

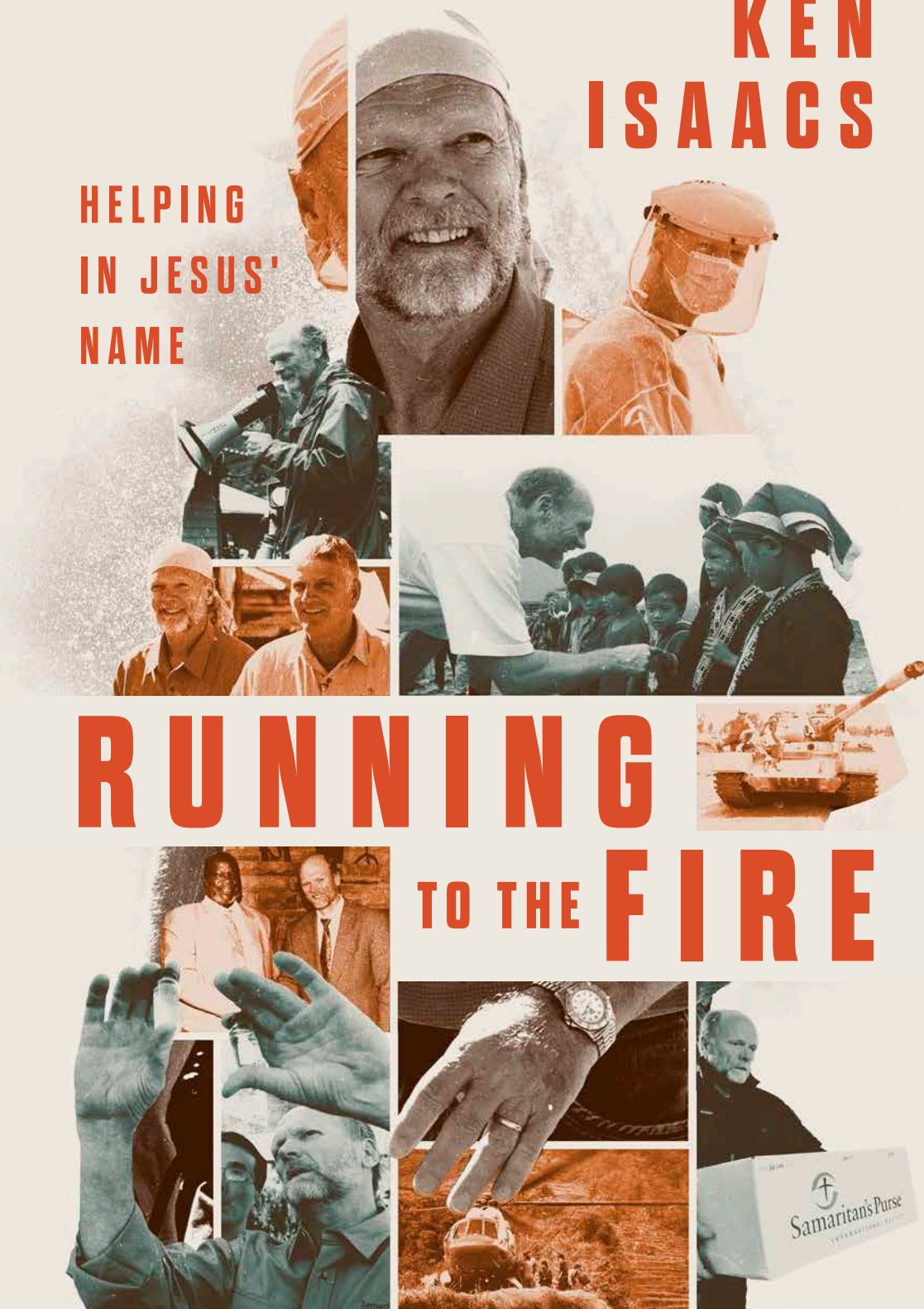
FOREWORD BY FRANKLIN GRAHAM

KEN  
ISAACS

HELPING  
IN JESUS'  
NAME

R U N N I N G

TO THE FIRE









## Introduction

# What If?

I bet I know what you're thinking.

When you picked up my book and read the back cover or scanned the table of contents and saw the many years I have served with Franklin Graham on the Samaritan's Purse team, along with the countless destinations I've been to and the disasters I've responded to, you may have gotten a certain image in your mind. You might have made some assumptions about me. So right out of the gate, I want to make something clear.

