

Love
is
to
Life

FIRST WORD

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes or daily food. If one of you tells him, "Go in peace; stay warm and well fed," but does not provide for his physical needs, what good is that? So too, faith by itself, if it is not complemented by action, is dead." (James 2:15-17)

Confession: I used to think that the Gospel was transactional: that it involved telling people that Jesus died for their sins, getting them to pray the sinner's prayer, and walking away knowing you had won another soul for Jesus. I told people in refugee camps and conflict areas about God - I was very good at it, actually - and I led whole groups of school children to accept Jesus.

And I was clueless.

Because the Gospel - the Good News - of Jesus is not just words, not just telling people how they can get to heaven. It is also providing for their physical needs. It is words and it is action, both, and they can't be separated the way I used to separate them. When I preached the Gospel in refugee camps where little children walked around with bellies full of worms - a problem that cost ten cents/month to fix - because they didn't have shoes to protect their feet, and I told them to go in peace, patted their little heads and walked away without meeting their needs, my faith was dead.

It wasn't until my wife Oddny and I met a woman named Rose who took in and cared for orphans, and who asked us to financially support a little girl whose family had been killed, that I came face to face with how dead my faith had been. Because when I found out that for \$30 a year that little girl would be worm and parasite-free, have new shoes and clothes, and enough food to be healthy, I realized how empty my blessings of peace had been to those who were hungry.

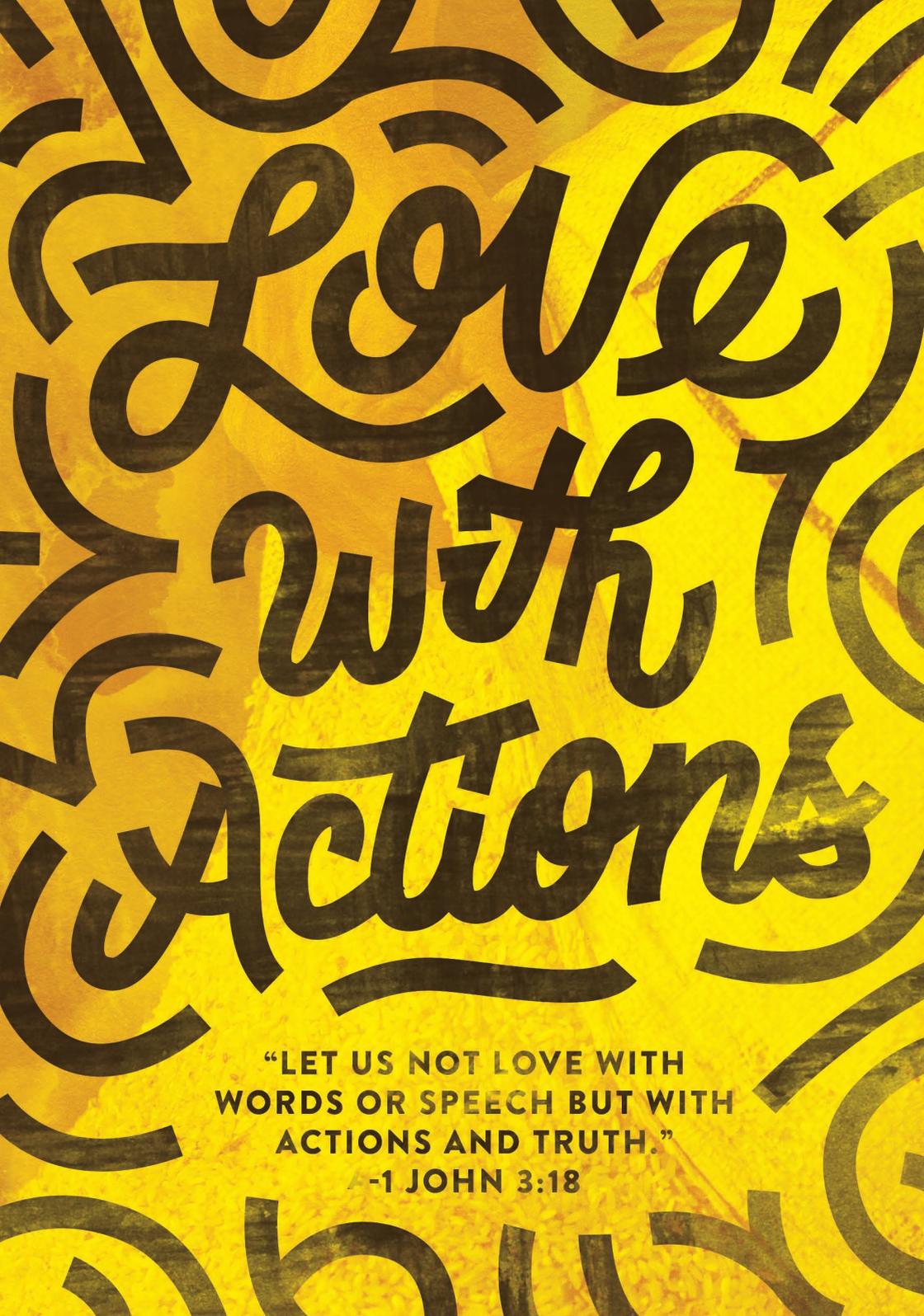
When Jesus told us that when we feed others we are feeding Him, he wasn't joking, and he wasn't referring to spiritual hunger. He said that when we give a cup of cold water to the least of these, we are doing it for him. Actual water, actually for Jesus. And when we don't, we send Jesus away thirsty.

