

THE SHAPE OF LOVE

Jesus, Compassion, and Sustainable
Development in Shan State



popular easy reading edition

STUART CORLETT

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www.circuitinternational.org

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Popular easy reading edition

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For Rob Kilpatrick.

A man who has given of himself to research these
ideas and make them real.

Chairman of our board and inspirer of many.

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Chairman's Foreword

The Shape of Love could easily have the subtitle “Welcome to the Wonderful, Complex and Challenging World of Christian Aid and Development”. It challenges the reader to consider a number of difficult issues that confront Christians wanting to support work that reflects the values of their faith in the best possible way.

For Christians honestly seeking answers to the question of what it means to seek the “kingdom of God” that Jesus called for, the book offers plenty of challenges to ponder and some important options to consider. After all, debates about the message of Jesus have been revisited numerous times in the post-Second World War era, when global development work really got underway. Circuit International was built on the premise that one of the best descriptions of the life of Christ is found in Acts 10:38: “and how he (Jesus) went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

In years of involvement with people of faith, I have come to the conclusion that the only sure way to determine what a person actually believes is to look at what they do. Jesus called for the kingdom and “went around doing good”, seemingly without demanding that people sign up to a particular set of doctrinal statements, but simply asking them to “follow me”.

How can we do that in the best possible way, so that those we walk alongside can experience “life in all its fullness” — another of Jesus’ statements about the purpose of his life? This is the question Stu seeks to answer in this book. With its practical examples and cautionary tales, it offers excellent, realistic scenarios to consider and theological concerns with which to wrestle.

I strongly recommend this book to any person of faith, of any kind, who wants their donations to make a genuine difference to the lives of those who are the focus of their concerns, or their work in aid and development to be genuinely liberating and truly humanitarian.

Rob Kilpatrick

Chairman of the Board

Circuit International

Author's foreword

I speak to churches about Circuit International and its work with communities in Shan State, Myanmar. Our purpose includes reducing poverty and the vulnerability to human trafficking that difficult circumstances can create. I care deeply about that work, and I want people to understand why it belongs within my commitment to following Jesus.

Yet a short presentation cannot make room for every question. Someone may want to know whether we speak about our faith, how practical help relates to the gospel or why a community's ability to make its own decisions matters. These are substantial concerns, even when the conversation begins beside a table of tea and biscuits.

My response has sometimes been more defensive than helpful. Compassion seems so central to Jesus' life that I can struggle to understand why anyone would wonder about its Christian significance. But my conviction is not an explanation. The person asking deserves more, and so do the people whose lives we are discussing.

The Shape of Love grew from the attempt to give that explanation properly. This popular edition brings the central questions into shorter chapters and more familiar language. I want it to be a book someone can read without training in theology or development, while retaining the care those subjects require.

We begin with people and the circumstances in which they live. We then return to the Gospels and ask how Jesus' words and actions should shape the relationships we make. From there, we consider the ordinary decisions through which help becomes useful, controlling, dependable or disappointing.

Shan State is the setting because it is connected with my work. Its people are not merely illustrations for a Christian argument. They have their own histories, religious commitments and hopes. A truthful account of helping must recognise the knowledge and activity already present before an outside organisation arrives.

Two sources also connect directly with my working history. Before I started Circuit, I established the Shan Healthcare Training Programme through Partners. Sharon Bell later examined that programme in her doctoral research. Her findings include both encouraging developments and criticisms. I have tried to make room for both, without treating the study as an evaluation of Circuit's present work.

Robert Kilpatrick's doctoral thesis on peace-building is another important source. He acknowledges assistance from me through Circuit International with research access and technical questions. That connection should be visible to readers. His research contributes useful insights and questions; it does not certify the effectiveness of the organisation I support.

The biblical discussion centres on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I have tried to let their demands and difficult passages remain part of the conversation. Jesus cannot be reduced to a convenient supporter of the approach I already prefer. The Gospels speak about belief and discipleship as well as compassion, and they challenge those giving help as well as those receiving it.