I hold no degrees and had no special training to equip me to live the life I have experienced. Yet when I read my Bible, I realize that puts me in some good company. When the angel of the Lord called Gideon a "mighty warrior" and told him he would save Israel, he responded, "Pardon me ... but ... my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judg. 6:12, 15). After Moses was called by God, he asked, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). When Saul invited David to marry into the family and fight battles for the king, the young man questioned, "Who









# **If You'll Open the Door**

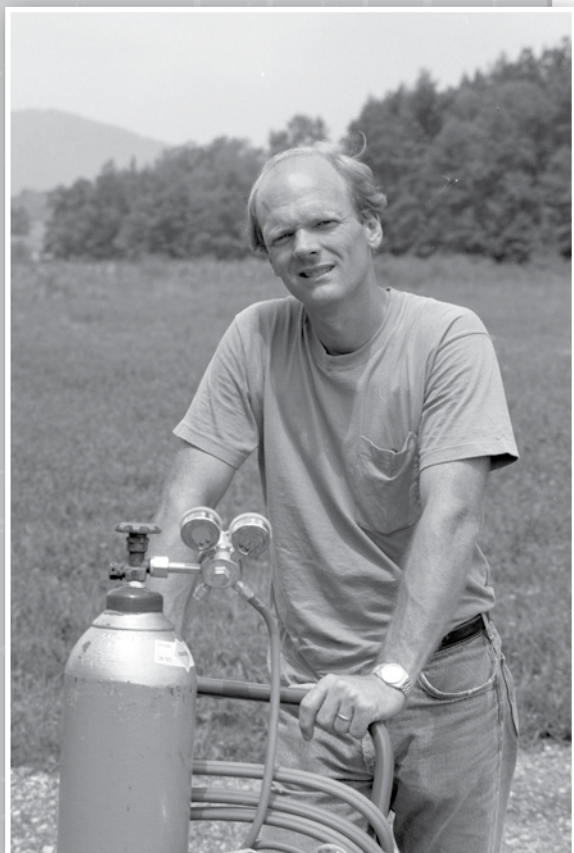
**Boone, North Carolina**

When I was just two years old, my biological father abandoned my mother and me. For the next four years, she raised me as a single mom. When I was six, she married a man named Coy Isaacs. At ten years old, Coy adopted me, and my last name was legally changed from Warren to Isaacs. That Father's Day in 1962, as a gift to him, I began calling Coy "Daddy." From that year on, I considered him my father.

I soon came to the conclusion that my parents liked to move. In my twelve years of education, I went to thirteen schools in seven cities in four states throughout the Southeast. So I was always "the new kid." One day, when I was in third grade, I looked outside to see our 1956 Chevrolet loaded with my bed strapped on top. We drove all day into the night to the new town my parents had chosen. Around the time I might be able to start settling in, we'd leave for the next stop. The longest time I spent in one place was my last two years in high school in Boone, North Carolina, where I graduated.

Sadly, my daddy, Coy, died in 1979 of a massive heart attack when I was twenty-seven. In 2002, after deciding to try to find my biological father, I was able to locate him. After just one visit, I was grateful that he left Mom and me

June 1988

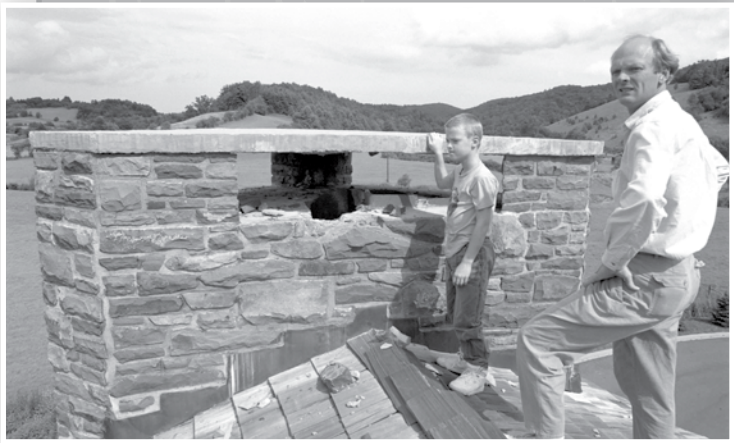






Ken, Carolyn, Jamey, and Coy at departure from Boone, August 1988.

Coy and Ken at Samaritan's Purse







# Go, Even Though There Is No Road

**Ethiopia**  
1989–1991  
Drought/Famine

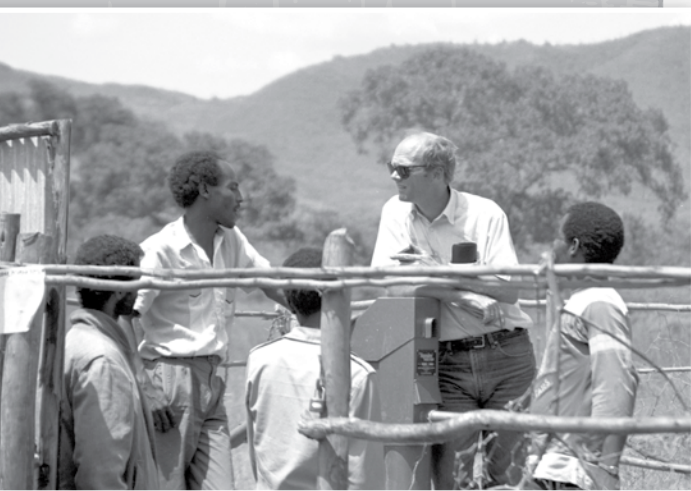
Working from our last communication that my wife would not be going back to Africa, I continued to pray for the Lord's will to bring His resolve to us. Meanwhile, Franklin and I were figuring out how I could go on two- to three-month rotations, traveling back and forth. Yes, in effect, commuting between North Carolina and Ethiopia. But, of course, there was no getting around the reality that the distance was going to create a strain on our marriage and family in every possible way. The time difference and lack of communication options in Africa would definitely be a constant challenge. This was back before cell phones, and international long-distance calls on landlines cost ten dollars a minute. (For perspective, in today's economy, that would be about twenty-five dollars a minute.) While the initial upset over my decision to leave my dream job appeared to be behind us, we had to try to find the best way forward.