Rose taught me that to love is to act, and that is what we have been trying - more or less - to do for the last twenty years as a team. We love with words when we tell people about Jesus who loves so sacrificially. We love with actions when we meet new refugees with a cup of cold water. Without words the Gospel doesn't have legs and without actions the Gospel doesn't mean anything. In this magazine our team writes about how this plays out on the field and changes the lives of real people who are desperate for Good News.



STEVE GUMAER

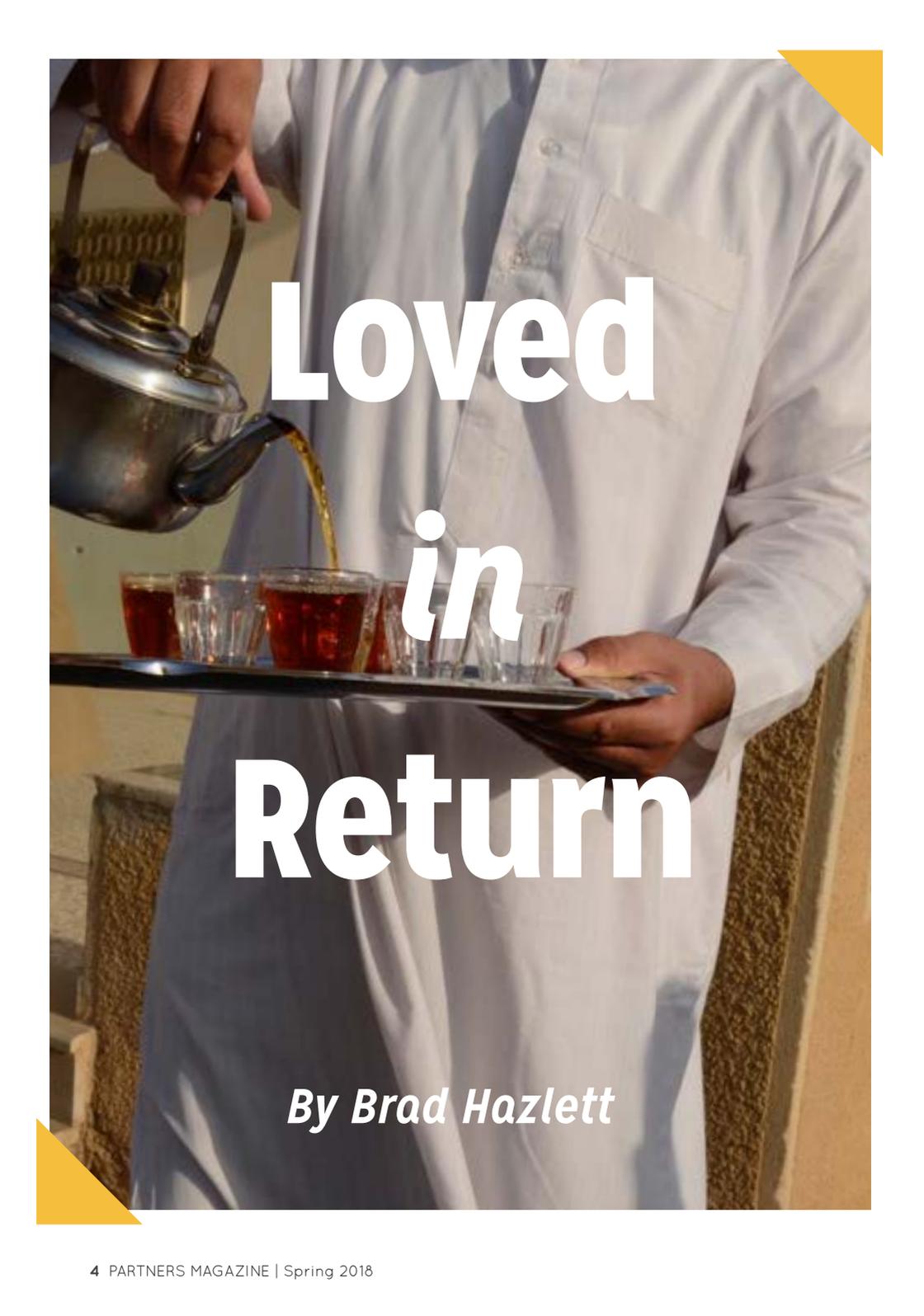
President, Partners Relief & Development



