

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

is *not* about

**EATING *and* DRINKING**



*A Missionary Mom's First-Year Reflections*

**CYNTHIA CARRIER**

"The Kingdom of God is not About Eating and Drinking: A Missionary Mom's First-Year Reflections" by Cynthia Carrier

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## Introduction

*I want to remember.*

The fabric of my childhood is full of holes. Sometimes I think that's by God's grace; certain things are best left to collect dust in the undisturbed recesses of my mind. Other times, I regret that I don't have more stories to tell, memories to share, joy to grasp onto.

Likewise, I've forgotten so many of the precious moments that I experienced with my children. I resolved that I would remember just how, at 10 months, he grabbed my leg with his chubby fist and demanded that I pick him "Ub!!" with his lower lip sticking out so adorably. That upon walking his first steps, he laughed such belly laughs that he immediately fell down, which produced even more giggles. Some days I catch the corners of other memories but they slip away before I can savor them. In the hustle-and-bustle of every day, it's easy to forget how precious life is and how blessed I am.

On the other hand, I remember some things I often would rather forget. I remember getting angry and spanking my little two year-old over her repeated potty accidents. I remember yelling at my 7 and 5 year-old sons so loud my throat hurt; obviously, over something important at the time but what it was, now is forgotten. Only the hurts remain. As a young mom, I was often overwhelmed and I missed out on so much grace. Those memories, when they surface, drive me to my knees in fresh repentance. Even so, I rejoice—because in re-experiencing those memories, however painful, I am spurred on anew my desire to live a holy life that is pleasing to God (see 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Granted, there have been many good times, which I receive as great blessings. I have felt God's pleasure and been given a chance to *breathe* when I felt suffocated by life. Even so, the hard times are perhaps more precious. It is in the crucible of real life that my faith is tested, my character refined, and my relationship with God strengthened.

In this past year, our family of ten has moved from the rural US to a small village in Kenya. It has been a year of consistent struggle and growing pains, punctuated by much that is praiseworthy. I can only look back upon it and praise God for His faithfulness.

I chuckle to think about how different this story would be if my husband had written it instead of me. I'm sure he would have acknowledged some struggles in our work in Africa, but he would have written at length about times God showed up, what He did in men's hearts, and how the Kingdom has been impacted and God's glory revealed. Me, I cried over hand-washing laundry. For sure, I'm more of a *glass half full* sort of person, but it's not just a matter of personality. I simply see how God has used every hurt, every challenge, every trial, to draw me closer to Him and to bring deserved glory to Himself. I have learned to rejoice in my weaknesses and fellowship with Christ in my sufferings, since it is at those times that I have been more encouraged to persevere in my walk with Him. Sometimes I forget just what He has done. It's easy to start thinking in the good times that I've somehow done something worthy on my own—so *I want to remember*.

I don't think that being a missionary here makes me anything special. This is just where we are, and what God has used to further our walk with Him. Elisabeth Eliot's biographical account of Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, puts into words just how I feel:

She [Amy] was finding firsthand that missionaries are not set apart from the rest of the human race, not purer, nobler, higher. "Wings are an illusive fallacy," she wrote. "Some may possess them, but they are not very visible, and as for me, there isn't the least sign of a feather. Don't imagine that by crossing the sea and landing on a foreign shore and learning a foreign lingo you 'burst the bonds of outer sin and hatch yourself a cherubim.'"<sup>1</sup>

The transition from America to Africa stripped away more than it put on; it revealed not only to me but, I believe, to our whole family, just what our weaknesses were. It gave us an opportunity to grow and glorify God in greater ways. And *I want to remember*. It goes without saying that I want to remember the good times: the fruit of our ministry work, the fun we had as a family, the relationships we've built, and the wonderful simplicity of our life here.

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<sup>1</sup> Elliot, Elisabeth. *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael*. Revell, 1987. p. 79

But I also want to remember the trials, the sufferings, and the tears—because through them, I sought God harder, prayed more, and desperately wanted to be more like Christ as a result of it all.

This is just *my* story—merely a snapshot of a unique time and place in our lives. Veteran missionaries will probably find my first-year naïveté amusing. Kenyan natives might disagree with some of my observations (certainly, not the least, life in the village is markedly different from the more populated areas). American Christians could feel judged by the lessons I’ve learned through our experience. It is my hope, however, that you will read through these pages seeking, and seeing, Christ. I pray that you will come away encouraged by God’s faithfulness and know that He is likewise at work in the midst of *your* struggles. I don’t want to be seen as “holier than thou” just because we’re on the mission field; instead, I want you to know that you are on the mission field where ever you are, and I don’t want you to miss the opportunities that God gives you. Above all, I want us all to be aware that we share common sufferings, and it is for His glory that we endure. And so let us encourage one another.

