

# SAVING ZIMBABWE



*Life, Death & Hope in Africa*

BOB SCOTT



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*The yellow Zimbabwe Bird is the national emblem of Zimbabwe. It is featured on the national flag and appears on currency, representing the soapstone bird carvings found at the ruins of the Great Zimbabwe. The African Mpatapo symbol throughout the book represents the bond or knot that binds parties in a dispute to peaceful, harmonious reconciliation. It symbolizes peacemaking, pacification and reconciliation.*

## DEDICATED TO

*Jeremy Russell, Matthew Marais and Laura Russell who lost more in one moment than most of us will ever lose in a lifetime. To Stephen, Thabani, Neville, Roy, Guywani, Esinath and all the Zimbabweans whose hope for a better life was stolen from them in one tragic moment.*

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## FOREWORD

**D**ecember 7, 1941, November 22, 1963 and September 11, 2001 are dates that live in infamy in American history. What makes them unusual is that we each know exactly where we were and what we were doing when we received “The News!” December 7, 1941, was the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. My father and his best friend were comfortably seated at the Sunday matinee at the LaGrange movie theater when the film stopped and the lights came up. The theater owner soon took the stage and told a horrified audience that America had just been attacked.

On Friday November 22, 1963 I walked in the door after another long, boring day of first grade, to find my mother sitting in shock watching our small black and white TV. The look on her face told me that something terrible had happened. She could barely utter the words, “President Kennedy has been shot in Dallas.”

For a younger generation, the events of September 11, 2001 will be the moment in time when they look back and say, “Everything changed that day. My life has not been the same.” Thanksgiving 1987 was such a moment for me on a very personal level. It was the day that I received the news that 16 of my dearest friends had been massacred across the ocean on a humanitarian project in Zimbabwe.

For anyone who has experienced the call that a loved one has been killed

in an accident, you know exactly what I'm talking about. For those of you that thankfully haven't, I can only describe it as initially unreal and ultimately devastating. You are never the same. Something dies in you.

I was a young associate pastor of a dynamic, growing church that was going places. God was moving and the future couldn't have been brighter. The sense of invincibility and divine destiny was woven through everything I was doing. I was a man on a mission that included not only my home church in Kansas City, but the African nation of Zimbabwe. I believed that God had a destiny for the country and its people.

I have spent the last 20 years carrying the story of these amazing people in my heart. I have rarely spoken about it because I've had so many unresolved conflicts in my soul over the whole situation. For me it was "the death of vision" but taken to an unimaginable level, as 16 people really died! You may be familiar with Proverbs 29:18 "Where there is no vision the people perish." This certainly was the resulting "domino effect" of the massacre.

I finally came to terms with the fact that the haunting images of death and destruction from 1987 are forever etched into my psyche. They will never be removed. The ripple effect has touched every aspect of my life and in many cases negatively. I have more than a few haunted ship wrecks lying at the bottoms of my ocean that stare up at me from the depths. I lived in fear for years that at any moment I'd be pulled under, never to be heard from again.

Time plays a significant role in our lives in bringing two concepts into balance. When we are young, our focus on the future and our perspective on the past are completely askew. As children the future seems so far away. We fantasize about what we want to be and where we want to go but it is all wanderlust. None of it is based on reality as we have little understanding of life. It is virtually impossible to see clearly what life holds for us further down the road. Life seems out of focus and the horizon hidden.

At the same time, because we are young, we have no history either.

This means we have no perspective and therefore life has virtually no context. We live in the moment and are only concerned with our most immediate needs. As we journey down life's highway and grow older, our future starts coming into focus and our past starts to bring perspective. This has certainly been the case for me.

In early 2008, something I thought had died many years ago started to resurrect. I started feeling emotions and passions I hadn't felt in years and they were bubbling up with an energy of their own. At first I tried to suppress them as I wasn't sure where they were coming from, nor was I interested in feeling more pain or living through more disappointment. I was caught off guard as my heart was being pulled back to the people of Zimbabwe.