Love with Actions

**“LET US NOT LOVE WITH
WORDS OR SPEECH BUT WITH
ACTIONS AND TRUTH.”**

-1 JOHN 3:18

A person wearing a white uniform is pouring tea from a silver teapot into a tray of glasses. The scene is set outdoors, with a textured wall in the background. The person's hands are visible, one holding the teapot and the other holding the tray. The tea is a dark amber color. The overall lighting is warm and natural.

Loved *in* Return

By Brad Hazlett

IF YOU ASK any of our team members to recall one of their most memorable meals from 2017, some would tell you about the afternoon when Syrian refugees served them tea in cracked cups they had carried with them when they fled. Others would mention the fresh coconut offered by Rohingya in an internment camp in Myanmar. Still others would tell how they were served a full meal by those who had very little.

Showing love through actions is what Partners does, the tangible manifestation of something not tangible. Over time we've come to understand more deeply what it means to be loved in return. It is common for us to receive tea, or a meal, or other expressions of appreciation. It's easy for us to serve, being served in return is unexpected.

In more than five years working with the Rohingya there has been one consistent response; those we have helped thank us because we care and we keep coming back. Sure, they are thankful for the food and the shelter and the medicine, and all the other help we have been able to provide; but most of all they thank us for our friendship and the fact that we show up month after month and year after year. Our presence and our actions have proven we are a friend to the friendless.

When Partners met Majd, his family was suffering from hunger and cold in Tabqah, Syria. An airstrike killed his

father and left Majd with disfiguring injuries. Together with his mother and four siblings they fled from the airstrikes and sought shelter in the remains of a bombed out building. This is the situation with most of the widows in and around Raqqa, Syria. After receiving help from Partners, Majd's mother wanted to thank us. She also told us that Partners is the only organization helping her family. To be seen and be shown kindness is of great worth to those who have suffered through war and oppression.

Partners' work in Raqqa continues to grow. Recently, we distributed food and opened schools and a clinic. We have built a relationship with the Raqqa City Council and they know that we are a Christian organization. This week they informed us that no one is helping them except for Partners. Through a translator we were told that when stability returns to Raqqa, we will be 'pampered'. I pressed our translator because of his unique choice of words. He went on to explain that we will be 'treated well', 'respected', 'accepted', 'loved'.

Jesus said to 'Love others as well as you love yourself' (Mark 12:30, The Message). In Partners we are intentional about loving others. We strategize and plan, and do all we can to be effective in showing this kind of love. We want to make sure our help has its greatest impact. When those same people return that love, it has an effect on us.

We are humbled to be loved in return.

A person wearing a camouflage bucket hat and a blue denim shirt is crouching in a muddy field. They are holding a small plant in their hands, appearing to be engaged in agricultural work. The background is a blurred green field. Overlaid on the image is large, white, hand-drawn style text that reads "The New Bulk".

The New Bulk

BY ARYUWAT RARUEN & DAVID HOPPE

A person wearing a blue shirt is working in a field. The background shows green foliage and a blue tarp. The person is partially visible on the left side of the frame, and their hands are near some agricultural machinery or tools. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a rural or agricultural setting.