[D]o not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. (Hebrews 10:35-37)

Blessings,

***Cindy Carrier***  
Kenya, Africa  
February 2013

## **Living “Off the Grid” (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)**

Maybe we had some rather romanticized notions of “pioneer times,” when families worked together to live off the land and gathered around the firelight in the evenings to tell tall tales or play the fiddle and sing. More likely, it was just the reality of the times—the economy wasn’t getting any better and we wondered, *what if?* No matter the impetus, 2006 was the beginning of many changes for our family. We decided to plan ahead for...what, we weren’t sure. Job loss? Complete economic collapse and resulting chaos? With a sense of unease, we began to assess our situation. In a “lights out” scenario, how would we hold up? What would we do for heat, water, food? Would our family be safe?

We moved from Connecticut to Indiana in 2006 for a number of reasons; living a more self-sufficient lifestyle was just one of our considerations. Once settled, we slowly began to plan and “stockpile.” We acquired laundry supplies: a metal wash tub, an old-fashioned washboard, and a hand-held agitator (which was really a glorified toilet plunger); lighting alternatives: a solar panel and inverter, a lantern, and candles and matches. Then we addressed food and water concerns: canning supplies, water filters, a hand-held pump and tubing to get water from our well, a storage of dry goods, and a supply of bullets for hunting.

Eventually (about a year later), Marc did lose his job. The government contracts that had provided for his hire as a project manager began to dry up, and as the company’s highest-paid employee, he was the first to be let go. We were thankful that we had simplified our lives and begun to raise our own chickens, goats, and garden crops. We continued to prepare for an uncertain future, though we remained confident that God held our future in His hands and that when He said we did not need to worry, He meant it (see Matthew 6:25-34).

We were ready for “lights out,” but we couldn’t have predicted how it would happen—it was not as we had anticipated. After being unemployed for a couple of months, Marc got an unexpected invitation to go on a short-term mission trip to Kenya. We had some money in the bank and he wasn’t exactly busy, so it seemed like a “God thing.” After spending a few weeks there, Marc came home convinced that a long-term future in Kenya was in God’s plans for our family. What pictures and stories couldn’t convey, his enthusiasm did. Within a week, unanimously, we all caught the vision for what God was doing and we wanted to be a part of it—though we weren’t exactly sure at that point what “it” was.

Due not only to Marc’s unemployment but also our longstanding desire to be debt-free, our house had already been on the market. We began to sell or give away a good number of our possessions. We were convinced that we would unload our house and immediately re-locate to Kenya. If we needed intermediate housing, we had a travel trailer that we had used for exhibiting and speaking on the mid-west homeschool convention circuit; we were all actually quite enthused about the idea of calling it home.

Little did we know then that it would be another two years before Kenya became a reality. We went through many necessary changes (both practical and spiritual) as we waited. And then...it was “lights out” indeed. We were finally on our way to Africa! We knew we’d be living without running water or electricity, and we were at least mentally prepared for the reality of that. On the ground, though, the transition from American convenience to the daily labor that is a way of life in Africa was both challenging and unexpectedly rewarding.

### **A Box that Washes Dishes?**

I had gotten out of the habit of using the dishwasher. With our large family, it didn't take long at all to fill it up, and I was running it multiple times per day. It seemed to me that we would use much less hot water and electricity if we just did the dishes by hand, never mind that I felt the children should acquire the very practical skill of learning how to take care of this oft-repeated chore without the aid of a machine. (Of course, I have many fond memories of washing dishes “the old-fashioned way” as I grew up. Was it fair to deprive my children of the same?)

Even so, after our Sunday afternoon fellowship times (in which we hosted quite a crowd and ate a full meal), and occasionally during the week when I was freezer cooking or making a big meal and dessert, the dishwasher was a big help indeed. I appreciated being able to put most of the plates, cups and utensils in and concentrate on scrubbing just the big pots and pans by hand. A small indulgence, surely.

After moving to Africa, doing dishes without the benefit of running water was an expected inconvenience, but a comparatively minor one. On days when the dishes overflowed our tiny kitchen sink, however, I admit—as rarely as we had used the dishwasher, *I sure did miss it*. Especially the week we hosted a short-term missions group; we used every single one of our plates, cups, and utensils, plus food preparation and serving bowls and pots and pans, during every breakfast and supper. Thankfully, the guys were out “in the field” during the afternoon, so we got a break at lunch time. Typically, I made a heap of rice and all the children “passed the pot” (each with their own spoon) just so we could take a rest from the seemingly unending task of dishwashing.

Talking with some folks here within the first days of our move, we awed them with tales of the technology available in America. Washing machines? Clothes dryers? Vacuum cleaners? With our limited knowledge of Swahili and their limited understanding of English, the closest we came to describing a dishwasher was “a box that you put dishes in... you press a button, and they come out clean!” Amazing! They just shook their heads at the impossibility of it all. It was amusing to consider our former life through their eyes, while at the same time we gained a great respect and appreciation for the hard work that they accomplish each and every day without many of the labor-saving devices that we took for granted.