At home in the early summer of 1988, with our sons out of school, we would often go to my mom's house after work to visit. (By this point, she had remarried.) We would snack on cucumbers or watermelon or her legendary coleslaw.

Drilling a water well in Addis Ababa







Solomon and Ken at a well pump, southern Ethiopia, 1990



Rick Auten, Mitchell Minges, Solomon Gebre Yohannes, and Ken, western Ethiopia, October 1991



Ken and Solomon on a Russian tank, Simien Mountains, 1991



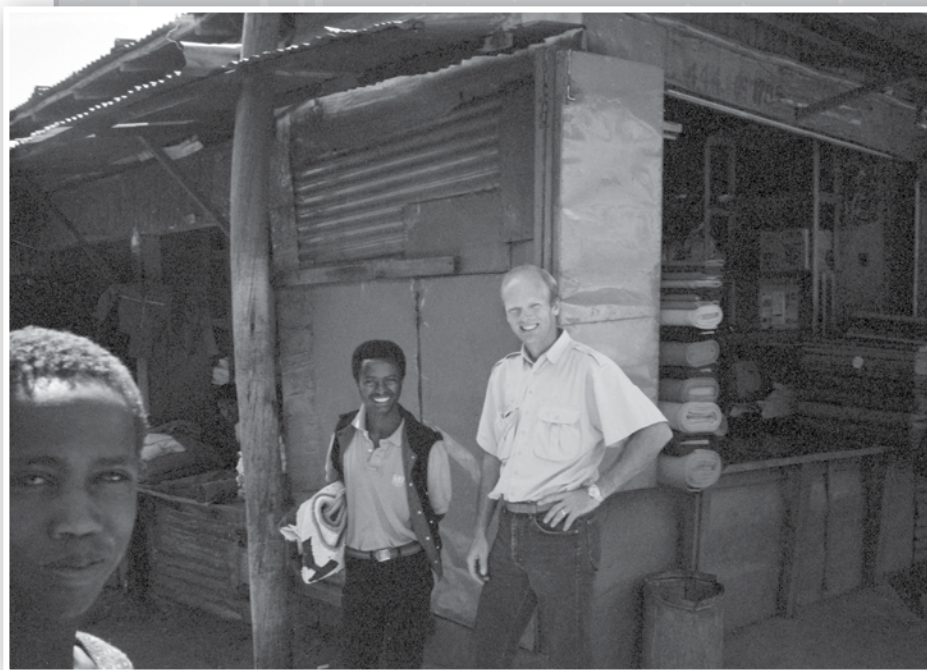
First well in Selam Children's Village, Addis Ababa, 1989







Carolyn and Kenney at Debre Zeit, 1990



Addis Ababa market, 1990







# Now's the Time

**Afghanistan**  
1991/2001  
War

## Chapter 3

Following the takeover in Ethiopia by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, I was concerned about the safety of the drilling equipment we had invested in and worked hard to secure. To protect the rig, we moved everything south, as far away from the line of fire as possible. Needless to say, these events immediately impacted the future of my work in Africa.

I know this sounds funny with all our amazing technology today, but a game changer arrived with the introduction of the fax machine, allowing me to handwrite a letter to Franklin on paper, feed it into the machine, dial, hit Send, and watch the page transmit to our office back in Boone in seconds. Typically, within a few hours, I would get a written answer back, all at a fraction of the cost of an international landline call. The ability to communicate across the world in writing seemed miraculous to us.

I faxed Franklin a letter explaining that, due to the escalation of violence, we had to transport the drilling rig to a safe location and close the program down for now. I also let him know that I still felt called to the work and would like to stay on with Samaritan's Purse. His response came back that I should return home and we would discuss that possibility. As I left Ethiopia, little did I know that this frequency of international travel would soon become an ongoing and distinct rhythm in my life.



Dr. Ed Carns showing Nurse Mary Lou Fisher the secrets to a PalmPilot, Kholm, 2002





