

Message: What in the world is God doing?

Barbara Trudell, 18 January 2026

First, thank you all for this church home! Since 1982 we have made our physical homes in Peru, Kenya, the UK, Cameroon, S Africa – but all that time, you were always here for us.

I love Psalm 40, especially verses 1-3. It's a good description of our own motivation for missions; our testimony that "here's what the Lord is to me, and He can be this to you as well."

¹I waited patiently for the Lord
 he turned to me and heard my cry.
²He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
 out of the mud and mire;
He set my feet upon a rock
 and gave me a firm place to stand.
³He put a new song in my mouth,
 a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the Lord
 and put their trust in Him.

That's why we follow the Lord – and in the case of Joel and myself, that's why we ended up in all those countries, following Him. In many ways our work has been a privilege. We have gotten to know and work with people all over the world, following the Lord's leading, sharing His Word and being part of His work.

So what is God doing across the world?

1. He's doing the same thing across the world that He does here, in this city, this church, this country. He is showing mercy, forgiving sins, drawing people to Himself. He is the same God of every one of the women, children and men in this world: New Mexico or Maine, Peru or Kenya or China. The wideness of God's mercy goes the whole world around.

I've been reading a book of Christian meditations by Mark Burrows and Jon Sweeney; they write that one of the most essential things about God is His **mercy** – "mercy without reason or explanation; mercy all the way from the beginning, and mercy all the way without end."

You and I have experienced that mercy: mercy we didn't deserve, and maybe we weren't even asking for it. But we got it all the same. And Jesus tells us, love one another as I have loved you. Have the same mercy on others that I have had on you in your disobedience, in your lack of

trust, in your fear. But it seems that we are not always very good at either understanding the mercy we have received or passing mercy on to others.

I've heard Christians in America say that God doesn't love Muslim people, because they have rejected Jesus as their Savior and they are persecuting Christians. There are more than 2 BILLION people of Muslim faith in the world, so that's 25% of the world's population. Or, they say that God can't love Hindus, because they have all those gods - and besides, they persecute Christians in India. So that's 1.2 billion people. Or, God doesn't love animists, with all their rituals and their witch doctors; well, that's 240 million more people. How could our loving God turn His back on so many of His created souls? As for them rejecting Jesus, how can it be that 3.5 billion Muslims and Hindus and animists across the world have rejected Jesus? The great majority of them **don't even know who He is.**

Now, religiously-based persecution is certainly common across the world, in all directions and between all sorts of religious beliefs. Violence and hatred are often justified by religious principles. Look at the Christian crusades in the Middle East in the 12th century: 300 years of killing and destroying, with the Church promising great spiritual rewards for it all. So there's no one religion that has a corner on persecuting others.

So how are we supposed to think of Muslims, or Hindus, or animists, or people with no religion at all? What about people who disagree with spiritual things that we think are really important? We are supposed to think of them just as God does: with mercy and love. It turns out that they are **people**, made in His image, people with families and friends and cares and worries.

Do I know His plan where all of these people are concerned? I do not. **It's not my job to know ahead of time what is in God's mind** – it's my job to demonstrate His love and mercy for others, here and now. Like Jesus said to Peter in John 21, when Peter was asking Him what was going to happen to John: "What is that to you? Your job is to follow Me."

2. God has His people all over. Joel and I have been very blessed to have coworkers, brothers and sisters in Christ, all over Africa. We have been shown tremendous hospitality, and made lovely friends from Ghana to Cameroon to Burkina Faso to Kenya to Mozambique. They have been generous, accepting, and patient with us. (You'd be surprised at how a newly-arrived foreign missionary can try the patience of local people.) Although my Kenyan friend, Pauline, looked at me one day and she said, "You know, you're not white – you're PINK! And I'm not black – I'm BROWN." We both looked in the mirror, and by golly she was right. So much for black and white!

Having brothers and sisters like this allows you to see past your own cultural assumptions, and to encounter the tremendous breadth of God's family. It also allows us to be generous in turn, where our brothers and sisters are in need, or are burdened with health issues or family challenges. It makes us understand a bit more about the breadth of the kingdom of God.

John 1: 29-42 is a wonderful example of how God works through friends. We read it earlier. So here, John the Baptist knew Jesus because they were cousins, but he didn't quite know who He was until Jesus asked John to baptize Him and he did. So later, John is out preaching by a river and baptizing people. John sees Jesus going by and tells his friends and disciples that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". When they hear that, two of those disciples, one of whom was Andrew, go to find Jesus. They are a bit awkward – "Umm, where are you staying?" He says, "Come on over!" They spend the day with Jesus, and they are blown away. Then Andrew goes to tell his brother, Peter, "we have found the Christ, the Messiah!" and Andrew brings Peter to Jesus, and Peter becomes His disciple too.

In the next section that we didn't read, Nathanael the Skeptic finds Jesus through his friend Philip, who brings them together. Nathanael doesn't believe anything good can come from Jesus' home town – until Jesus meets the needs of his heart. In the movie *The Chosen*, Nathanael is shown as sitting under a tree, in tremendous emotional pain, before he meets Jesus. Jesus says, "I saw you under the tree, and I see you now." And Nathanael becomes one of the 12 disciples.