## Work, Work, and More Work (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)

Our “homesteading” lifestyle in America involved a lot of work. Keeping up with a large, homeschooling family was demanding enough; add to that gardening and canning, chickens, rabbits, milking goats, wood-splitting, and more—life was sure busy, but we enjoyed it. I recall when my daughter drew this picture—her perception of our family life (titled, “Worck Today,” or, “Work Today”):



We didn’t have horses, so that was a fanciful addition—but the rest was pretty accurate. I commented to her about how the girl in the picture was always smiling, and Rebekah replied, “That’s because work is fun!” We often emphasize how the Lord values our diligence, and that everything should be done as unto the Lord with an attitude of service and a desire to glorify God and bless others. I was glad to have our children grow up in an environment where hard work was necessary but at the same time, rewarding. Rebekah’s picture and our conversation about it were just confirmation of this.

### Each Day Has Enough Trouble of its Own

Then...Africa, and a new level of *busy*. Fetching water in the early part of the day was just the beginning. Only our two oldest children could manage the standard *chupa*, while the next two in age would fill a *chupa* about half-way and trade off on carrying it. It was a long walk to the spring—about 1/4-mile, and at the bottom of a very steep hill with a rutted path only about a foot wide. When it was raining, it was treacherously slippery; couple that with a full *chupa* that was hard to balance on dry footing, and the children had their share of spills. More embarrassing and discouraging than physically harmful, you can still well imagine why this daily chore inspired its share of grumbling.



Far from being idle while the children topped off our 210-liter indoor tank, I began each day with the two-to-three hour task of clothes washing. Every day I expected to do several wash basins full—what would probably be one or two loads in my American washing machine. I found that I could manage it, though I was occasionally frustrated about what I was *not* doing during this big chunk of time. I was *not* overseeing homeschooling like I wanted to; I was *not* adequately supervising the children (and you know that Proverbs 29:15 says, “a child left to himself disgraces his mother” because it’s true!); I was *not* nurturing the baby (then about 9 months old) as I felt he needed. However, I generally succeeded in keeping my complaints to myself.

Sometimes, though, the clothes would be extra-muddy, or there would be more than usual. At those times, I was known to get a little irritable. Not *just* because of the added work, but maybe because...I was up since the baby’s early morning feeding at 4 AM, didn’t have breakfast ready yet and was hearing nothing but “What’s for breakfast?”, “What are we having to eat?”, “When are we eating?” and so on, from plus or minus seven children in turn. Not to mention that as I was scrubbing over the tub, everyone had already gotten water or finished their morning jobs and really needed some direction in at least starting their school work, which I didn’t really want to take a break to provide. Because if I didn’t *get the laundry done* it wouldn’t get hung out in time to dry before the afternoon rains came. And that would be terrible, seeing as how I really only had enough cloth diapers to get me through ONE DAY. (“Give us this day our daily bread...” or clean diapers, as the case may be?)

So, occasionally it was easy to feel overwhelmed, even though it wasn’t “just” about the actual work. However, slowly but surely I figured out some laundry best practices, which helped ease my daily burden immensely. Instead of adding clothes to the basin haphazardly, I learned to sort them and wash in order: least dirty to most dirty, to minimize how many times I had to change out the wash water. I experimented with detergents and found that if I chose Omo rather than Sunlight, I could use less *and* scrub less. Our neighbor also introduced me to *Msaifi*, a bar soap that could be applied directly to dirt and stains for added cleaning power. I still laugh when I recall that day, as her incredulous inquiry sounded so much like a commercial: “*Don’t you use Msaifi?*” and I had to have her explain just what it was and where I could get it.

## **“Fine, or Not Fine?”** **(a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)**

I recall informing my largely non-believing family that we would be moving to Kenya on mission. Not only did they not really understand, but they had a host of questions and concerns as well. At the top of the list were medical care in the event of an emergency, and the increased likelihood of illness (particularly things that weren't an issue in the US, like typhoid, malaria, and cholera). I could understand those concerns, because I shared many of them myself.

After doing some research and talking to some folks on the ground, I felt I had a realistic expectation of what life would be like in the area where we planned to move (specifically, if there would be particular health risks and what the situation would be with doctors and hospitals). I was a lot more comfortable with information in hand, as much of what I learned allayed some of my fears. We would have access to a local hospital that would provide decent quality of care, and if something requiring more “professional” care came up, we were not more than a few hours from higher-quality medical facilities. Although malaria is endemic to many regions in Africa, the elevation where we would be located greatly reduced our risk. And if we did get malaria, medicine was readily available from the local chemist (pharmacist). Most members of our family had already been vaccinated for typhoid and yellow fever, so that was no risk. I felt pretty good about our overall medical situation as we prepared to move.