One day as I was ruminating over all these mysterious thoughts and feelings, out of the depths of my soul came the words "Do not let the lives of your friends be shed in vain. The story is not over, in fact, it's just beginning." These words would not leave me alone for weeks until one day I came to grips with the fact that I had been entrusted with a message. For reasons only God knows, like a pregnant woman, I was carrying in me a profound story that needed to be told.

Once I got past all my fears and insecurities about writing, I set my mind and heart to telling our story. It's a big story that covers a myriad of people and generations. While it's the story of Zimbabwe, it's also the story of many other people around the world. It's a story that sadly has repeated itself like a broken record as mankind fails to gain understanding and wisdom from history.

I'm old enough now to have perspective and from my perspective the cure for what ails the world will not be found within our own hearts. I have seen too much, the evidence is too overwhelming; mankind is plagued by the terminal disease of selfishness. It is at the root of all evil and has consumed humanity like a ravenous beast. If there is any hope that, as the prophet Isaiah dreamed, the lamb will ever lie down with the

lion and wolf, the human soul must be re-wired. In the place of out of control self-centeredness, mankind needs a new heart, one that is motivated by true selfless love, one for another.

The people of The Community of Reconciliation had that kind of love but it came not from their own innate goodness as they were all too aware of their own human frailties. It came because they had a spiritual encounter with God himself that transformed them. That transformation couldn't help but transform the people around them. Transformation of the soul is the soul of transformation!

I hope our story, while at times gut-wrenching and unbearable, will be both thought provoking and inspirational. It's a story that is in progress and this book is only the first volume in an ever unfolding divine drama.

In order to put some form to a number of concurring and intertwined story lines, I have divided the book into two parts:

Part One, "The Road Behind," chronicles the martyrdom of my friends and their simple but extraordinary lives. It also recounts the history of the Zimbabwean people and addresses the elements that contributed to this violent collision of cultures.

Part Two, "The Road Ahead," explains the current situation in the nation and what I believe is a general road map for significant and lasting change in the country. It is my hope that this story will help inspire others to join with the Zimbabweans to rebuild their nation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. Like all those associated with this story, I hope you will never be the same nor will the people of Zimbabwe.

Bob Scott

January 2009



## PART ONE:

### THE ROAD BEHIND

*The past is our definition. We may strive, with good reason,  
to escape it, or to escape what is bad in it, but we will  
escape it only by adding something better to it.*

— Wendell Berry





## CHAPTER 1

### A JOURNEY INTO UNCHARTED TERRITORY

*If you can find a path with no obstacles,  
it probably doesn't lead anywhere.*

— Frank A. Clark

**I**t was a gray, overcast day at New York's JFK airport, one where it felt like the clouds were just a few feet above one's head. The events of the last twenty-four hours had left me in a dark, introspective mood. Talking was out of the question. It almost seemed irreverent. As we were finding our seats for the long haul overnight flight, the captain announced that we were temporarily fogged in. He suggested we get comfortable as it was possible the flight would be delayed for some time.

My feelings and emotions were churning like the ocean during a massive storm. On the one hand I was frustrated and wanted to get on with the trip. I needed to get to Zimbabwe and find out what had happened to my friends and to comfort their families. On the other hand their deaths were so violent that I was filled with anxiety about having to not only face the unpleasant sights but also a lot of people in anger and excruciating pain. I was not sure if I really wanted to experience what I was about to be exposed to. I felt totally inadequate. It soon dawned on me, however, that it really didn't matter. I was on an airplane headed overseas to a huge funeral and there was no turning back now.

Suddenly, the flight attendant's announcement interrupted my inner world of thoughts. Due to the weather delay, the captain was going to make the evening news available. It looked like it was going to take quite awhile for the fog to clear and he thought it might be a nice gesture to keep everyone occupied.