3. God has no Plan B. God is never, ever caught off-guard. He is working His work in this world, through Jesus His Son and the Holy Spirit. He needs no "plan B" – with God, it's all Plan A. There is no way to frustrate His purposes, either intentionally or through our own dopey behavior. That is why Psalm 40 verse 1 talks about waiting patiently for the Lord, whether you know what's going on or not.

This is important to remember when our own "plan A" goes awry. In 1993, we were sent on a trip across Africa to get to know the BT and literacy work that SIL teams were involved in. We had just arrived in Kenya, and a few weeks later they sent us on this 3-week trip to West Africa. We didn't know any of the countries we were going to, or any people there – and we didn't speak French! So we were in Accra, the capital of Ghana, on our way to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. Our new Ghanaian friends dropped us off at the airport in Accra, but then our flight was cancelled. This was when the Ghanaian military were providing flights into and out of Ghana – but apparently, they had something else to do with the plane that day. So we were a bit frantic – we didn't know the system or how to rebook or basically how to get where we needed to go. I will admit, panic set in. No plan B!! THEN, this tall, well-dressed African man said to Joel, "Do you people need some help?" (In perfect English.) He was from the country of Mali, and he was also on his way to Ouagadougou; he was rebooking his tickets to go to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire first, and then on to Ouagadougou, the next day. He took us under his wing, got our tickets changed all the way through; once we landed in Abidjan, he invited us to accompany him to his hotel (the best one in town) to call the SIL office nearby and get our accommodation for the night. The next day, he navigated the entirely-French-language Abidjan airport for us, and got us on the same plane he was on to Ouagadougou. We actually didn't converse much – he was a businessman with his own affairs – but we were completely

over-the-top amazed. We were so out of our depth, and God provided this lovely man. In fact, later I wondered if he was actually an angel, and disappeared as soon as we left him in Ouagadougou!

It's important that we align ourselves intentionally with God's Plan A. In fact, Psalm 40 is all about getting aligned with God's Plan A. Asking for help and wisdom is the first step – and trusting Him is the second step. King David says that God pulled him out of the muck of his own fears and disobedience, God put him on a solid rock to stand on, and God so worked in David's heart that it was like a whole new perspective - a new song – and David had a LOT of songs! Praising God, trusting Him, telling others about His mercy and love.

4. God leads His people to serve the needy, with the same heart He has. Think of all the times Jesus showed mercy to the people around Him: He touched the lepers who were begging, and healed them; He turned water into wine for the desperate host of a wedding party; He raised up the little daughter of a Roman military man; He provided food for thousands of people who had come to hear him and had stayed so long that they were hungry. I'm sure He loved that little boy who gave his whole lunch to Jesus. That boy didn't know why, he just had to volunteer that lunch – and it fed thousands of people. Jesus healed the ear of a Roman servant who was coming to arrest him – after one of His own followers had attacked the man. On the cross, His last thoughts were for the humans who were killing Him, because they didn't really know who He was or what they were doing.

How can we possibly match up to that kind of generosity? We can't - but He asks us to try. We don't have supernatural power like Jesus, but we can share His heart. That heart sent Joel and me to Africa, and it led us to serve His beloved people there. People who can't read the Bible, or anything else – children who fail in school because they are being taught in a language they don't speak – people who think the language of their heart is inadequate, it's just "animal talk". And national leaders who want to help make a difference but aren't sure how.

I see that generosity so much, right here in this church. Providing food to homeless and destitute people, caring for people who are dying, constructing beds for kids who are sleeping on the floor, visiting people in prison.

We are blessed with these many needy people, who help us be like Jesus.

5. Sometimes God's Plan A can feel pretty awful. Dying on the cross was an unspeakable way to die, yet that is what Jesus had to do. That was Plan A, and Jesus fulfilled it perfectly, in perfect faith.

I have a hard time with this, though. The Lord's Plan A in my life hasn't had VERY many horrible bits in it - but when you see injustice, pain, sickness and grief in the people you love, it's really hard.

When we were in Nairobi, we had some friends named Bob and Ruth Chapman. They were Canadian, and they had worked with SIL in Cameroon for many years. When their two sons were 10 and 12 years old, the family was on the way back from Cameroon to Canada for a furlough time and they stopped on the coast of Kenya for a beach holiday. The family got back to Canada, and both boys suddenly fell sick with malaria. By the time the doctors knew what the boys had or how to treat it, both of them had died – 45 minutes apart, in 2 different hospitals.

I can't imagine the pain of Bob, Ruth and their daughter Erin. I cannot imagine the sleepless nights full of tears – the regrets – the anger that God didn't keep their boys safe but let them die. It was awful. And I can't believe that they had the strength to return to their mission assignments in Africa, doing the Lord's work, at the Lord's direction, and radiating grace and love for Him.

But they came back to Africa, and served Him faithfully. **They believed, they trusted, and they obeyed.**

Trust is the thing. Trust in God's Plan A, and in His endless mercy.

God is present – in His world and in His people. Learning that over 40 years of service around the globe has been the most important thing that Joel and I have done. We are blessed to be part of His work here in Las Cruces as well, alongside you – our dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Your love for us and your mercy to us. We want to follow Your Son Jesus Christ, to show His love and mercy to those whom you put in our lives. Thank you that You keep helping us, You keep forgiving us, and You keep leading us in Your way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This is the benediction that I heard every Sunday growing up. I love it, and want to bless you with it too.

Jude verse 24: Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the Only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.