Where I use imagined situations to explain a problem, I identify them as such. They are not disguised reports about particular families, workers or organisations. The personal connections described here come from my own role and the source material. Other people's private stories are not mine to invent.

The reading notes at the end identify the main sources and biblical passages. Readers who want to examine the argument more closely can follow them without having to negotiate a reference in every paragraph. Contemporary circumstances change, especially amid conflict; this edition draws on the research assembled for the book in September 2026.

My hope is for a conversation in which conviction and humility can remain together. We can believe something strongly and still listen carefully. We can value an organisation and still ask whether its work is helping. We can speak about Jesus and respect the freedom of someone who answers differently.

I hope these pages make that conversation easier to begin, and more useful when it becomes uncomfortable.

Stuart Corlett

Chapter One

The Question After the Talk

When I speak to Christian communities about Circuit International, someone will sometimes ask a question that stays with me long after the presentation.

“Where does the gospel fit into all this?”

It is a fair question. I wish my face always remembered that.

I have been talking about our work with communities in Shan State, Myanmar. About reducing poverty and helping people gain more control over their future. About the hope that better choices can make people less vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Then comes the question about where the Christian part belongs.

My first instinct is to ask, “How are we not communicating the gospel?”

That reply reveals how strongly I feel. It does rather less to explain why.

The person asking may have supported Christian work for years. They may be wondering whether we speak openly about Jesus, or whether faith has become something we mention when raising money and quietly put away afterwards. They may care deeply about people knowing God. Those concerns deserve a thoughtful answer.

So does another question, which is less likely to be asked in the room where I am speaking.

What does our faith feel like to the person receiving our help?

That person may never hear my presentation. They will encounter our faith through a conversation, a decision about funding, or what happens when they disagree with a plan. They may judge our intentions by whether we listen when the answer is inconvenient.

This book begins between those two questions. I want to understand how compassion belongs within the good news of Jesus, and how that conviction should shape the way we work alongside people. Answering properly will require me to examine my own assumptions as carefully as I examine anyone else's.

There goes the comfortable version of the book.

The question beneath the question

When Christians use the word “gospel”, we mean good news. Yet we can carry quite different ideas about what that news includes and how someone comes to hear it.

For some, the first concern is whether people are learning about Jesus, forgiveness and the possibility of a changed life. Others begin with what happens to a hungry person, a frightened family or someone whose choices have narrowed until every available option carries a risk.

I recognise myself in that second group. I also need to take the first seriously.

The Gospels give us a Jesus who teaches and calls people to follow him. He speaks about God's kingdom, repentance and faith. Matthew ends with his commission to make disciples. If I want to build an argument around Jesus, those passages come with him. I cannot leave them out because they complicate my presentation.¹

Those same accounts give substantial attention to bodily suffering. People are hungry. Someone needs healing. A

crowd has stayed so long that the journey home may be too much without food. Jesus pays attention to these needs.²

I find that breadth demanding. It asks more of us than finding a favourite verse and putting it on a slide. I like a good slide. It is wonderfully cooperative. It never raises its hand and asks what I left out.

Reading the Gospels carefully is less convenient. They invite us to consider what Jesus says alongside the way he meets people. His words help us understand his actions, and his actions give substance to what he says.

Practical kindness does not explain every Christian belief. Someone receiving help may know that we have been generous without knowing what we believe about forgiveness or resurrection. If we want to explain those convictions, we will need words.

But our conduct also communicates. We can speak eloquently about grace while making people anxious about pleasing us. We can talk about love and then become impatient when someone makes a decision we would not have chosen. The person listening has to make sense of both messages.

That is why I want to ask what shape the good news takes in another person's life. Our explanation matters. So does the relationship in which we offer it.

The person receiving the help

Imagine, for a moment, that your family needs assistance and an organisation offers it. You are grateful. Then someone invites you to a religious gathering.

Perhaps the invitation is entirely sincere and carries no conditions. Even so, you may have a question you do not feel

able to ask: will refusing make any difference to the help my family receives?

That is an imagined situation, but it helps us see a difficulty. The person offering assistance knows what they intend. The person receiving it has to work out what is safe.