What happened next is a memory so etched into my psyche that I will never be able to forget it. It's like a newsreel stored in my head. It sends a chill up my spine as I recall the sound of the musical intro to ABC's Evening News blaring over the plane's loud speakers. Then there was the distinct Canadian voice of news anchor Peter Jennings saying, "Tonight's top story: sixteen missionaries were massacred in Zimbabwe yesterday..." At that moment it seemed like my whole internal gyroscope started spinning out of control. I felt dizzy. There on the TV screen on an airplane in New York City was a picture of my friend Gerry Keightley holding his baby son Barnabas, along with pictures of his two beautiful daughters, Deborah and Glynis, when they were little children. I was stunned to see them on TV. I had no idea that anyone outside of Zimbabwe, aside from a few folks here in the States, even knew about what had happened the night before.

In the US, the Friday after the Thanksgiving holiday is always one of the busiest shopping days of the year. No one has time to sit and watch the news, much less care about or even want to hear about a massacre in Zimbabwe. The story was a morbid one and after all it was the first day of the Holiday season.

As I sat stalled on the tarmac in that suddenly claustrophobic jet I thought, *There are my friends on TV. They have become a news story because they are now dead. How sad is that. No one seemed to think that leaving behind their comfortable suburban lifestyle for the sake of racial harmony, in a country torn apart by racism, was newsworthy when they were alive. Now they are dead because of it, so we'll tell the story on a day when no one cares! This is warped.* The whole scenario was causing me intense emotional pain and I felt a consuming anger rising up inside me. I was so emotionally conflicted

with so much sorrow and anger in the same moment.

As I looked around, I saw children playing in the aisles, people reading the newspaper and others with headphones, listening to music. I was beside myself. Everything inside me wanted to run up and down the aisles ripping newspapers out of people's hands. I wanted to make all of them watch the story. It was important to me that they knew that these people had died for something good, something really good. They had demonstrated that by the grace of God, black Africans and white Africans could live together. They were not just talking about it, they were doing it. They had established a genuine expression of the Kingdom of God that modeled racial harmony, feeding the oppressed poor and forming a self-sustaining, small village economy. They died not because it was a flawed truth but because it was a powerful working truth. They had demonstrated that age-old hatreds could be put to rest. They called their little expression, "The Community of Reconciliation."

THESE PEOPLE HAD  
DEMONSTRATED  
THAT BY THE GRACE  
OF GOD, BLACK AND  
WHITE AFRICANS  
COULD LIVE  
TOGETHER.

Sitting there in stunned silence, it hit me again that these were my dear friends with whom I had worked so closely over the last few years. I wanted to tell everyone, including the press, that they had it wrong. These were not missionaries from far away; these were ordinary local African people, friends and neighbors that just wanted to do the right thing. They wanted to demonstrate the love of God in the simplest way. They wanted peace, not conflict. They wanted to help people out of difficult times, whether white or black. These were good people, really good people. Did anybody care what they had been living for?

It was a terribly excruciating experience to see that few had cared about what they had been doing when they were alive, and that they were only newsworthy now that they were dead.

To over 350 people on that plane it was just another news event about another tragic story somewhere far away. While they were comfortably

numb to it, I was filled with raw and painful emotions that kept escaping from their self-imposed exile to the deep recesses of my soul. These human beings were not just a story or a photo on a screen. They had become family to me. I sat in that aircraft seat like a caged animal using what little bit of self-control I had left to keep myself in my seat. If I had given in to all those raw emotions just for a second, I'm sure the airport police would have carried me off that plane wrapped in a straight jacket, screaming into the foggy night.

I was really upset at ABC News for the "missionary" reference as I thought it took away from the true nature of the story. Not that I have an issue with missionaries, but this was not about people coming from somewhere else to help the poor Africans. This was about indigenous black Africans and their white neighbors saying let's live in peace together, side by side. Let's change our history. God made us one people in Him, let's live like it.