Kholm, 2002



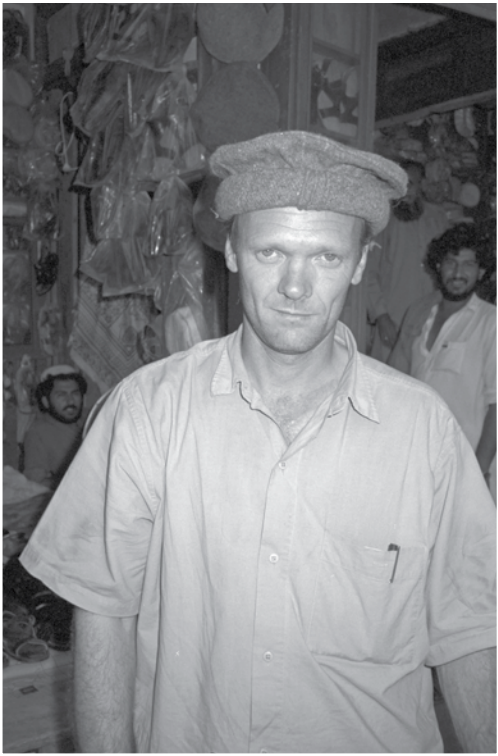




Aziz Aslami and Ken watching a Northern Alliance fighter explain his tools



Shahzada and his wife with Ken, Peshwar, Pakistan, 1991



Ken in a traditional hat, 2002

Friend Greg and a local Mujahideen with  
Ken, Jalabad, 1991







Ken with Team Lead Dony Sawchuk, Kholm, 2002

Afghanistan/Pakistan region, 2003





# Anyone Who

# Welcomes a Little Child

**Bosnia**  
1992–1995  
Ethnic Cleansing

I have a photograph I took in Sarajevo of a man and woman sitting at a bistro table on the small terrace of their apartment. They were calmly enjoying a cup of espresso in the morning. Outside their little sanctuary, the contrast was starkly brutal. Part of their building was destroyed, reduced to piles of rubble. Bullet holes and shrapnel marks scarred the remaining walls.

What you cannot see in the photo are the explosions going off nearby. Through the noisy chaos, the husband and wife sat out in the open, appearing to savor the day like nothing was happening. I was across the street when I noticed them and snapped the photo. As I watched for a moment in total bewilderment, the man made eye contact with me, smiled, and raised his cup into the air in a toast, as if to say, “Come what may, right here, right now, I will enjoy my coffee.”

I also knew of people who went for a walk deliberately through areas of the city that were called Sniper Alley. While the name originally referenced the main road to Sarajevo that snipers focused on, it came to describe any



Sharing baklava, 1995



Receiving flak jackets, 1995



Nova Bila Hospital, 1993





Mostar, 1993





Zagreb, Croatia, 1993

Sarajevo, 1994



Dr. Ross Rhoads with Ken, preparing to deliver shoeboxes, Mostar





**Operation Christmas Child**  
2023 Statistics

11.3 million shoeboxes packed by people from eleven countries  
2.9 million decisions for Christ  
5.1 million children participated in The Greatest Journey  
discipleship program.

Since 2009, 40.5 million children have enrolled in The Greatest Journey.

In January 2023, Samaritan’s Purse celebrated the 200 millionth box given in Lviv, Ukraine, to a beautiful little girl whose parents had been killed in the war.

Scan the QR code below for more information.









## Chapter 5

# Tell Them Who You Are and Why You're Here

**Rwanda**  
1994  
Genocide

**Disclaimer:** This chapter describes some graphic scenes of brutality. My goal was to balance being honest about the evil in Rwanda while avoiding very real details that sound like the script for a horror movie. In short, R-rated scenes are told in PG-13 detail.



Over the years in honestly answering the question “Where do we get involved next?” I’ve realized that you could throw a dart at a world map and, if you hit a landmass, you would find some sort of humanitarian crisis. That truth is consistent with what Jesus taught us, recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John: “The poor you will always have with you” (Matt. 26:11). The same is true for the sick and brokenhearted. A major part of our leadership at Samaritan’s Purse has to do with stewardship of our staff and resources, as we constantly ask, “Where do we feel like God is leading us to serve?”



Rutare, May 1994





The Unaccompanied Minors reunification program, Kigali, early 1995





Kibogoro Mission Hospital



Kigali, 1995



Applying eye drops, southern Rwanda



Don Norrington with Ken, working in orphan care, Rutare



To Whom It May Concern

Re: Ken Isaacs

The man working with Samaritan's Purse is authorised to stay in a house in Remera near Chez Rondo.

Plse don't vacate him.

Rose Kabuye (Mayor)

Prefect Kigali

23-07-94

Actual note from Mayor Kabuye

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: KEN ISAACS

The man working with Samaritan's Purse is authorised to stay in a house in Remera near Chez Rondo.

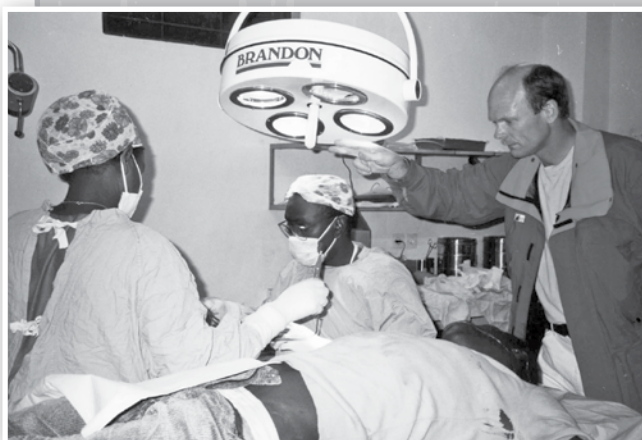
Plse don't vacate him.

Rose Kabuye (Mayor)

Prefect Kigali

*[Signature]*

23-07-94



Southern Rwanda



Coordinating logistics at Kigali Airport





# Will I Die Tonight or Tomorrow?

**Zaire**

**1996**

**Detainment/Interrogation**

In 1996, with our team continuing the work at the Central Hospital in Kigali, Rwanda, I was traveling in and out of the country as needed. I know this sounds archaic today, but our most reliable form of communication there was short-wave radios. One day, an urgent call for help came in to our office on one of the frequencies. I heard and responded to the man, who said he was a missionary in an area of Zaire he identified as Kishungu. (Today, Zaire is called the Democratic Republic of the Congo.)