### **Drinking Water Dilemma**

We knew to drink only purified water to eliminate the risk of water-borne illness. Really, we did. We were happy to learn that we'd be gathering water from the local spring, because spring water is pure, right? So we thought, until we'd been drinking and washing with the unfiltered, unbleached, unboiled water for a number of weeks, and suddenly some of us started using the bathroom quite frequently and urgently. It started with Micah, who was then four. We let it go for a few days, thinking maybe it was food-related. We like to let nature take its course, so we weren't too concerned. But when diarrhea strikes, dehydration is always a possibility, especially for the littles who don't have the responsibility for self-care and don't always drink water when you tell them to. After a few days, Marc went into town to see the chemist, who upon hearing the symptoms pronounced, “Oh, that's from amoeba!” and gave him a liquid amoebicide. After the four day regimen, Micah was fine. And then a few of the other children got sick. Back into town, this time for daily “T-Zex” capsules. (To everyone's great distaste, one of the interesting side effects was a rather metallic taste in the mouth that tainted everything you tried to drink for the next couple of days.)

After suffering with diarrhea for several days and then taking a round of amoebicide, Jubilee (our three year-old) went to the outhouse when we were in the middle of eating breakfast. She came in smiling and shouted exuberantly, “I have FINE poop!” And so a Carrier family tradition was born. Each time one of us begin to experience gastro-intestinal distress (for one reason or another), we ask upon their return from the outhouse, “Was it FINE or NOT FINE?” It still gives us all a chuckle, if nothing else. Isaiah added to the joke one day when, after a couple days of eating some bananas we'd been given, he came in and announced, “I have EXTRA FINE poop!”

In any case, the diagnosis of amoeba caused us some confusion. That would indicate that our water was contaminated, which we had been confident that it wasn't. After all, it is a natural spring. Marc (a degreed hydrogeologist) went with Isaiah to examine the water source more closely. The pipe should have been coming from the soil face, which indeed would naturally filter the water. However, Marc noted that the piped water was actually draining down into a pool. There was another pipe coming from this

source, which was actually where everyone collected water from, because it was more easily accessible! Even a visual inspection of the pool of water revealed algae and surface contaminants. Immediately we looked for an alternate water source, and found a properly-developed spring further away. (Of course that brought more complaints from the children, who already spent so much time going to and fro to fetch water.)

Regardless of where our water now came from, I began to bleach our drinking supply. Then I realized that we were using washing and rinsing water for the dishes that was not treated, which probably created new problems even though we were addressing the drinking water issue. Marc took on the herculean task of emptying, bleaching, and re-filling our indoor storage tank. Isaiah's math for the day was to figure out how much bleach we needed to add to the tank to purify it, and then how much we should add per re-filling each day to keep it clean for dish-washing, hand-washing, and so on. After a few days of complaints about the bleachy aftertaste of the drinking water, I stopped bleaching and started boiling the water, but I had to remember to do it every night so that it would be cool by morning. Of course I forgot on more than one occasion—so it was back to bleach for the day.

## Things that Go Bump in the Night (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)

I'm not the kind of person that deals well with change, and moving to Africa was a particularly big transition in just about every way possible: geography, language, culture, and even the practicalities of daily living. With the level of uncertainty and the number of unknowns accompanying this change, I also had to face one issue that I had never met head-on: *fear*.

### What about Kidnapping?

Of course, as a Mom one of my primary concerns was the children. I feared kidnapping for ransom, since we would be one of few *wazungu* in our community, with a comparatively large house that was not “very” secure, in a place where poverty is the norm. When we introduced the idea of Kenya to my Mom, her response didn't help alleviate that particular concern; one of her first questions was, “What about kidnapping?” Prior to our move, Marc entertained my worried chatter about it for all of a few minutes and then dismissed it as being “not likely.” He was convinced that the majority of Africans respected *wazungu* and that people would fear robbing us or, especially, kidnapping one of our children. I wanted to believe him, but I remained somewhat unconvinced.

During our first days in Africa, I had to get used to the foot traffic outside our house and people finding their way onto our veranda. We're not far from a busy road, and our house is just one of many on the path to the spring where lots of people get their water. Since we didn't have a locked gate, people frequently made themselves welcome and I was almost always surprised to look up from whatever I was doing and see a head ducking into our door, asking, “*Hodi?*” (“May I come in?”) At that point, how can you keep from asking a visitor in?

That level of insecurity, however, kept me from letting the children play outside freely and caused me to keep a very close eye on things when we were entertaining company. I continued to worry about kidnapping, and only after we had been here for some time did I realize that those fears were largely unfounded in the small village where we reside. As in any small town America, everyone knows everyone and people are always minding your business. If we had someone unknown come to our gate and folks knew that I was home alone, it wasn't long before one of our neighbors would drop by for an unspecified reason and make sure that everything was OK. If the nighttime revelry of our neighbors was unusually loud, Silas would call and check up on us just to make sure we weren't being disturbed. Many times I have thanked God for leading us to the area we have settled in! We have wonderful neighbors and a good community for living and ministering among the local population; though it has occasionally brought with it challenges, it has been a true blessing to our family—not the least in terms of our feelings of security.