For hundreds of years, the South African Dutch Reformed Church had either turned a deaf ear to, or in the worst cases, sanctioned the hideous concept of Apartheid. This political ideology sanctioned by the church stood for two of God's people groups living side by side but in different communities with different standards. The inequality was substantial, with the white population getting the vast financial benefits of the arrangement. The people of the Community of Reconciliation believed that God had a very different expression in mind that celebrated diversity in harmony. They understood that each group brought something unique to the table and that the only one who sits at the head of God's table is God.

I couldn't keep from thinking of my dear friends John and Elaine Russell, who were in their 70s. They had lost nine family members in this tragedy. That number seemed unimaginable. Losing one loved one is difficult enough, how could anyone survive the loss of nine loved ones?

WHY DO BAD  
THINGS HAPPEN TO  
GOOD PEOPLE?

As I would later learn, the Russells were just returning to Zimbabwe from visiting with their youngest son Jeremy here in the States, when the raid and subsequent massacres took place. As they got off the airplane in Johannesburg, South Africa, they noticed that there was an unusually large contingent of people there to greet them. It was then that they learned about the attack and murders. They had lost two daughters, two son-in-laws, a daughter-in-law and four grandchildren! How I ached for them. Adding to the pain was the immense distance, the sense of separation from them and the inability to even give them a hug or utter a kind word.

As the magnitude of it all hit me, the tears welled up. *How tragic, I thought. They don't deserve this. Why do bad things happen to good people? This just doesn't seem right. I thought if you obeyed God and lived righteously He would protect you.* None of this made sense; this whole scenario felt wrong, very wrong.

After a few more hours of what seemed like reliving a lifetime, the plane finally took off. As we roared down the runway I was thrust back in my seat by the power of that huge aircraft. It all seemed like a bad dream or a metaphor for what lay ahead. I was no longer in control of the situation. I was being unstoppably carried along by the jet as we soared into the darkness.

*How did all this happen so suddenly? Yesterday I was enjoying a beautiful Thanksgiving with my family.*



My date with this unforeseen destiny started out unusually in that it was actually a beautiful day. Kansas City Thanksgivings traditionally were cold, overcast and often rainy; this one was warm and sunny. The air outside was clean and fresh and there was a sense of anticipation over this family holiday.

Thanksgiving is an American celebration of the friendship between the “Pilgrims” who left England to settle America and the indigenous Indians

who were already living here. The contemporary Thanksgiving celebration involves family and friends at a large meal: usually a roasted turkey with many side dishes made from foods native to the United States. It is a form of a harvest festival. The first Thanksgiving is believed to have occurred at the Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts during the fall season of 1621.

Traditionally, we gathered our whole family and headed to my mother-in-law's house for an all-day event. It was an experience unlike any other. With seven children of her own, each bringing their brood, Peggy's little white, single-level home on Blue Ridge Boulevard was always packed with people. I was particularly thankful for the pleasant weather as it meant the massive gathering of hyperactive grandchildren could play outside.

The sense of anticipation of seeing all their cousins in one place usually had my kids wired by early morning. This led to frequent, incessant questioning about whether or not we were going to be leaving soon. I was always fascinated by the sense of excitement that the children had about Thanksgiving. I think the fact that it was an "event" and at Papa and "Gre-Gre's" house was what made it special.

Once we had our assigned portion of the feast prepared, we loaded the children and food in the car and headed on our merry way to Thanksgiving Madness. My oldest son Kyle was five, and my daughter Jessica was three. They each looked so cute buckled in the back-seat of the car, beaming with expectations. Kyle, who always had enough energy for three kids, couldn't wait to get there to play football with his uncles and cousins. Even at five he already had the natural intensity of a competitive athlete and the heart of a soldier. Jessica had a baby doll in her arms that she was mothering to death. She loved the "American Girl" collection and my mother, Elaine, always made sure that her dolls were finely dressed.

