

# the call

# Sacrifice

Peter Fretheim's Testimony

*"I urge you all, on account of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."* – Romans 12:1, 2, Berean Study Bible

The life I left behind to answer God's call was comfortable and good. Things came easy. I had been born into privilege, unknowingly part of that one percent of the chosen few who were at the top, living the American dream. Growing up, I had no idea that this dream could be changed, replaced completely by one that involved living and working among the poorest of the poor. Loving the poor in God's name wasn't even a concept I could have wrapped my head around. Deities weren't part of our family back then, except for the Hindu ones my Ashram-going mother had begun putting in shrines around our Greenwich, Connecticut house, and lighting incense to every morning. The real god in our family was money, and everything else was just a waste of time.

But the God I serve today is a God of change. He brings the exile out of slavery and raises the dead. He parts the waters and turns the mighty oceans of our human reasoning into dry land. Our God, who can cause storms to still, leads those who answer His call to something new, something that is not the work of man. All of our money, privilege and birthright, were no match for this kind of God and the dream He had in store.

Years later, here in our compound in Jos, I would find myself meditating on this during my daily devotional time. Sometimes these hours in praying and seeking God would last all morning and stretch into the afternoon. As one who had never pursued fasting, I would realize I was doing just that, feeding on His Word and the spiritual food He brought like manna to my front door.

People back home would ask me and Miriam about the sacrifices we had made to call Nigeria home. I suppose that's how it looked from their perspective. How could I explain that, while we didn't have much money or personal stuff, we were rich beyond measure? Being able to serve the beautiful and amazing people, the poorest of the poor who had become part of our very big family, who filled the refugee and widows' centers, stood gratefully around a humble village well, or lined up every morning in front of our clinics and dispensaries, this all added up to the greatest wealth that anyone could possess. Those scions of Wall Street that my father used to vacation with or our well-heeled neighbors inside their gated mansions were poor by compare.

Not to say that things were always easy here in northern Nigeria. Life's been pretty tough the past ten years. About a dozen of my closest missionary friends left because of the terrorist bombings and the rise of Caliphate-seeking insurgents. When the Fulanis added their guns to the mix, and half of Boko Haram split off to join ISIS, even the most resolute among them packed up and went home. Interestingly enough, it's because of my wife Miriam that we stayed. I'm convinced of that. She was the one who would sit up with me at night when the sounds of explosions weren't all that far off, and tell me that God wanted us to be here now more than ever. "When the needs are great," she'd say, "then the need to meet them is greater."

When I recall those midnight conversations, I realize that next to giving my life to Jesus, marrying Miriam was the other right decision I made in my life. Those two decisions define who I am today. If I hadn't made them, I wouldn't have much of a testimony to share.

The summary of our years in Nigeria could be put into five words – all provision comes from God! When I saw that Rakesh had titled his wonderful, personal story, *My All-Sufficient Portion*, it touched a nerve. That one statement, the one he was quoting made by William Carey, perfectly describes the ministry God has gifted us with in Nigeria. When we first arrived we had just enough money to cover one extra month of ministry. Our friends back home about my shortsightedness. Some thought I'd last a few months before giving up and coming back to the US. Members of my own family thought we I had lost my mind.

But what happened that next month when our funds should have run out, or the next month after that, and then after that again, was nothing short of miraculous. For the next twenty years God provided for all of our needs, and allowed us to meet the needs of those we were ministering to, feeding, clothing, sheltering, doctoring, and educating them. Never once, during all of the years, did there seem to be a beyond the next thirty days, and we never once did we find ourselves lacking either. God truly was our all-sufficient portion, and whatever was happening in our ministry was not being built by human hands.

During the past few years the situation in Nigeria has worsened. The impact of radicalization and tribal wars, the collapse of most of the government programs, and the droughts and lack of water have left much of the country in ruins. Microboard's involvement that began in 2017, during such a time as this, was a miraculous demonstration of His provision. How we met and became partnered seems like a miracle on its own, and how quickly our relationship solidified and became one.

Just a few months earlier, on our knees, Miriam and I had asked God to help us increase our

abilities to address the rising tides of needs. On every front, the needs seemed to be escalating. “God help us increase our response so that no one is turned away,” we cried. How could we have imagined that God would respond so immediately? And yet, when evil abounds, grace does much more.

God’s grace has helped us to bring water and minister to the people in the Muslim north, to spread health and healing among refugees and widows, spiritual riches among the poorest of the poor, and all of these blessings have flowed back into our lives and the lives of all who have been faithful to answer His call.

I can’t close this short testimony without mentioning that today my mother and all of my children are passionate followers of Jesus. Those floodgates of heaven, that Malachi spoke of in his prophecy, have poured out more blessings than we could have ever asked for or deserved. His portion never lacks or falls short. And the sacrifices people speak of when the subject is missions? The great sacrifice has already taken place, one that happened two thousand years ago. Because of that one single sacrifice the world has been given a second chance, a chance for men and women to be reborn and become sons and daughters of God. That one act changed everything that happened after it. Because of that single, history-altering sacrifice we do what we do today, us here on the mission field, and those back home who help keep the work alive. Whatever we do, no matter how difficult what is demanded, it is the only response we can offer to the great sacrifice Jesus made and His Father in sending him. For God so loved the world, He sent His Son. This truth will always be what we are called to measure our lives by and the choices we make. We are called to not conform to the world, but to live our sacrifice daily, pleasing Him by the renewing of our thoughts and ways, and in doing so, be at the center of His perfect will.