He reported that Rwandan refugees were pouring into his area. His estimation was 60,000 men, women, and children. I knew right away that these were part of the 2 million that had fled across the border into Zaire. There was also a massive cholera epidemic with thousands of people dying every day. Eventually, I learned that the missionary on the radio was Jim Lindquist. Rwandans were coming to his mission station, trying to flee this horrible situation.

Following the plane crash that had killed Rwanda's president and the genocide that had begun against the Tutsis, the military commander of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), Paul Kagame, responded by leading a force of 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers to fight the Hutus. Kagame's forces were able to retake Kigali

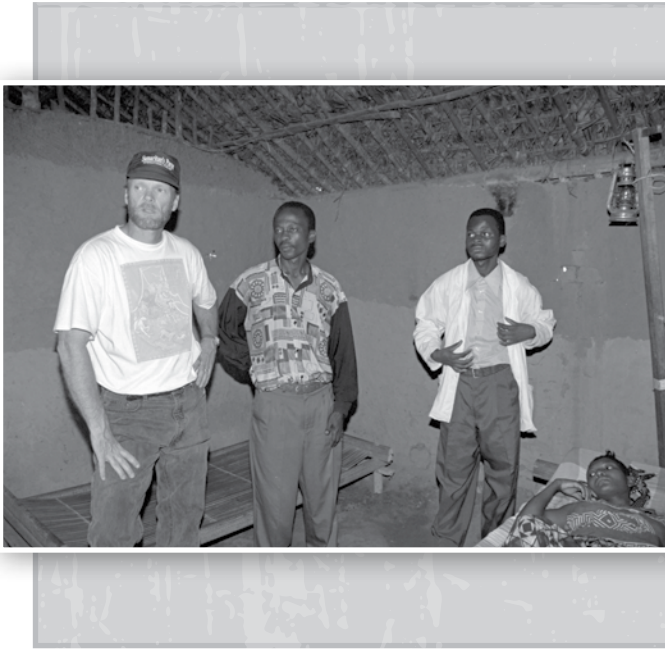


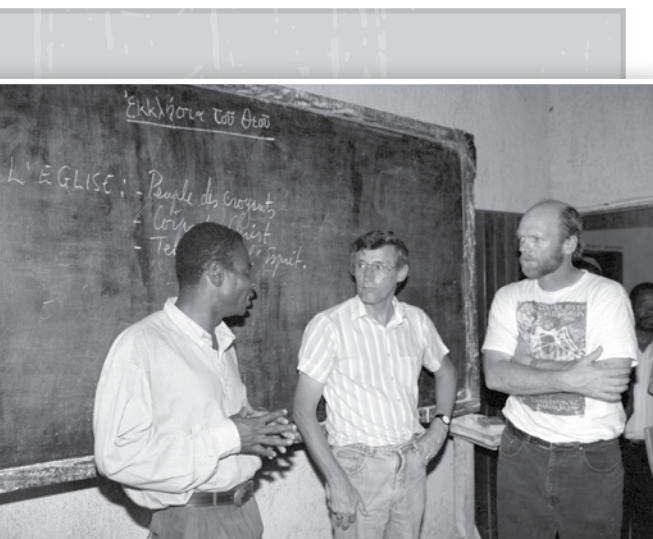


Michael VanRooyen, airport attendant, and Ken,  
Kigali, November 1996



Pilot Curtis Wilkerson making final checks  
at Kigali Airport before flight to South Sudan