Upon arriving at the Callahans', the kids were practically out of the car before it stopped. Their little legs ran as fast as they could to the

backyard to see who else was already there and to make sure they wouldn't miss anything. Once they had scoped out the whole situation, I heard their mother yelling out the backdoor for them to come inside to give their Papa and "Gre-Gre" a big hug and kiss. Papa was a big outgoing man and gave big bear hugs, while "Gre-Gre" had a favorite chair she loved to sit in to watch all the "goings-on." With a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, she'd sit there quietly for hours and just smile, taking the whole scene in. One by one, more cars arrived and more kids piled out, each making the same mad dash to the backyard to see who was already there.

It was a tradition that late morning and early afternoon were always spent watching football. We were a football family. My brothers-in-law were die-hard Kansas City Chiefs fans. It just so happened that this Thanksgiving the Chiefs were playing the Detroit Lions and thankfully with the nice weather the kids were all outside. My in-laws had one of those old wooden console TVs that sat on the floor. If the weather had been bad there would have been virtually no way to see the screen with all the people standing around in the house, so this year we actually got to watch the game uninterrupted. Thankfully the Chiefs beat the Lions 27-20 or my brother-in-law Pat would have been in a grumpy mood the rest of the day. The late game was the Dallas Cowboys vs. the Minnesota Vikings but before the game started, I decided to mosey outside to see how my father-in-law Bob was doing in the backyard.

Bob was a big man who had had a rather tough life, growing up on the violent streets of East St. Louis, Illinois. He had married my mother-in-law, Peggy, and they had a house painting business together. He was as blue-collar and redneck as they come. You could always expect beer, barbeque and country music. He and Peggy were also very involved at the Elk's Lodge in south Kansas City. The Elk's Lodge is a social and fraternal club founded in 1868. For a number of years Bob was the "Grand Poobah", or leader at the Lodge. He ran that place like it was his domain. He loved to cook and it was a common sight to see him standing behind



the grill cooking for the whole crowd.

For all of his street toughness, underneath he was a big soft teddy bear that really loved his step-kids and grandkids. When he knew “the family” was coming over, he’d fire up his grill, crank up the country music and start barbequing. This year he was smoking a turkey in a new smoker

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HOW THIS CRISIS  
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ME TO MY KNEES  
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STATUS QUO  
“NORMAL LIFE.”

he had just purchased. As I stepped outside and looked around, there he was, standing next to his grill with his big barbeque fork in one hand and a beer in the other. He had his chef’s apron on, but he was so big it looked more like a bib. At that moment he was watching all the grandkids run around the yard. The boys were playing football, the girls had their dolls and the moms were seated

together on the patio furniture, all talking at once. It was quite a sight to see and the volume level was staggering. I remember thinking to myself, *he’s in his element now*. Bob loved having lots of activity around him all the time. I think he quite enjoyed the chaos.

After walking back into the house to watch the Cowboys game with Pat, I sat down in one of the armchairs, thanking God that all that noise was outside. Around half time, they announced that the turkey was ready. Peggy kicked into gear and started setting out the food, plates and utensils to feed this crazy mob. The cousins came pouring into the house and jostled into line, jumping up and down while their Moms filled their plates and sent them back outside. Once the munchkins cleared out, the adults started lining up. I was so looking forward to tasting some of Bob’s smoked turkey, as it looked and smelled delicious.

After piling my plate high and having just sat down to devour this amazing feast, the phone rang. I was really surprised when I learned that the call was for me. Why would anyone be calling me at my in-laws house on Thanksgiving? I was hoping it wasn’t someone from the church who needed counseling. It’s awfully hard to have compassion for someone

when you know you have a big plate of delicious food that's getting cold.

My brother in-law and I had started this church a few years earlier, and sometimes people's needs would cause them to be invasive. It wasn't uncommon for someone that was in the middle of a personal crisis to try and reach us no matter where we were. Nothing could have prepared me for this call or how this crisis was about to take me to my knees and pillage my status quo "normal life."