We might believe that we have made everything clear because our policy says participation is voluntary. Yet someone may still worry about next month, or about being remembered as the family that was difficult. A reassuring sentence means more when people have seen that disagreement does not cost them fair treatment.

For me, a Christian organisation should be able to explain its faith openly and make clear that assistance is not a reward for agreeing. A person ought to be free to ask about Jesus, to become a Christian, or to remain unconvinced. We should care about the conditions under which those choices are made.

There is a simple question I would want us to face. If someone received help, gained a safer livelihood and continued practising a different faith, could we be glad about the good that had happened?

I believe we should be. We may still hope to share what matters deeply to us. That hope does not make their improved circumstances an unfinished transaction.

The same concern reaches beyond religion. Suppose we arrive with funding and a proposal. We ask for opinions, listen politely, and then proceed with the plan we brought. It is possible to hold a community meeting without giving the community much influence. A meeting can have excellent biscuits and very little room for disagreement.

The useful question is what people can actually change. Can they identify a different priority? Can someone point out that the proposal will create extra work for them? Can a family refuse to participate without becoming unwelcome?

Nor can we assume that the first confident person to speak represents everyone. People living in the same place may have different interests and unequal opportunities to be heard. Listening takes time, especially when we need to hear from someone who rarely gets asked.

These questions apply to the work I support. My commitment to Circuit gives me a reason to ask them carefully. It cannot supply the answers in advance.

A stranger on the road

Jesus tells a story about a man who is attacked on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The robbers leave him badly injured. A priest passes by, then a Levite. A Samaritan stops.³

The Samaritan attends to the man's wounds, puts him on his own animal and takes him to an inn. He pays for further care and undertakes to meet additional costs when he returns.

The details are wonderfully practical. Mercy requires somebody to stop travelling. There are wounds to tend, transport to arrange and a bill to pay. The injured man needs care after the dramatic roadside moment has ended.

I am struck by how much attention the story gives to that ordinary work. The Samaritan's compassion becomes visible in what he is willing to do and provide. He leaves the man somewhere he can be cared for, with resources to make that care possible.

The story records no demand that the injured man adopt the Samaritan's religious identity. Nor does it require him to

demonstrate that he will soon be able to repay the expense. His need gives the Samaritan reason to act.

Jesus ends by asking which person became a neighbour to the man who was attacked. His listener identifies the one who showed mercy, and Jesus tells him to act likewise.

This is a parable, not a complete handbook for running a development organisation. It does, however, place a searching question before anyone trying to follow Jesus. What would mercy require of us here, with this person, under these circumstances?

Sometimes it will require immediate help. Sometimes it will require a relationship that lasts. We ought to be careful with language about helping people become independent. A person may need continuing support because of illness, disability or circumstances they cannot control. Receiving that support does not diminish their worth.

Having more say in your own life is compatible with needing others. Most of us depend on people we barely notice until something stops working. I would struggle to claim complete independence while waiting for someone else to repair the electricity.

In development work, I want us to ask whether people have greater freedom to make meaningful choices and whether the support they need is reliable. That may include strengthening local skills or livelihoods. It may also include continuing assistance. The form of help should be guided by the situation and the people living through it.

The Samaritan gives me a starting point for this. He notices a need and accepts responsibility for responding. The story leaves me with less room to stand at a safe distance explaining why the matter belongs to somebody else.

Making room to be corrected

I write as a public speaker and fundraiser, which means I spend time explaining why people should care about work I believe in. That role carries a temptation. When we care strongly about a cause, we can begin to hear questions as obstacles to getting on with it.

Yet people who support the work deserve honest explanations. People whose lives it affects deserve more than explanations; they need opportunities to influence what happens. Sometimes their response will challenge the account we hoped to give.

Before I started Circuit International, I established the Shan Healthcare Training Programme through Partners. Sharon Bell later examined that programme in her doctoral research. We will return to it because it gives this discussion a direct connection to my own experience. Her work includes criticisms as well as positive findings, and both belong in the conversation.⁴

My involvement also needs to be clear. I have an interest in how that earlier programme is remembered. Its achievements cannot fairly be claimed by one person, and its difficulties should not be edited out to make a founder more comfortable. Bell's study concerns that earlier work; it is not an assessment of Circuit's present programmes.