When we talk about being in this for the long-haul, there's probably no greater example than the communities we've walked alongside in Karen State, Myanmar. It's where our very first relief efforts were focused during the height of the Myanmar Army's offensive on the Karen, which led to the displacement of more than 25,000 villagers in 2006 alone. In these same communities, where the mortars have stopped and fragile peace agreements are now in place, the toll this war has taken continues to be felt and forms a crucial part of why our work here isn't yet finished.

Deep in these jungles, Partners is training displaced Karen villagers to provide for themselves something that war and oppression have made very difficult to obtain: a reliable food source. Through your support, a small team is teaching valuable techniques which empower these Karen to become self-reliant for their daily needs and which lay important groundwork for the impending return of thousands of Karen who are being sent back to Myanmar from refugee camps in Thailand.

Since 2016, the Thai government has been pushing toward repatriating the more than ninety-thousand Karen refugees now living in camps on the Thai border. In the same year, authorities announced that they would stop providing food rations in 2017 in order to force the Karen to return to Myanmar. Two weeks ago, they announced that rations will be stopped in 2018 instead. Even with

the rations still coming, it's not exactly easy for refugees to get enough food in the camps. A few years ago, a boy in one of the camps drowned trying to cross the river to forage for something to eat. When the rations stop, things will be even more desperate.

The repeated postponement of ration cuts is a perfect indication of the complexity of the repatriation process. The problems with the plan are manifold. For one thing, the Myanmar government has done very little to assist in the process. The majority of the burden has fallen to the Karen National Union, which has had insufficient time and resources to provide accommodation and schooling for the arrival of so many people. The land selected for resettlement is not ideal. The decision is often based heavily on proximity to the border camps or simply on the fact that no one else wants it.

For several years, the Myanmar government has encouraged other ethnicities to come and occupy the land vacated by Karen who fled attacks from the military. Because the Karen can no longer return to their actual homes, the land they are resettling has proven to be inconveniently located and nutrient-poor. It is here we can see a devastating chain-reaction of problems brought upon the Karen by Myanmar's relentless oppression of ethnic minorities. The constant upheaval in Myanmar has made poverty and food shortage a near-permanent danger for many Karen communities. >>>>>

In Myanmar, and indeed much of the world, it is common practice for a farmer to borrow seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides from a local store. The borrowed supplies are used to produce a crop and ideally to repay the store after harvest. Not only does this system often leave the farmers in a cycle of debt to the store, it also causes some other feedback loops that make it more and more unlikely for people to become self-sufficient. The pesticides and chemical fertilizers reduce the quality of the soil, making it increasingly difficult to farm without using those same chemicals again the next time around. Plants grown from the hybrid seeds they bought may have some desirable properties but are also incapable of yielding viable seeds for a second generation of those plants. The single-use seeds, the poisoning of the soil, and the ever-looming debt cause many farmers to keep buying back into a system that keeps them poor and under-nourished.

Add to this misery the constant threat of soldiers attacking and burning the crops, or the whole village. This is life for so many Karen. The army attacks, the Karen run, the army leaves, the Karen resettle and begin farming, the army attacks. This has been happening repeatedly for several years, but many Karen continue to return, perhaps in defiance, but also because they refuse to become refugees, so there is nowhere else to go. When they do settle they are quickly forced to enter the same destructive farming cycle.

Enter Eden, a two-acre farm deep inside Karen State where a small Partners team provides extensive

training to give the Karen a way to escape the cycle of destructive farming. Attendees learn to make natural fertilizers and pesticides so they don't have to spend what little money they have on chemicals that degrade their soil. They learn soil rejuvenation techniques which replenish it with nutrients and allow long-term farming without the use of chemical fertilizers. They learn a system of rice intensification which has allowed many farmers to more-than double their harvest while using fewer seeds and without spending money on equipment or harmful chemicals. They learn seed-saving and are given the seeds of purebred plants which can then be propagated without limit. They also learn soap-making to increase hygiene and provide some extra income. Together, this wealth of knowledge allows the Karen to drastically reduce their dependence on money and the destructive farming system so common throughout Myanmar.

Changing the mentality is no small task. Often, the villagers don't believe farming is possible without buying chemicals. Understandably, they are too afraid to take the risk of changing anything until they see for themselves that their neighbors are producing better and more reliable crops at a lower cost. The movement is definitely spreading. "The training was really useful for my area. Now I will go back home and implement the information that I was taught," says Saw Swe Mue Hair, a 65-year old farmer who visited Eden recently. The number of Karen requesting to be a part of these trainings is increasing. The team's schedule is already

fully-booked with trainings through the end of the year.