Once the phone made its way over to me, I was surprised to hear the distinctly South African voice of my pastoral colleague, Noel Alexander, on the other end of the phone. Noel wasn't one to show a lot of emotion and I could tell by the unsettling sound in his voice that something was wrong. Very wrong! He told me to sit down; he had something dreadful to tell me. It's amazing all the things that ran through my mind in that moment. In an effort to help immunize myself from the impending pain, my mind raced ahead, trying to uncover every possible scenario, so that when I finally heard it, I wasn't going to be totally shocked. Well, even though my mind covered a myriad of scenarios, what I was about to hear wasn't in any one of them. I could feel Noel's voice struggling to come up with enough strength and find the right words.

SUDDENLY IT  
WAS LIKE I WAS A  
SPECTATOR OF MY  
OWN LIFE.

After a brief pause he stammered, "Bob, all the white brothers and sisters on the farms in Zimbabwe have been killed. They've been massacred Bob, all of them, even the children." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. In fact, I was so stunned I asked him to repeat what he had just said. My worst fears came true when he told me again the news of the massacres. In that moment the sense of shock generated strange sensations in my body. It started in my head and soon, had completely consumed me into what felt like some sort of dimensional bubble or alternative reality.

Suddenly it was like I was a spectator of my own life. I felt like I was having an out of body experience. I was watching people's mouths move,

but couldn't hear a word they were saying. I could tell by the expressions on their faces that they were all having fun, laughing and enjoying the meal and each other. I remember my mind going numb, and then my body, as all the feeling just drained out through my feet. I was sitting there in a chair with a whole plate of untouched food on my lap and a phone to my ear, but I had no idea what I was doing there.

As I tried to find my mental and emotional equilibrium, I started asking really dumb questions just to buy time to try and get a hold of myself

THIS JUST WASN'T  
SUPPOSED TO BE  
THE WAY THE STORY  
ENDED. SOMEONE  
HAD DECIDED TO  
REWRITE THE SCRIPT  
AND VIOLENTLY  
AT THAT!

and clear my head. I finally had one cognitive thought and asked what had actually happened.

Noel explained that he had just received a call from Joseph Huidekoper in Montana, and that he had been frantically trying to track me down.

Joseph and his new bride Joanna had lived and worked for a couple of years with my friends who had just been massacred in Zimbabwe. Noel told

me that from what had been communicated to him, a group of political dissidents had raided the New Adams Farm, killing eight people, and then raiding the adjacent Olive Tree Farm, killing eight more. Both properties were a part of The Community of Reconciliation.

I sat there in shock and asked myself, *how could this have happened?* These were really good people who were doing something simple and yet extraordinary. I thought, *bad things don't happen to good people. How can this be?* I hung up the phone and just sat there, my mind racing to figure out some rational explanation for this tragedy. This just wasn't supposed to be the way the story ended. Someone had decided to rewrite the script, and violently at that. My paradigm of the Christian life and God's ways took a huge hit in that moment. In fact, they got nuked.

Before we hung up, Noel and I decided to meet at the church offices immediately to try to sort through this overwhelmingly tragic news. Neither of us really knew what to do next. It was fortunate that Gary Kroeze,

who had introduced me to this group of amazing Zimbabweans, was in Kansas City at the time. He was having Thanksgiving dinner with Jim and Sallie Collins, who were members of our church. The Collins had recently returned from an extended stay in Zimbabwe where they had been working on developing simple technology solutions that would benefit not only the people in the Community, but also those in the surrounding region.