Not only has our community been helpful in allaying my fears, but we gradually heard about some of the prevailing views about *wazungu*—particularly Americans—which helped to alleviate any remaining concerns I might have had, particularly as the boys started spreading their wings a bit and going into town alone. Multiple sources said that they believed that an American passport contains a tracking device—so if an American *is* kidnapped, the perpetrator is sure to be found. Others think that if an American is injured, lost, or kidnapped, helicopters will come from the sky and rescue them. Not only that, *all wazungu* have guns (which are outlawed for Kenyan citizens) and there is no prosecution if a robber is shot while breaking and entering. We also heard more than one rumor that involved supposed “video surveillance” around our house, although in reality none exists (*shhh*, don't tell our neighbors). And so we have found that there is enough mis-information out there to make it highly unlikely that

anyone will mess with a *mzungu*. Granted, there is always the possibility—and things do more commonly happen in other areas—but here? Marc was right—kidnapping is certainly “not likely.”

## **“Weep with Those Who Weep”** **(a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)**

The Apostle Paul admonished the church in Rome to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). It seems as if it is a simple thing to rejoice with those who rejoice—but if we ourselves are suffering or spiritually struggling, it is not so easy. Conversely, having the sympathy to mourn with others when we are experiencing blessing or ease may likewise be difficult. These are two areas in which the Lord has worked on me through coming to Africa—and I would not hesitate to say that I expect more growth in the future.

### **“Do Not be Surprised...”**

First Peter 4:12 tells us, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.” During our family devotions and homeschooling times, we had read often from *Martyr’s Mirror*; we weren’t unfamiliar with the horrific ways in which people of old have suffered for their faith—and joyfully, at that. In comparing ourselves to the ancient saints, we knew that we didn’t know suffering. We wondered how we would handle having our tongues cut out, being hung by our thumbs, burned alive, stretched on the rack, starved, beaten, or drowned for our faith? If such times of persecution were to be ours again, would we stand firm or would we be of the great number who recanted under pressure to attain a life of ease, while guaranteeing for ourselves an eternity of the torture we were trying to avoid? These were topics we considered, but for the most part our understanding of suffering was merely intellectual.

As an American Christian, I was not as familiar as I thought with struggle, with hard labor, with poverty, with oppression. Seeing all these here first-hand, I realize how sheltered I was from the harsh realities that many face on a daily basis. When I did encounter difficulty, I didn’t always see it as being from the Lord. I was often slow to learn the lessons that God was trying to teach me, and I didn’t always cooperate graciously. In some sense my life was too easy; I suppose I rather unknowingly embraced an attitude of entitlement.

Imagine an unwitting office worker being forced to work in the fields for a day; the overseer would take one look at his soft, white hands and probably have himself a good laugh. And if that guy actually made it through the day swinging his hoe in the sweltering heat, he’d have himself some sore muscles and blisters. I’ve earned some sore muscles and blisters here in Kenya—both literally and spiritually—and I praise God for giving me the opportunity to learn through trial.

### **Getting Personal**

I recall experiencing a few days of emotional struggle during our early months here. The negative things I was meditating on were really not as terrible as I imagined; I was probably making a mountain out of a mole hill and my mood affected nearly everyone in the house. Marc didn’t say much but I know he wanted to.

We went to town for lunch and in the course of our conversation, Marc said in a rather off-hand way, “These Africans, they know how to suffer.” And he was right. If there is no seat on the *matatu*, they’ll find an empty spot and just squat down for the ride. Their children run around without diapers and they wipe up pee and poop from the floor without a second thought. They walk kilometers on end rather than take a car, miss meals regularly, wear worn and torn clothes and no shoes as a matter of course, carry burdens that we’d be unable to shoulder, endure serious illness because they can’t afford medical care,

and wait in line for hours without missing a beat. They face death with regularity and poverty is the rule rather than the exception. Though some complain, most are resigned. Why get upset about something you can't change? It's just the way life is.

## **“The Kingdom of God is not About Eating and Drinking” (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)**

When we arrived at our Kenya home—at 4 AM after an eight-hour ride in a mini-van and 24 hours of international flight—we unceremoniously dumped our Rubbermaid totes and suitcases on the sitting room floor and rummaged through a few of them just long enough to find three blankets: one for the boys, one for the girls, and one for Marc and me. Then, tired and bedraggled, we found our new beds.

