

1. IT STARTED WITH 4

Kigali, Rwanda

In December 2006, four children changed my life forever. I was in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, with a friend of mine, Elroy Pankratz. A local pastor took us to visit four siblings whose father had died of AIDS two weeks earlier and whose mother was hospitalized with the same illness and was expected by her doctors to die within days.

I peered into the dark mud hut and saw four children with such sad eyes, all huddled together. They looked so hopeless. They had no food and no idea what they were going to do next. I immediately felt my heart break, and I committed to sponsoring them. The next day, the pastor took me to the hospital, and we prayed for their mom.

The sadness in those kids' eyes that day is an image I can never forget. I don't want to forget it. They were mere children, and their desperation awoke something inside me. They weren't nameless faces on a television screen. I couldn't change the channel and pretend they weren't there. I couldn't forget about them and go back to life as usual.

I wanted to do something.

On the flight home, the stirring in my heart was impossible to ignore. God was doing something inside of me. I was forty-eight years old, but it felt like my life calling was just coming into focus. As I thought of those four faces staring up at me and others I had met as well, I knew I was not doing all that God had called me to do.

God had made me for more.

I began to weep as that truth sank in. It was the first time I had cried in years, I think. So, there I was, seated next to strangers, thirty-five thousand feet in the air, with tears flowing uncontrollably down my face.

I felt like God was rewiring my heart. He was preparing me for a change that was about to take place. Even if I had wanted to, there was no way I could ignore what was happening to me.

That trip to Rwanda began an entirely new chapter of my life. It was a chapter I did not see coming, and it is still being written today. Soon after returning home to Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, I started a ministry named Home of Hope with one mission in mind: to bring hope to as many desperate children as possible.

The last decade and a half have been completely different than I ever could have imagined. I had no idea the places I would go, the things I would feel, or the changes I would be a part of. I couldn't have foreseen the transformation that would take place within my heart and the new level of purpose and fulfillment I would experience.

I could not have known the extent to which God would use our team as we answered the cry of some of the neediest, most vulnerable people in the world.

Most importantly, I had no idea how many incredible people I would meet along the way. The story of Home of Hope is not my story, nor is it the story of one organization or one church. It is the story of countless heroes, starting with the children, the mothers, and the community leaders on the ground, as well as the everyday heroes from all over the world who have given their time, money, and prayers toward serving people in need. This is the story of individuals who have decided to live on mission, who were willing to step up and step out, and who accepted God's call to make a difference in their world.

Big or small, we all have a part to play. We were all Meant **4** More. Those four children were meant for more. I was meant for more. You were meant for more. That is the message of this book, and it is the message I believe the Holy Spirit wants to speak into our minds and hearts every day.

In the following pages, I hope the pivotal, unexpected moments of my journey will encourage you to be ready for your own mission field. I hope to inspire you to follow God's call for you. He created each of us with a unique blend of talents and giftings that will only be fulfilled when we walk in His destiny for us.

Along the way, you might laugh and smile as you read some of the stories, and you will likely find tears in your eyes and pain in your soul as you read others. Remember, rather than focusing on what we *can't* do, focus on what we *can* do. We can extend love, mercy, and hope. We can help people, and we can encourage other people to help people as well. We can respond to God as He leads us toward our calling and purpose.

As we begin, I would like to highlight several things. First, as I mentioned above, this is not a book about Brian Thomson, nor is it a book about Canada or Home Church or any of our Canadian pastors and team. Yes, by the grace of God we have played a role, but I am convinced that helping those in need is not about people with more resources or privilege “saving” anybody, but rather about all of us working together to fulfill God’s original intent for humanity: to be one people, one family around the world, united in love, with each of us contributing our part. I have received more than I could ever give back. I am overwhelmed with gratitude and awe toward the people in each nation who are serving those around them with a level of grace and faith that never ceases to inspire me.

In our ministry, we are careful not to be the heroes or saviors. We point people to Jesus and Biblical principles. We train and empower local people to find their own solutions and to be a resource in their communities and countries. We focus on education and job creation to give people dignity, confidence, and self-respect and to help break cycles of poverty and oppression.

Second, we are committed to preserving the dignity and integrity of the people whose stories are shared throughout this book. All names and pictures have been used with permission, and stories of specific children have been used with the permission of their parents or legal guardians. We have consulted throughout the writing process with the local teams where Home of Hope is serving. The people mentioned in this book are not victims or statistics, but friends. They are known and loved by our team.

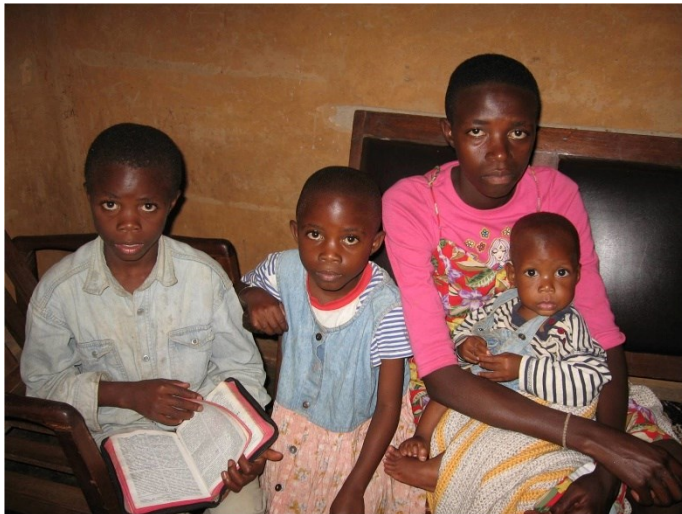
Third, this book includes stories from many years across several different nations. Africa and Asia are diverse, beautiful continents with dozens of nations and hundreds of cultures, and these stories are not

necessarily representative of the countries where they occurred. In many cases, local and national governments have worked hard to address the issues we faced in those early years, particularly in slum areas. We often work directly with local authorities, and we applaud their efforts.

Fourth, reader discretion is advised. While many details have been omitted, what we did choose to include is often difficult to read. We have seen many sad, tragic, and appalling things over the years. Our hearts have grieved many times. We feel it is important to recognize the needs that exist while also looking toward the hope and redemption that God wants to accomplish through

The four siblings we met in Rwanda, December 2006. From left to right, Emmanuel, Josiane, Marie Claire, and Eric. of us. We have tried to include content warnings in the appropriate places, and we ask you to use your discretion as you read, especially if topics of abuse or abandonment could be a trigger due to past trauma in your own life.

Finally, all proceeds from the sales of this book will be donated to the ongoing social outreach work of Home of Hope. If you would like to learn more or contribute directly to one or more of the social outreach projects mentioned in this book, please visit www.homeofhope.ca, or contact us at info@homeofhope.ca.



The four siblings we met in Rwanda, December 2006. From left to right, Emmanuel, Josiane, Marie Claire, and Eric.