I put the phone down and just sat in the chair looking around, struck by the incredible irony of it all. Here I was sitting in America, with life teeming everywhere around me. Three generations of family members were laughing, joking and eating together, celebrating the gift of life and family. The warm, fall sun was shining down brightly and the birds were in the trees singing at the top of their lungs. Life surrounded me; I was immersed in it. At the very same moment, a continent away, sixteen lifeless bodies were being loaded up and driven to the local morgue in Bulawayo. Those weren't just any bodies. They were the bodies of my friends and, in a spiritual way, my extended family. Just

a year earlier we had sat together and shared meals, friendship and our dreams for this community. We dreamed of a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe where the color of one's skin was irrelevant. We dreamed of a land whose soul was transformed by the very same values and principles that beat within Jesus' heart. Amazingly

WE DREAMED OF A  
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enough, it was materializing and most everyone in the region saw the transformation taking place. Centuries of racism and resentment that had tarnished a nation so filled with promise were slowly being washed away by a love not of this earth.

I felt very alone as I sat there in that chair. No one at the house had any idea as to what I was feeling. I still hadn't touched my food and frankly I had lost my appetite. I didn't want to say anything because I didn't want to ruin everyone else's holiday and yet I needed to leave. What do you say to

people in a situation like that? I had no idea. I was still in shock. I finally excused myself, telling them I had to leave to attend to a personal crisis. I told my wife I would meet her at home later that night once I figured out what was going on.

I headed to the church offices to meet with Noel and Gary. I was lost in thought about all the people that had lost family members, how they must be in total shock and how hard this was going to be for them. It suddenly dawned on me how similar John Russell was to my father-in-law, Bob Callahan. Both men had had hard lives and grew up tough. Both were fiercely independent and self-made. Both were blue collar and not scared of a hard day's work. Both ran trade companies and were leaders. Both men, while seemingly tough on the outside, were big teddy bears on the inside and absolutely loved their children and grandchildren.

This Thanksgiving, November 26th 1987, while Bob Callahan was celebrating the joy of life and family, John Russell was in mourning, having been left to deal with the calamity and destruction the Angel of Death had left him.

In the same moment I found myself overcome with a very sobering sense of my own immaturity. I thought, *I am way too young and inexperienced to deal with something of this magnitude.* Other than Elizabeth El-

AS I TRAVERSED THE  
LIBRARY OF MY MIND  
LOOKING FOR SOME  
PAST EXPERIENCE  
OR MATERIAL I  
MIGHT DRAW ON,  
I CAME UP EMPTY. I  
WAS IN UNCHARTED  
TERRITORY.

liot's story of the martyrdom of her husband and his four friends in 1957, I didn't know a single person that had gone through a similar experience. I found myself overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the situation. I kept repeating to myself, *sixteen people have just died! Sixteen!* Frankly, I was lost. I traversed the library of my mind looking for some past experience or material I might draw on but I came up empty. I was in uncharted territory. It's embarrassing to admit, but I found myself momentarily feeling sorry for myself. I was bemoaning the fact that I wasn't sure I was up to this and I

had no idea what I was even supposed to do. I can't fix this, I thought, it's just too devastating. I am not even sure what to think. There is so much I don't understand about what happened and why.

Waiting next in line on this emotional and mentally volatile ride were thoughts of guilt over my feeling so pathetic in the midst of a crisis. I didn't like how I was dealing with the whole situation. I felt like a boy but needed to be a man. In hindsight, I am sure that I was still suffering from shock as my brain just could not seem to think clearly about anything. It felt like I was in a fog and struggling to focus on what was ahead of me. I still had that strange sensation like I was somehow in another dimension. Everything inside me wanted to get away and try to process all that had just happened alone. What I really needed was time and solitude which, over the course of my life, have served me well. They have helped me calm my emotions and by isolating myself from all the other voices, I can hear my own thoughts and get in touch with my feelings. Unfortunately, that opportunity never materialized and I was left to compartmentalize my emotions until some unknown point in the future.