Both the crying baby and the noise of our nearby neighbors woke me up much earlier than I wanted—about 10 AM—and everyone else rolled out of bed around noon. Our escort from Nairobi had left us with some food: a gallon of milk, a couple loaves of bread, a bunch of carrots, a bag of tomatoes, and some biscuits (hard cookies). The bread was dry, crumbly, and tasteless—not even a layer of butter on top would have redeemed it much, I’m afraid. By the time we all got dressed and ready it was a normal lunch time, so we had some dry bread, raw carrots, and a glass of milk. Since we spent the remainder of the day unpacking and meeting the family, we had tomato and carrot sandwiches, milk, and a celebratory dessert of biscuits at supper time. Breakfast and lunch the next day were the same.

Despite the unpalatable bread, the comparatively small portions as we tried to ration what we had, the odd combination of foods, and the lack of variety, we all agreed—these were some of the best meals we had ever eaten! We felt it was just a part of the new adventure of moving to Africa, and the excitement of just *being* here carried us along like a wave.

Then the food was gone. Marc made his first trip into town to stock up on supplies, and reality set in.

Across the board for every member of our family, one of the hardest things we’ve had to get used to in the transition from America to Africa is in the matter of food. We knew it would be a difficult adjustment, so for at least six months before the move, we began to eat much more simply and rely more on “staple” foods. I stopped buying almost all convenience foods and read labels a lot more, trying to find foods that were not highly processed. This was something we had been moving toward for health reasons, anyway, so Africa just pushed the change into high gear.

### **Dietary Changes**

What I thought was budget-friendly and “simple” by American standards turned out to be exactly the opposite in Africa—particularly when it came to our breakfast menu. Since we had our own chickens in America, we ate lots of eggs, as well as homemade wheat toast with butter, oatmeal, and homemade granola with milk. I thought this would translate well to Africa, but I was rather disappointed to find that it did not.

Since here every egg is a lost chicken (worth a fair price at the market), they are not always available—people would rather collect them and hatch a new brood than sell them. When we can get them, they cost almost the same as an American egg (which makes them expensive!).

I was also quickly frustrated with the quality of wheat here; no matter how well I sorted and cleaned it, it just tasted *dirty*. I resorted to bleached white flour and couldn’t help but feel like I was compromising our family’s health. Ditto with butter—it is very expensive, and we can only get it in the next big town. Without refrigeration, our infrequent town trips won’t keep us in fresh butter regularly. Back to margarine, which I thought we had given up for good many years ago.



Oats are equally hard to come by and certainly not considered a “staple” here. And even if we had a granola alternative, we sorely miss fresh, cold milk to pour over it. Somehow we can’t bring ourselves to enjoy boiled and slightly-cooled milk straight, but here raw milk is rather dangerous due to non-hygienic milking practices and storage conditions. We can get small amounts of pasteurized, refrigerated milk in town but at a cost, which we have not felt is worth it.

And then there’s oil. People here don’t use oil, they use “cooking fat,” which actually is vegetable shortening. Another thing I’d streamlined out of our diet in America, in favor of healthier coconut oil. Getting coconut oil here? I don’t think we can...and if it *were* available, I’m quite sure it would be out of our budget in the amount that we use it. So, for lack of alternatives, we’re back to vegetable shortening.

Another preference of mine was apple cider vinegar over the distilled white variety—many health benefits there. And I was surprised to find that even white vinegar is rare here. What you usually find is a cleverly labeled *vinegar substitute*, which is just water and acetic acid.

I’ve had to make peace with the fact that my preferences are just that; in fact, here they are downright luxuries. And while I don’t think it’s necessary that we deprive ourselves to meet some self-imposed standard, we certainly eat much better than the average Kenyan even with the “substitutions” we’ve made in our diet.

Some of our choices have been made in consideration of our personal budget. Certainly, the fixed nature of our income causes us to be somewhat careful with “luxury” items. However, even if there were no financial considerations, we would have a problem with living large when so many of our neighbors struggle to put *ugali* and greens on the table. For example, I love chocolate, but a small bar costs 150 shillings. When maize is at its highest price, you can still get about a kilo, plus greens, for the cost of that chocolate bar—and that’s a whole meal for a family our size! In light of that comparison, it’s somewhat hard to rationalize the indulgence of chocolate (and similar excesses), though we do it once in a while. The Apostle Paul’s desire “that there might be equality” may be an ideal (see 2 Corinthians 8:13-15), but we believe that we must do our part to be good stewards—which means that we cannot really keep the same standards for our diet that we did in America.

