

Creative Reflection



Weakness is a Virtue:

Maybe we are missing something big in our missions strategies

ARTIST STATEMENT

The last couple years of my life have been an unraveling of all I thought I was, and of all I knew to be true. It has been a season of burnout in many ways, and for a long time. I blamed spiritual warfare, or the enemy, believing the lie that God desires for us to continually “go hard”.

This piece was written on a recent trip to East Africa, where God brought to the surface a lot of pride in me and revealed lies that we as the Church believe about our role in the Great Commission. Through having been broken physically and emotionally, God is consistently showing me that people are attracted to Grace that works within us, not the strength that we conjure out of our own effort to impress others with the gospel.

The psychiatrist told me not to come here.

He said I was too high on the PTSD risk scale, had too many signs of depression and anxiety, and that it would be healthier for me to stay home instead.

I decided not to listen to him. After all, I am the one that goes hard, not home.

We felt like we needed to visit overseas so we could think and pray about moving there in the future. Even though it had been a year of major struggles, I was going hard, not staying home.

God had been clear that we were to go and I was convinced this psychiatrist was in the way of me valiantly following God's voice.

My husband and I work with newcomers and refugees in the city. I had just come out of a two year period of pretty intense burnout and health issues. I was reeling, trying to figure out how this could happen, why would God allow this to happen, when I was desiring so strongly for the unreached to know Him? This wasn't supposed to happen when you were on fundraised support, when you had done a four year degree in intercultural studies, when you knew all the stuff.

But looking back at that time period, and the current struggle to continue, I have had to realize, maybe this was the only way. Maybe this time of emotional breakdowns and raw vulnerability before my friends and neighbours was the only way for them to actually see Jesus, not just myself.

But now, here was this psychiatrist telling me I couldn't go. Did he know the experience that I had, the countries I had lived in, the training I had done? Did he know I was a pastor's kid, that I was prepared and equipped for pressure and hard situations? That I was ready now?

Anonymous, Weakness is a Virtue

Did he know who I was?

The brutal reality of it all was this: I didn't know who I was.

I didn't know that, as people who are sometimes desperate to represent the gospel and proclaim that we have it all together, sometimes the most godly thing we can do is surrender and sit down.

It is in weakness that we experience Christ for ourselves, and in suffering and vulnerability that others experience Christ in and through us. Any other way, it turns into a self flaunting, supporter-bragging ministry that I am afraid far too many of us have accepted as the only way.

I used to be a good global worker.

I used to be intentional with my every decision, even praying as I ran down crowded streets, asking God which way to go, as if every interaction must be used for some glorious story that I could write home about and impress all the supporters.

I used to push hard in language learning, striving endlessly to perfect pronunciations - often more so for the glory of man, rather to share hope itself.

I had taken four years of intercultural studies, I had worked with and trained with the best. I knew how to say good goodbyes and happy hellos and how to weave intentionality into every waking moment.

But I didn't understand what it meant that when we are weak, that's when He actually gets the glory and not ourselves.

I didn't understand that maybe admitting our weakness was actually the only way to point others to Jesus and not just to the straw and hay of our own hands.

So, we went to the red dirt soil of another country anyway, and were smacked in the face with the reality of western global work and NGO's, and how quick and easy it is for us to flaunt ourselves and our strengths and forget all together about why Christ came in the first place.

The man sits across from us, a Pepsi in hand and a "Got Jesus" shirt on his back, his chair tipped back, and his honesty spilled out:

"The problem with you guys from the West," he says carefully and respectfully, "is that you always come here wanting to teach. But maybe God wants you to come here to learn. Maybe He has you coming here to *grow you, not to fix us.*"

Maybe that is the crux of this all. Maybe that's the issue with traditional missions, with the entanglement of hero complexes and colonialism in the past, with the damage we have done in desperate attempts to prove something or teach something, and we forget that our Saviour Himself came in humility and in the weakness of a frail human being.

Maybe there is a point to that.

Maybe the whole problem is that we have been trying so dang hard to be perfect representations of Christ in our ministries that we have missed the reason why Christ came in the first place.

Anonymous, Weakness is a Virtue

Because, we are frail and weak human beings. And others need to see that we are weak and frail humans because they know they are too. Sometimes it's nice to not feel so bad about yourself and embrace have a need for God to fix, instead of being a mighty missionary.

Maybe they don't need a strapping young hero, dressed in safari clothes, seeking to accomplish and discover great and mighty things - with a dash of evangelism sprinkled in. (David Livingstone did great things for God, but he wasn't perfect either, and maybe it's ok to actually acknowledge that).

Maybe others are not actually rejecting the gospel after all, but rather, rejecting us and our interpretation of what it means to bring the gospel across cultures to them.

Maybe the gospel hasn't spread because we are trying to spread our own agendas and cultural competencies, and not Grace Himself.

We are convinced that we have to protect and proclaim the name of Christ through the means of being the strong and powerful ones that hold true to our systems, our doctrines, and our ways of doing things above all else.

We are convinced that our education, our "go hard" mentality and our push and effort for miracles and programs will bring the breakthrough necessary in peoples lives.

And yet, He was broken. He was humbled, He was made weak.
So, how in the world, could we ever expect him to use *us* in any other way?

ARTIST BIO

Author is a Vanguard College alumnus that wrestles with accepting the ways that things have always been done and seeking to live life in a way that challenges cultural norms. They do this by living cross culturally here in Canada and sharing the ways and life of Jesus with youth from various religious and cultural backgrounds. They have chosen to remain anonymous to protect those youth and this ministry.