Ed Morrow and Ken with a local pastor in Yakasu, 1998



Moving supplies in Yakusa, 1998

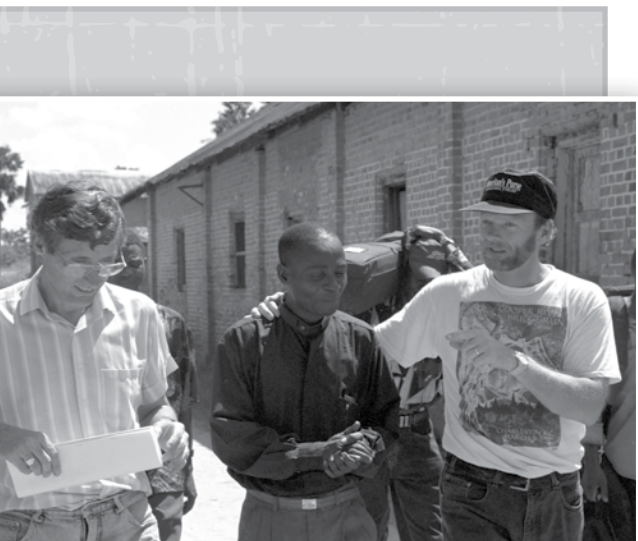






Moving supplies in Yakasu, 1998

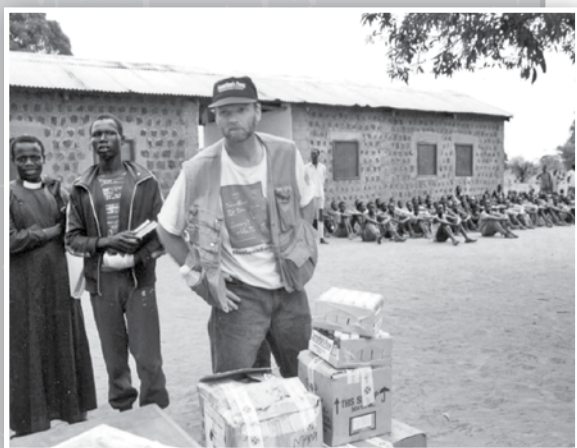












Bringing medical supplies, 1998



# To Go into the No-Go

**South Sudan**  
**1993**  
**Persecution**

In 1993, Samaritan's Purse began to work in very remote areas of South Sudan. Originally a region of Sudan and later its own nation, it has long been one of the poorest places in the world. We had come because the people were suffering from tribalism and a lack of infrastructure, healthcare, and education. The Arabic Islamist government, based in Khartoum, added to the problems for the people in the south as it persecuted and even enslaved them because of their race and religion. From then to today, the war in Sudan has always had many different layers exacerbated by great political strife.

At the time, there was a United Nations program called Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) that coordinated humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of the Sudanese who were suffering because of the war. The program had three members—the UN, the government of Sudan (GOS), and a rebel group known as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). UNICEF and the World Food Programme were the primary leaders and coordinators of OLS. This arrangement was unique because UN agencies typically only engage with formal governments and not rebel groups trying to break away from or overthrow the government.

The OLS would often agree that entire regions of southern Sudan would be classified as “go zones,” while others were classified as “no-go zones.” The



Franklin Graham with Ken at a South Sudan state dinner, immediately after South Sudan declared independence, July 9, 2011





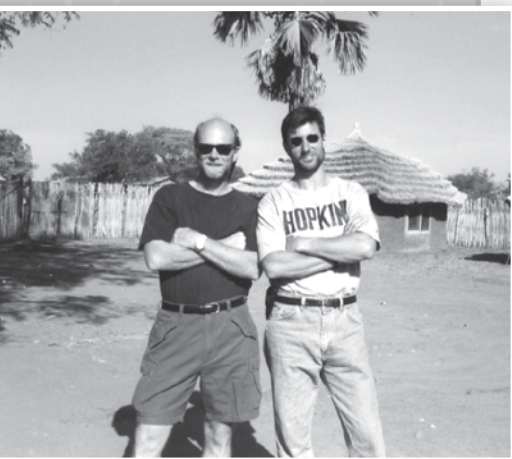


Food airdrop for famine response  
in Sudan

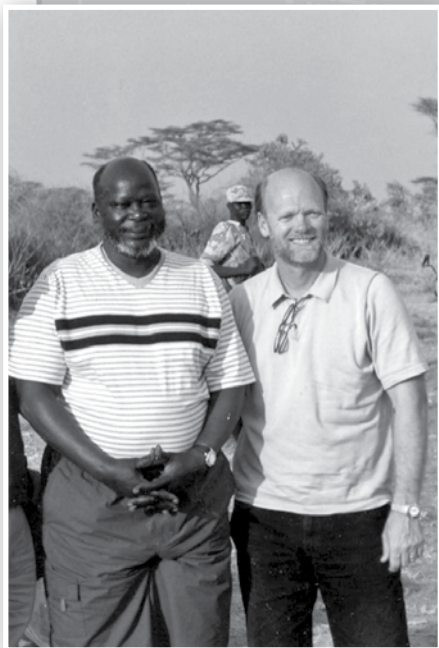




Lui, May 1997

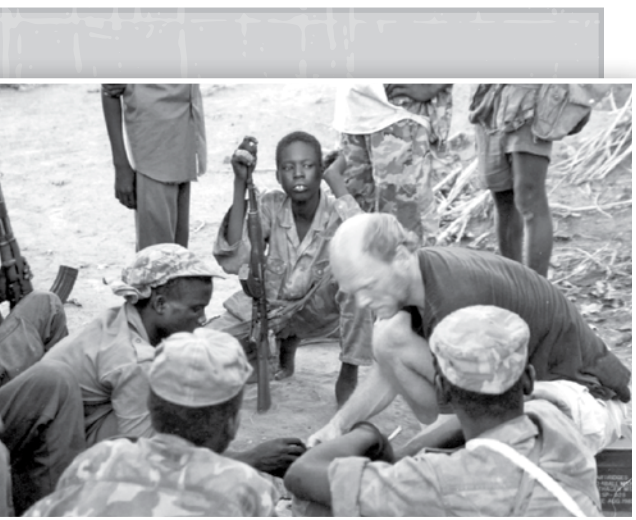


Ken with Mike VanRooyen, Lui, May 1998



John Garang and Ken at New Site, 1999





Ken helping a wounded soldier, Tindalo, 1997



Governor Malik Agar of Southern Blue Nile and Governor Abdul Aziz la Hilu in the Nuba Mountains, 2000



Lui Hospital, 1997









## **My Seventeen-Month Detour through Washington, DC**

In February 2003, I received a call from Roger Winter, who was being promoted to assistant administrator of the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, the agency containing the humanitarian response assets of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Roger was leaving the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and asked if I would consider taking over the role.

