into these themes personal and accessible. The book description reads:

"Miserere Mei is translated simply as "have mercy on me," and has the same root as myrrh, or healing oil. Artist Georges Rouault channeled this healing energy in his powerful series Miserere et Guerre, a collection of prints created amidst World War I in France. This stunning series of images still beckons the viewer on a healing journey."

As an artist, therapist, and spiritual seeker, author Joel explores themes of suffering, grief, love, and hope in the first 33 plates of the Miserere series (images included). He does not shy away from Rouault's Catholic spirituality inherent in the pieces, but rather appreciates the resonances with his own Eastern Orthodox Christian background, and connects them with universal human experiences of psychological and spiritual exploration and growth.



JOEL DURING HIS SERVICE WITH WMF ROMANIA.



The following is an excerpt from Joel's book:

Journal Entry -

Ion asked me to go with him to visit some relatives of his, knowing that his uncle had become a Christian some years ago. He is always dying for the chance to talk about his new faith with "his people" the Roma.

We entered the courtyard through a big metal gate to find his aunt lying on a couch moved outside to enjoy the summer air. It was a regular living room couch that they would put a tarp over at night. She was resting her Sunday away when we walked in. She didn't immediately recognize Ion, but with a few words in... Romani language, her face lit up...

He told the aunt how he chose to be in the family of God, and through faith in Christ his life is changed. Without pausing, he told how he could now read the Bible and write, how he was going to school and getting his birth certificate. "God is in my life." He would go on as long as he could about his new faith, about not being on drugs or alcohol for a year and four months. She motioned to one of her stepdaughters who had been listening in, "His face is changed, isn't it? He looks good."

...It seemed clear to me that without the evident change in his face from what it was a couple years ago, they would have probably been impatient with all his preaching.

The same thing happened each time a new person entered the courtyard; strange looks, "Who is this?" "Oh yeah, that kid who would beg from everyone," "That messed up kid who lived down there," and then, "He looks good," "He is different." This always prompted Ion to another sermonette...

As things often happen, this little visit occurred on Transfiguration Sunday. In Romanian, the Transfiguration is referred to by the ordinary words, "the changing of the face." The Eastern Orthodox understanding is that the transfiguration was not so much a light show, as it was the scales coming off the Disciples' eyes; they saw Christ as He always is. The veil came off and they really saw Christ... they were acknowledging that they had finally seen Ion not as "street trash," a "beggar" or a "pest," but as an eligible bachelor. They saw him with new eyes. They saw beyond the labels.

... In Rouault's image depicting Christ being reviled, beaten, we are placed in a front row seat to God in the position of the abused outcast. By extension, there is a divine identification with all outcasts, all those reviled, all those who are stripped of the dignity of being seen as divine beings in human flesh. The indignity experienced by Ion was not foreign to Rouault's Christ reviled.

**FOR MORE MEDITATIONS ON ART, LIFE, AND SERVICE,
CLICK HERE TO PURCHASE JOEL'S BOOK.**

HIS LOVE, HIS COMFORT, AND HIS FRUIT

BY KRYSTAL BORN

I was reading my devotional of the day from Henri Nouwen's book *You are the Beloved* when I read this sentence, "We are called to give our lives to others, so you and I can bear fruit." It encouraged me to go deeper and to reflect on giving one's life to others in service and the fruit of the Spirit.

Throughout Scripture, God calls those who love and follow Him to love and serve one another. Jesus demonstrated it perfectly for us through different ways - from doing the simple yet profound way of washing His disciples' feet to the ultimate show of love - dying for us so that we may be washed clean from our sins and brought into His kingdom.

We are cleaned from His sacrifice. As believers, we have accepted this and given the Spirit. Galatians 5 reads of Christian freedom, of life in the Spirit vs. the flesh, and of the fruits of the Spirit. First, we have been set free. But this freedom, Christian freedom, is a gift; however, it is also a demand. It is living life in the presence of God, being led and guided by the Spirit. We ask for the wisdom of the Spirit that guides us in this life. "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is, first of all, pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17)

A believer is actively and purposefully walking on the path of the Holy Spirit. Walking with the Spirit we are being supernaturally transformed internally and externally. It is to become like Christ, following His teachings and personhood. It is to use this freedom to serve in His Kingdom. "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love." (Galatians 5:13)

Repeatedly, in the last two chapters of Galatians, Paul talks against self-indulgence and instead states that loving one's neighbor, serving one's neighbor, and bearing another's burden fulfill the law of Christ. God has given humanity an opportunity to come into his family through his love for us, so that we can love him and love and serve our fellow neighbor. The freedom God has given each believer is Spirit-filled to equip each believer to grow in holiness. The believer is supernaturally filled with the Spirit to grow in holiness, but it also requires discipline and maturity. It takes a lifetime of acquiring and growing to be like Christ.