## **Family Dynamics** **(a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)**

We all had different responses to the various stages of our move, and it was occasionally challenging to deal with the range of emotions and issues that arose, particularly given the size of our family and the number of things going on. I had many moments, both pre- and post-move, where I felt like one of the “walking wounded.” Here’s how Wikipedia defines this type of person:

[T]he walking wounded are injured persons who are of a relatively low priority. These patients are conscious and breathing and usually have only relatively minor injuries; thus they are capable of walking. Depending on the resources available, and the abilities of the injured persons, these people may sometimes be used to assist treatment of more seriously injured patients, or assist with other tasks.<sup>1</sup>

Though I was occasionally emotionally and spiritually hurting, I sometimes had to pretend that everything was fine and carry on with the day-to-day “stuff” of family life. My issues, whatever they were, needed to be put on the back burner as I continued to take care of practical matters, encourage discouraged children, mediate conflicts, capture “teachable moments,” and invest in relationships with my children. The fact that I had little opportunity to sit around feeling sorry for myself sometimes made me feel sorry for myself! Yet I sought, and found, comfort in the Lord’s presence. He helped me to struggle through the issues that threatened to get me off-track in my spiritual growth and in our necessary progress.

I regret the times that I was not as emotionally available to my family as I should have been. Sometimes they needed encouragement and I chose to speak discouragement, or perhaps I should have been sympathetic but instead was critical. I was too often self-absorbed instead of reaching out to meet their needs. I am, however, thankful that the Lord quickly convicted me each time I fell short of His perfect response and I gratefully took the opportunity to repent to my husband or children—whoever it was that I had wronged in my selfishness. Carrying the burden of my own emotional issues and helping everyone else deal with theirs (all while managing the practical things that needed doing) was, for me, one of the most challenging aspects of our transition to the mission field.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walking\\_wounded](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walking_wounded)

## On the Mission (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)

When Marc initially visited Kenya in 2009, he didn't view it as potentially fruitful for missions work, as a large percentage of the population is considered "Christian." He was mostly looking forward to encouraging existing churches and expected to be impacted in some way by visiting a foreign country.

However, what he found was that many people are baptized merely to receive a state ID; in lieu of a birth certificate (which have only been issued fairly recently), a baptismal certificate serves as proof of identity. These "baptisms" have indeed skewed the numbers when it comes to assessing how many true Christians there are here.

Though Kenya has been evangelized with a "gospel," much of what has happened is intellectual assent rather than life transformation as a result of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Many Christians here are sincere, but there is, by and large, a lack of discipleship in the churches and a failure to fulfill Christ's instruction: "teach them to observe [obey] all that I have commanded you." As well, a lot of the "health and wealth" gospel of the United States has found great success here, where poverty is viewed as bondage and people desperately want hope of something better. Unfortunately, "something better" is typically viewed in terms of worldly blessings, and the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom truly doesn't take root.

The Lord has impressed upon Marc the need to mobilize the saints for the end-time harvest. Jesus said His work was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43), and that only when the Gospel of the Kingdom is preached will the end come (Matthew 24:14). Yet even in a post-Christian culture, there are many who do not understand *the Gospel of the Kingdom* and how it should affect their lives. Instead of counting the cost of being a disciple, they make a nominal commitment to Christ and yet remain tethered to the world, rather than forsaking all and following Jesus as He taught.<sup>1</sup>

The Gospel of the Kingdom tells us that there are, indeed, two kingdoms: the kingdom of the world, which is under the influence of the evil one, and the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is firmly established in Heaven, currently manifests itself in the hearts of Jesus' followers, and will physically be established upon Christ's return. By nature, and by default, human beings are members of the kingdom of the world. They follow the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil. God's plan is to rescue us from one kingdom and transfer us into *His* Kingdom (see Colossians 1:13-14). Only upon repentance and re-birth through baptism do we enter in the Kingdom of God (see Acts 2:38 and John 3:5). Yet even our citizenship is conditional; the Scriptures are clear that we must obey the laws of the Kingdom (Jesus' teachings) if we claim to belong to Christ (see John 12:47-50). If we do not, we are in danger of being cut off and thrown in to the fire (see John 15:1-10).

The parable of the sower makes it evident that there are four ways to receive this word of the Kingdom: to reject it because Satan takes away the seed that is planted, to receive it with joy but fall away quickly because of persecution, to accept it but be rendered unfruitful because of worldliness, or to bear fruit (see Matthew 13). Unfortunately, I believe that many Americans are rendered unfruitful because Satan has blinded us and beguiled us with things of the kingdom of the world. And equally unfortunately,

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<sup>1</sup> Please take the time to view a video presentation about the Gospel of the Kingdom at <http://kingdomdriven.org/kingdom-expansion>

here in Africa, there is potential for the same thing to happen. Even though poverty is the rule here (and it would seem that folks without many material possessions actually have an advantage) the spirit of covetousness causes people to long for more and to be equally deceived.

We have seen this first-hand in trying to minister in Kenya. Many “Christians” have visited us, come to participate in the home fellowship that we hosted for a time, and even been baptized, only as a means to receive various types of financial assistance. In fact, one man “converted” from the Muslim faith and received a microloan to start a business because he lost his job as a teacher at the local Madrassa. He gathered some of the locals to himself by promising them that the *mzungu* missionary would give them money. A large number of them heard the message of the Kingdom and were baptized, but their baptism wasn’t one of genuine repentance—it was merely an outward show. An entire “church” born in that area turned out to be mostly false converts who sought material gain.