Since so many communities are isolated and their farmers bound to the schedule of the crops, the team also travels to several other areas, providing free trainings to whomever is willing. They have even been asked to provide trainings at boarding schools inside the refugee camps in Thailand, where many of the students don't have other family members to provide for them.

These sustainability trainings are giving the people a sense of control over their lives and equipping them for the eventuality of a move back into a very unstable Myanmar.

We know that delivering a bag of rice to a hungry family in crisis is important. Yet, if it truly is love that motivates our actions, we need to look further down the road and do all we can to provide a way out of hardship for communities ravaged by war.



PARTNERS
FOR CHANGE

Because educating a child, strengthening families, and rebuilding hope is not an overnight process, **PARTNERS FOR CHANGE** is a monthly giving program that invests in community-led ideas that provide long-term solutions to break the cycle of poverty and violence.

JOIN US TODAY AT CHANGE.PARTNERS.NGO OR USE THE ENCLOSED RETURN ENVELOPE TO BRING HOPE TO THOSE AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND OPPRESSION.



GRANDMA'S

Roing

Marie Dershem

The sights and sounds were unlike anything I'd experienced before. Dirt roads bordered by open sewers, three-wheeled CNG taxis weaving in and out of traffic in a seemingly chaotic choreography punctuated by incessant honking, cows meandering down the main road unaware of the chaos surrounding them on narrow roads shared by large buses and bicycle rickshaws. The chaos was almost too much to take in. After a long day of travel, we were on our way from the airport to our hotel in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, with a small team from Partners Relief & Development.

My husband, Aric, I, and two others would be together for the next several days to provide aid and assistance to the Rohingya refugees.

But for me, this journey began long before we we left for Bangladesh; long before we were invited to join this team. My journey here began when I was a young girl, wide-eyed and amazed at the stories of Jesus' love in places that seemed so far away, yet so much a part of my family.

You see, my grandparents were medical missionaries in parts of India



and Africa. My grandfather was a doctor, my grandmother was a nurse; together they provided medical care to hundreds of people in war-torn countries, risking their lives at times to provide care and safety to those in need. I grew up immersed in the stories of their work and I deeply admired them.

My grandma and I were particularly close. Almost two years ago, she joined my mother, her daughter, in heaven at the age of 103. After my mom passed away, we grew even closer, helping each other feel

connected to my mom, her daughter.

Soon after she died, my aunt and uncles gave me one of the most precious gifts I could imagine - my grandmother's wedding ring. When I slipped it onto my finger, I was flooded with memories of the stories she told - the stories of the love, care, health, healing and safety she brought through her work. The hands that had worn this ring for almost 70 years were the hands that brought Jesus' love to people around the world.

I began to wonder... how can I honor

her? How can I continue the loving work of her hands in my life? The call to “do,” or to “act” was strong and clear. I searched and longed and wondered and prayed about how God could use me.

Later that year, through a number of coincidences and loose connections (translated to “God working in my life”), I was invited to an informational meeting to hear about an organization I had never heard of before, Partners Relief & Development. At this meeting, I learned about a group of people I was completely unaware of ... the Rohingya. And, that day, I left that meeting knowing that I wanted to be involved. It started with the simplest and safest act of doing - a donation.

Over the next few months, I connected with one of Partners staff members who lives in my town. I deeply admired her work and began to share my longing to “do”... to be involved at a deeper level... to “act.” I needed to get my hands involved - this ring could no longer sit on idle hands.

In late August, 2017, the headlines began to tell a horrifying story about violence and rape and death... and subsequent flight of the Rohingya to Bangladesh. The Rohingya were literally fleeing for their lives. Reading the headlines and then following Partners’ work there moved me to tears, anger and utter disbelief.

I prayed.

I donated.

And then, I asked. I asked if there is

a role for me. If there is a way I could get involved with my hands and feet - to be Jesus' hands and feet, as my grandma had done throughout her life.

They said, “yes.”