PHOTO WMF MOLDOVA

The fruit of the Spirit grows organically; it is not about a believer's might or earning God's love. But rather it is dwelling in the Holy Spirit and a daily relationship with God. This daily walking and dwelling in the presence of God are transformational. Serving others is transformational. And we can visibly see this transformation through the fruit of the Spirit. You will be recognized by your fruit (Matthew 7:16-20).

The fruit listed is expected to be manifested in a Christian life and a Christian community. These are characteristics of Christ that grow supernaturally in every believer that is walking with the Spirit. Love is to be at the forefront of it all. It fulfills the law because of faith working through love in the community (Gal 5:6, 14). The fruit of the Spirit is a portrait of what life looks like in the Spirit. This life builds community. This is the fruit that is planted by the hearing of the good news, is nurtured in the community, and is brought to consummation by the goodness of God. This new life gives believers the freedom to love unconditionally, serve, and build up people around them.

"You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit - fruit that will last - and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other." Luke 15:16-17. These verses come at the end of the Vine and the Branches discourse. Abiding. It has been a word dear to my heart - abiding in the true vine. Abiding so that we may know the true love of God. Abiding so we may be transformed. Abiding so that we may bear the fruit of the Spirit in service to God and our neighbors.



"YOU, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WERE CALLED TO BE FREE. BUT DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM TO INDULGE THE FLESH; RATHER, SERVE ONE ANOTHER HUMBLY IN LOVE."
(GALATIANS 5:13)

PHOTO WMF MOLDOVA

The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23a).

I reflect on these fruits in my own life and the community I have been called to serve. Jesus chose me, He appointed me to go (to wherever he calls) and bear fruit. Just as He called everyone who follows Him. God called me in 2016 to go to Asbury University. I said yes to that call. I said yes to the call to serve in missions. I said yes to the call to serve in Word Made Flesh Moldova in 2019. I reflect on how Covid began in 2020. It derailed the plans to do my 3-month internship and ultimately move. However, during that time, I abided in God's word, in prayer, and a virtual community, and He grew in me a supernatural patience and forbearance.

February 24th of 2022, a little over a month after I had moved to Moldova, marked the start of the War in Ukraine. Amid such loss, tragedy, uncertainty, and many other feelings, there was a sense of peace beyond understanding that I experienced. God had called me and led me to this time in Moldova. As Ukrainians poured into Moldova, we decided as a community and through God's guidance to serve Ukrainians and to continue to serve our kids and their families.

I saw the community bearing each other's burdens. I saw love, kindness, goodness, and gentleness thrive. I saw, despite such great sorrow, moments of joy that could only be explained by the presence of God being manifested in an Agape-type of love for God and for each other. I saw the faithfulness of Word Made Flesh Moldova in the continued service to our neighbors and continued to stand firmly in this service. I saw the kindness and goodness of our WMF community and our supporters.

God never says that serving Him will be easy; in fact, the opposite, we will face many trials and tribulations. But He gives us Himself and His fruit to continue to walk forward. As I walk through the grief of losing my father and grandfather this year, I am dedicated to being faithful in serving God and serving others. His love, His comfort, and His fruit, as well as the comfort and guidance of many who have been in my life and who He has brought into my life this past couple of years, have been the sustaining force to continue my walk and service with Him.

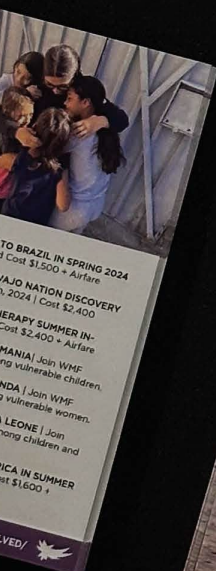
Thank you all for the service that you do. I love hearing the stories of how God is moving His servants to serve and the fruits that come forth.

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A clipboard with a table titled "INT". The table has two columns: "No" and a name column. The names are handwritten in blue ink.

No	
1	John Per
2	Kakibh
3	EagMan
4	
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