When God entrusts you with a compassionate heart such as I have, one of the very real struggles is to separate your own pain from that of others. At times all those emotions can get tangled into one large knot that seems impossible to separate. I had dealt with the death of my father a few years earlier but this situation was altogether different. How does one process the tragic deaths of sixteen friends at once? I could barely get past mourning for the first few friends that came to mind when I realized that I still had fourteen more to go. It seemed that there just wasn't enough of me or that my heart simply wasn't large enough. This was perplexing and gave my inner demons more fuel for their bonfire of guilt. In the end I had to lump everyone into one big group called "The Community" and mourn them together, which took away some of the personal nature of it but made it possible to process some of my grief.

I wondered about the remaining family members scattered around the

world. My thoughts turned again to the Russells. What about John and Elaine? What about Dave and Sharon's families in the US who are now so far away from their dead children? At that point it was all coming too fast and furious and I was unable to process it.

Despite the state of chaos that my mind and emotions were in, I had no choice but to force myself to rise to the occasion right then and there as people were going to be looking to me for direction and answers. After all, it was through my encouragement and leadership that so many people in Kansas City had been involved with this project. They were going to be looking to me not only for direction, but how to respond to a crisis of this magnitude.

Just then another wave of emotion swept over me. What about the families from the church that had spent time on the farms? What if the Collins, Corums or Hartleys had been killed? It would have been unbearable, and yet what I was already feeling seemed unbearable. Could something be more unbearable than what I was already feeling? That seemed like such an oxymoron. Sometimes emotions can wreak havoc with the mind. When you need sanity, they betray you and seem to want to drive you toward insanity.

I kept telling myself, if there was ever a time to stand up and be a man, it's now. It was like I was giving myself an internal slap on the face

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to wake up out of this mental stupor and emotional chaos. If I was going to be remotely helpful at this meeting I needed to do something with these unbridled emotions as they were tearing me apart inside. I wanted to let out an enormously loud scream. I decided at that point to do what I had done so often in the past which was find a nice cabinet in my soul and stuff every emotion

I had in there. Once firmly packed, I chained the doors, and locked them securely. To make sure that there would be no chance of escape; I took that

cabinet and rolled it into a cave even deeper into the recesses of my soul so that it would never see the light of day. There it has remained for many years until recently.

As I walked into the meeting room, Noel Alexander and Gary Kroeze both met me with an extended tender hug. Noel was his typical stoic South African self with little to say and yet there was that strength of soul that was always evident with him. Gary was trying hard to hold it together but his eyes were filled with tears. While he was a tough Montana cattle rancher on the outside, on the inside he was as tender as they come. Later when he just could not hold it in anymore he blurted out in a moment of pain, "I should have been there, I should have died too." He was really struggling with the guilt of being alive while his dear friends had crossed over to heaven. My friend Mike, the senior pastor, decided to come by the offices to see if he could lend any support. I remember being so thankful for his willingness to do anything to help. Although he had not visited the Community and so didn't have the personal connections that we did, he knew we were in pain and just wanted to be there for us.

I do not remember much of what the four of us discussed in that room other than recapping the phone call from Joseph and praying, asking God for strength of soul and direction. I know that there were some extended moments of silence as no one knew quite what to say. Since Gary and I had the most to do with the people at the community, it was decided we should go there and take whatever time was necessary to help comfort family members and the Africans and help with funeral arrangements.

The events of Thanksgiving 1987 swung open a door I couldn't kick closed and believe me I kicked hard. In fact it would indelibly reshape me, my destiny, my view of life and my view of God for the rest of my life.

It's now been over 20 years since fate stood like a bully in my path, forcing me down a road I did not want to travel. Years later, I'm still dealing with its awful and yet uncharted repercussions. On the other hand, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "Woe to him who quarrels with his



Maker... does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’” (Isaiah 45:9).

I had no idea when I woke up that Thanksgiving morning what God was “making” out of me and certainly no idea of the ghastly circumstances that had taken place while I had slept. I was a young pastor trying to be obedient to the perceived call of God on my life. I simply wanted to help Jesus build His church. I had no idea the wilderness journey He was about to take me on.