I talked about Roger in the previous chapter, but I had been introduced to him in 1997 when I needed to connect with someone in Washington about South Sudan. Surprised at Roger's call, I realized the honor of being considered for the prestigious position. After a visit to Washington to discuss the details with Andrew Natsios, the administrator of USAID, as well as much thought and prayer, I turned him down. But, two months later, the offer came back a second time. While Franklin was supportive, he expressed he didn't want me to leave. Eventually, Carolyn and I came to a peace about accepting the offer, a huge step of faith for us to leave family and friends in Boone.

After obtaining the necessary security clearance, on August 15, 2004, I began my new job. Keeping our place in Boone, we bought a townhome in



Tsunami relief supplies, Jakarta Airport, 2005





Secretary of State Colin Powell briefing embassy staff  
with Jeb Bush, Jakarta, Indonesia

To learn more about how to join our DART roster,  
scan the QR code with your smartphone:



Jane Graham, Franklin Graham, Ken Isaacs, President George H. W. Bush, Barbara Bush, Carolyn Isaacs, President Jimmy Carter







# Yes, Mr. President

**China/Myanmar**  
**2008**  
**Earthquake/Floods**

On May 12, 2008, a magnitude 7.9 earthquake hit southwestern China with the epicenter in Sichuan. Eighty percent of the structures in that region were flattened, causing 90,000 people to die or be declared missing; 375,000 were injured in collapses or by falling debris. Millions were displaced and homeless.<sup>1</sup> The destruction of the roads caused many of the remote villages in the mountains to be impossible to reach.

Only ten days before this earthquake, on May 2, Cyclone Nargis caused a severe flood in Myanmar (known as Burma until 1989). Twelve-foot walls of water accelerated by high winds surged through villages. In the Irrawaddy Delta, an estimated 138,000 people were killed or declared missing.<sup>2</sup> In the same region of the world, two massive disasters struck that literally impacted millions upon millions of people.

Providentially, at the time, Franklin was in China speaking at a series of engagements, back when the nation was more open to religious activities than it is today. Immediately following the earthquake, Franklin called me. Realizing the severity of the tragedy in China and also talking about the devastating floods in Myanmar, we made the decision to respond to both disasters as soon as we could pull the resources together.





Cyclone Nargis damage, Irrawaddy Delta, Myanmar, 2008





Relief food for Cyclone Nargis victims

Community well. Irrawaddy Peninsula, 2008







## Letter from President Bush to Ken



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 1, 2008

Mr. Kenneth Isaacs  
Boone, North Carolina

Dear Ken:

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss the relief efforts in China. I am grateful for your taking a firm response to this horrible disaster, and I appreciate your dedicated efforts to provide hope and healing to those dealing with profound loss. Your good work reflects the compassion and decency of our Nation.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature of George W. Bush in black ink, written over the word "Sincerely,".

George W. Bush









# Ask the

# Right Questions

## Haiti 2010 Earthquake

**Disclaimer:** This chapter describes some graphic scenes of deaths and injuries. As in the chapter on Rwanda, my goal was to balance being honest about the devastation while being cautious in describing the horror of human suffering I witnessed.



After leaving work on January 12, 2010, I went to the gym. While I was running on a treadmill, the TV mounted closest to me was on CNN. Suddenly, a breaking news report caught my attention as I saw video clips of chaos and destruction. The anchor stated that at 4:53 p.m. eastern standard time, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti with the epicenter being fifteen miles southwest of the heavily populated capital of Port-au-Prince.<sup>1</sup> (Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, about seven hundred miles southeast of Florida.)





82nd Airborne, 1st/325 representative with Ken and Paul Saber



Working with the 82nd Airborne Ist/325



Working with the 82nd Airborne 1st/325





# Like God Had

# Punched the Earth

**Japan**  
2011  
Earthquake/Tsunami

On March 11, 2011, an apocalyptic natural disaster struck Japan, causing a cascade of devastation.

First, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake hit at 2:46 p.m. off the northeastern coast of Honshu, Japan's main island. Secondary quakes and hundreds of aftershocks followed, registering in the 7s. (For comparison, the one that struck Haiti was a 7.0.) To date, the initial event is considered one of the most powerful earthquakes to be recorded since recordkeeping on earthquakes began in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Second, the tsunami it triggered had waves more than thirty feet high that reached the shoreline within thirty minutes and traveled as far inland on the eastern side of the nation as six miles. With little time for evacuation, people scrambled to reach higher ground on land or in buildings. Thousands drowned in the flood, and, when the water began to recede and flow back, countless victims were swept out to sea.<sup>2</sup>





Inspecting supplies at the airport in Tokyo



Morioka area, Honshu



Dr. Chiles (far left), Ken, and two US Marines coordinating a US response



Morioka area, Honshu



What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. (James 2:14–18)



To find out more about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, scan the QR code below.