When we first arrived here, we had many visitors. Just as the parable of the sower promised, many “received the message with joy,” but when they were challenged to count the cost of being a disciple (see Luke 14:25-33), they have typically not returned for further teaching or discipleship. Some of what we considered fruitful in terms of our ministry was actually *not*—which was somewhat discouraging at various points during our time here. On the other hand, those who have truly repented and made a commitment to follow Christ have been a source of great joy as they have learned, grown, and propagated the teachings of the Kingdom on their own.

By casting a wide net and doing “training meetings” with groups of pastors, Marc has been able to identify key disciples who are, indeed, committed to the Great Commission, and who desire to make genuine disciples of Christ in their own rite. His goal is not to do the work of the ministry all by himself (which, frankly, is complicated by the *mzungu* factor), but rather to raise up and equip locals. This strategy, developed over our initial months on the ground here (and gleaned from New Testament practice), has proved the most effective. Perhaps there aren’t the “numbers” associated with other missionary methods, but it has proved fruitful in strengthening true disciples—which means that the Kingdom will expand organically over time. We encourage ourselves with Jesus’ own words: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Given the difficulties that money has introduced into the ministry here, we were actually rather amused (and relieved) to hear from Silas after we had been here about 10 months, that many local pastors were hesitant to work with Marc. During our first few months, they had wanted to meet with the *mzungu*, but when it became evident that he was an “unfunded missionary,” their interest waned. Though we are far from “poor,” by African standards, I’m glad that we are viewed as such because at least we will be more likely to attract genuine seekers after the Kingdom of God, rather than folks who just want a bigger slice of the kingdom of the world.

## Reflecting on our First Year (a partial chapter excerpt for preview purposes)

As I look back over our first year on the mission field, I can't help but be amazed at how God prepared us for Africa well before it was even an idea in our minds. He shaped our character, adapted us to hard work, gave us knowledge and experience in self-sufficiency, and grew us spiritually so that we would be ready for what He wanted us to do. He also gave us practical skills that would be a benefit, like Marc's project management and business acumen, which are a help to many here who receive microloans to start small businesses. Granted, there was much change that needed to occur after our arrival in Africa—but we are always in the process of learning and growing, aren't we? I am ever so thankful for the wisdom and grace of God.

### **Spiritual Growth**

Occasionally I wish that we had been better-prepared spiritually for Kenya; though we thought we were coming in strong, I would say, rather, that we have been strengthened through our trials here. While that should be expected, I often regret that there were so many growing pains that might have limited our effectiveness. As well, our children have had to experience our ups and downs and have sometimes learned wrong ways of responding from us. On the other hand, our personal shortcomings as their parents have opened up dialogue as we have learned from the Word of God and been led by the Spirit.

One of my daughters made me a very beautiful Mother's Day card, telling me that I was "the best Mom" and she loved me so much. I said to her, "What makes me a good Mom? I know I'm not always the best Mom, but I want to know what I can do to be better." Her reply was quite surprising: "Mom, you really know how to repent!" I was tempted to be discouraged, thinking that I mess up so much that all she sees is me asking for her forgiveness. On the other hand, what was encouraging was that she could see in my life the process of sin and repentance. With all my heart, I want to please and glorify God—and towards that goal I constantly strive. But inevitably, I do fail. And what *should* my response be? Of course, to repent—not just to be sorry for my sin, but to turn from it and re-start myself toward the heavenly goal. If nothing else, I'm thankful that my children are seeing us live authentically as Christians in an environment that has sometimes challenged us and caused us to stumble. In terms of both the ministry and our family, I can only trust in God's wisdom and believe that He has worked, and will work, all things for good.

When we were planning for Africa, we didn't really know what we would be doing on the ground, in terms of ministry. It has been an exciting adventure allowing God to guide that process—sometimes difficult and discouraging, other times exciting and enjoyable. I think before we left the US, we had some rather idealized notions of foreign missions work. But our lives have, in many ways, been remarkably ordinary. I can only concur with Amy Carmichael's report to the supporters of her work with orphans in India:

"It is more important that you should know about the reverses than about the successes of the war. We shall have all eternity to celebrate the victories, but we have only the few hours before sunset in which to win them. We are not winning them as we should, because the fact of the reverses is so little realized, and the

needed reinforcements are not forthcoming, as they would be if the position were thoroughly understood....So we have tried to tell you the truth—the uninteresting, unromantic truth.”<sup>1</sup>

In my account of our time here in Africa, I wonder if I’ve said too much of the negative and not enough of the positive. But, like Amy Carmichael, I hope only to be realistic.

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<sup>1</sup> Elliot, Elisabeth. *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael*. Revell, 1987. pp. 161-162.