So, my husband and I found ourselves overwhelmed and eager that first day in Cox’s Bazar. I want to share one glimpse of our time there. On the day we visited the Jadimura refugee camp, we drove past miles upon miles of bamboo and tarp-covered homes that covered every piece of available land as far as the eye could see. Once there, we would bear witness to a food and blanket distribution, organized by Partners and funded with your donations - with your love. As we rushed through the camp (for the safety of all involved), we hardly had time to mentally absorb the devastating conditions. But, when we arrived to the distribution site, we saw the piles of food sacks ready to be given; piles of blankets neatly tied with rope, ready to warm someone that very night. And, we saw the beautiful, weathered, longing faces of Rohingya children, women, and men, waiting patiently for the promise of hunger filled and shivers calmed. As we witnessed this distribution, I was struck by the patience of those waiting for their goods, and their eyes. The stories their eyes told of fear, hunger, despair, terror, and now, a small piece of love received. I wish I could say we alleviated their hopelessness. We did not. That is so much more than one small organization can do with a single food distribution. But, we did give your love in the form of food and warmth.

On our way out, one of the team members handed me a fistful of friendship bracelets. As we wound our way back to the road to meet our driver, I began to tie them on the wrist of every child I saw, offering each one a blessing as I did. Within seconds, I was surrounded by children... eager for a piece of love all their own... a bracelet tied with a blessing. Their faces lit up as they brought their friends and siblings and held out their wrists so they could receive this small gift of love. Their smiles were the most beautiful I have seen. I was humbled and grateful and filled with the joy of loving through action.

Later, as my husband and I looked through pictures from the day, a striking image came through again and again. Every single picture my husband took of me tying bracelets onto eager wrists, my grandmother's wedding ring was prominent.

She taught me... Jesus calls us to love one another and to love is to act. This is the greatest commandment. I am grateful beyond words for the ring that inspired me to love, to act and the opportunity to learn what that means in a real, tangible way in Bangladesh. ■



Over 700,000 Rohingya are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, forced to flee Myanmar's campaign of genocide.

THIS IS SHABANA. THE WOMAN WHO WENT BACK

WATCH HER STORY AT

SHABANA.PARTNERS.NGO

Claire Gibbons



I remember our first interaction with Partners. It was mid-2008, Cyclone Nargis had just slammed into Myanmar and an unimaginable total of 138,000 people had lost their lives in the countries that surround the North Indian Ocean. This number could have been lower but the situation was exacerbated by the inaction of the Myanmar Military who blocked access to international aid organizations. As families displaced from the storm waited without food or shelter for any help,

they could see the aid ships laden with supplies that authorities had forbidden to unload.

We were in our late-twenties, kid-free, and open to doing just about anything to be part of this organization that was unlike any other we had met. The team was clearly in crisis-management mode and we were on a two-week vacation. We just wanted to help and found ourselves ensconced in a deep conversation on how our faith demands we act and how Partners should respond to this crisis. Exposure to this practical and holistic response to showing Jesus' love in the midst of this crisis was foundational to our decision to join Partners as staff.

One of the team was heading out to purchase an industrial-size chainsaw to take to Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta, others had just returned from hearing stories of survivors from the Delta who had walked days and days to the refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border; yet another team member walked us through photographs of the devastation that were littered with dead bodies. Someone suggested a protest, a t-shirt was designed, there was outrage at the injustice of the situation but much more importantly, the team was already there on the ground in an incredibly difficult context, filling the gap when few other groups were helping. Food was delivered. Medicine and medical care reached those who needed it.

Skip forward 9 years to 26 August 2017 and some of the Partners leadership team were meeting in our home in Thailand when the news broke of renewed attacks against Rohingya

communities in Rakhine State near the Bangladesh border. We had been working with the Rohingya for more than 5 years and these were our friends who were being annihilated. The meeting changed focus immediately as we had long suspected this crisis would reach a boiling point. We prayed and then the team jumped into action – local networks contacted, flights were booked, and relief plans were underway. On August 29 – long before any other international group – our team was in Bangladesh delivering assistance and standing on the banks of the Naf River with burning Rohingya villages visible across the river in Myanmar. Since then, food, shelter, medicine, water and sanitation and more have been provided for more than 100,000 Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar over the past 6 months.

When I think what “to love is to act” has meant in Partners over the years, I think of these stories. At the heart of who Partners is, you still find a willingness to say yes to helping when it would be far easier to say no because God doesn't ask us to take the easy path. There is still a desire to rapidly mobilise to respond to crisis, and to have deep and lasting relationships with these communities that become the cornerstone for truly transformational development. The places have changed, we've matured in our systems and processes, many of the faces on the team are different, the people groups we work with have expanded as well, but the heart is the same.

1 John 3:18 “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”



Free, Full Lives
For children affected
by **CONFLICT**
& *oppression*

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