# This May Be His Only Chance

Liberia  
2014  
Ebola

Saturday, July 26, 2014, was a beautiful day in the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina. Carolyn and I were celebrating the wedding of some friends, a Mexican couple who proudly displayed their heritage in the ceremony. The entire bridal party looked amazing in their formal dress. Their vows given by the priest were very moving. As is normal for me, I cried during the wedding. There has always been something deeply moving to me about the union of a man and woman with “til death do us part” always melting my heart and bringing me to tears.

Following the presentation of the couple, we were all invited to the basement of the small church for their reception. Around one o'clock in the afternoon, as the eighty guests finished lunch, just as the wedding cake was being cut, my wife received a text that read: “Please have Kenney call urgent.” Edward Densham had been trying to reach me. My phone battery had died earlier in the day. In my line of work, the word *urgent* goes far beyond a challenging deadline or an impatient client. Words like that most often indicate an actual life-and-death situation.

When I stepped outside to call Edward, he answered and said, “Dr. Brantly’s results for his test came back. He tested positive, Kenney. He has Ebola.” Hearing those three words, I immediately felt as if some huge invisible fist punched me in



At the River Gee





Disinfection at the Ebola clinic exit, ELWA Hospital

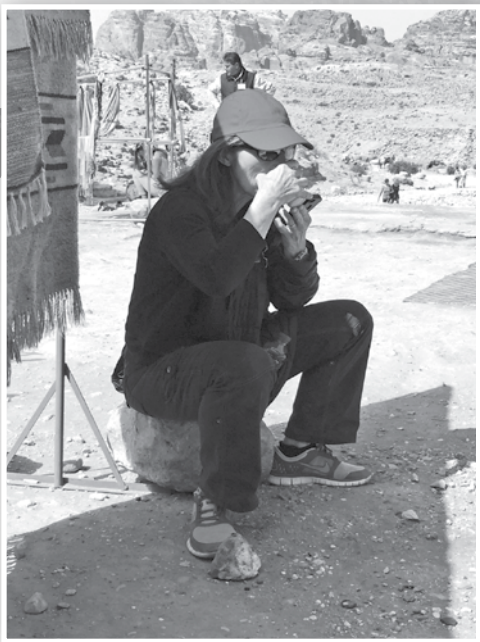








ELWA Ebola clinic



# This Is the Life I've Got, and I'm Going to Live It

**Carolyn**  
2016–2017  
War in Iraq

After being threatened, held captive, shot at, and surviving many close calls from bombs and land mines, on my way home from a disaster or war zone, I would often ask myself, *How many of these ordeals will I be allowed to get through and make it safely back to my wife?*

And then the very sobering question, *What will Carolyn do when I get killed?*

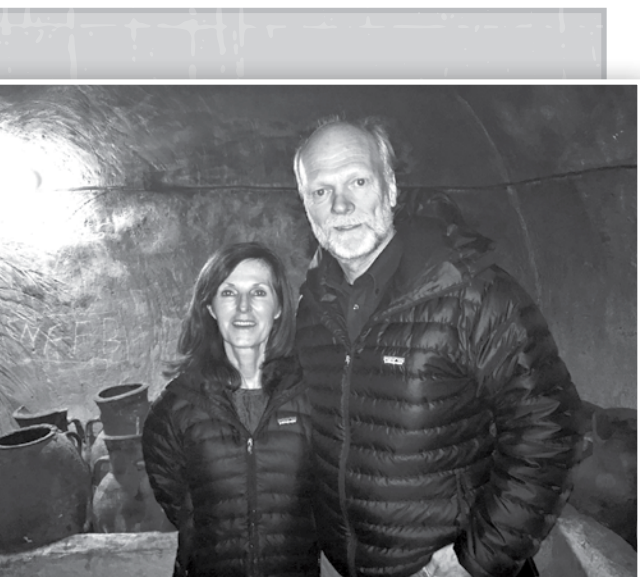
Throughout the Bible, there are numerous accounts of God's favor and protection for His faithful people, yet, for many, including most of the disciples, their lives ultimately ended in martyrdom. For those who believe in Jesus, eternity is guaranteed; safety is not. God has a purpose for every day He gives us breath, but there is also a purpose in death as well. The apostle Paul often touched on this subject, as in Philippians 1:20–21, "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

In what country and what crisis would it simply be my time? I also smoked for twenty years, finally quitting on June 13, 1993. If you have ever been





Yazidi holy site in Lalish, Kurdistan region, northeast Iraq, 2016



Carolyn and Ken underneath the Lalish holy site



IDP Camp, Kurdistan region, northeast Iraq, 2016



Preparing for large-scale food distribution to IDPs, Iraq, 2016



Medical staff treating patients in emergency room,  
outside of Mosul, 2017





Franklin Graham giving the address at the dedication of the Emergency Field Hospital, Bartella, January 2017



People fleeing Mosul area during time of conflict, 2017



Outside of Mosul, 2017



Displaced Iraqis, northeast Iraq, 2017



Construction of hospital's blast walls, Bartella





Starting the day with team prayer, near Mosul, 2017



View of EFH, outside of Mosul, 2017







*HELPING IN*

# *JESUS' NAME*

*THE WORLD NEEDS MORE  
GOOD SAMARITANS*

Help us run to the fire to share the eternal  
hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*"Go and do likewise."* —Luke 10:37

Hurricane  
Helene  
Response







**150**  
YEARS STRONG

DAVID  COOK

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