That distinction is part of a larger responsibility. An organisation's description of its intentions tells us what it hopes to do. We still need to find out what people experience and what changes endure. Sincerity is a beginning. It leaves plenty to investigate.

I hope we can approach that investigation without becoming suspicious of every generous impulse. People give their time and money because they care. Churches ask about faith

because it matters to them. Development workers may be trying to respond to needs that are difficult to explain in a short presentation. There is room to recognise those commitments while asking better questions.

The harder task is to make equal room for people who have less influence over the conversation. A donor can decide whether to give. A speaker can decide which stories to tell. What can the person described in the story decide?

That question will accompany us through this book. We will return to Jesus, look at the history Christian organisations bring into their relationships, and consider how help can strengthen or restrict another person's choices. I expect some of those questions to be uncomfortable. They are particularly worth asking when we feel certain that our intentions are good.

For now, there is somewhere we need to go before we can answer the question after the presentation. Shan State deserves our attention in its own right. The people who live there have histories and hopes that extend far beyond the moments when an organisation arrives to offer assistance.

Before discussing what we might bring, we need to learn something about the place and the people already there.

Chapter Two

A Place Beyond the Headlines

Try describing the place where you live using only the worst things that happened there last year.

Leave out the gardens, the jokes, the neighbours who know your dog's name. Ignore the people who run the sports club or bring soup when someone is ill. Keep the accidents, the arguments and whatever made the evening news. Now hand your description to someone who has never visited.

They will have information. They may have very little idea of the place.

That is a useful difficulty to remember when we talk about Shan State. Violence and poverty deserve serious attention. Yet if those are the only things we describe, we can leave readers imagining a vast emergency populated entirely by people waiting to be helped. The people themselves disappear behind the conditions affecting them.

Shan State is in eastern Myanmar, bordering China, Laos and Thailand. It is a place of towns and villages, cultivated land, mountains, trade and movement. Its borders enclose many communities and languages. The word "Shan" can refer to a state, to a people or to a language. Those meanings overlap without being identical. Someone living in Shan State need not be ethnically Shan. Someone who identifies as Shan may be living in Thailand or much further away.

We do not need to master every name before we can care. We do need to resist the idea that one name explains everyone.

A map cannot tell us everything

A map is an excellent place to start and a poor place to finish. It shows a road as a line. It cannot tell you whether the journey is affordable, whether a checkpoint makes it frightening or whether the person travelling has the documents someone might demand.

Distance is only part of access. A service may be relatively close and still be difficult to reach. The clinic can exist, the road can exist, and the patient can remain without care. A journey involves time away from work, someone to look after children and the possibility of being asked questions you cannot safely answer.

This is one reason the word “remote” can mislead us. A village may be closely connected to a border market while having poor access to dependable public services. A family may have relatives across an international border and limited options within its own township. People’s practical geography follows relationships and risks as well as roads.

There is also no single authority whose presence explains every local arrangement. Different places have encountered state officials, the Myanmar military, ethnic armed organisations, militias and other powerful actors. Religious institutions and informal networks may be crucial to ordinary life. Who can open a road, guarantee a meeting or interrupt a supply route can vary with place and time.

For an outside organisation, this creates difficult decisions. Working through one institution may provide access while giving it extra influence. Avoiding institutions altogether can leave a project answerable mainly to itself. Good intentions do not remove these consequences.

We should be cautious about claiming political neutrality as though our arrival makes no difference to anyone’s standing.

At the very least, we can ask who benefits from being our contact, who might be excluded, and who bears the risk if our assumptions are wrong. People who remain after a visitor leaves have good reasons to notice such things.

People already making a life

The social life of Shan State began before our project proposal. That sounds obvious until we notice how often an account of development starts with the arrival of the organisation.

Families already care for one another. Teachers teach, traders organise supplies, religious communities maintain relationships, and health workers try to reach patients. Migrant networks connect people to information and assistance. Local knowledge includes matters a visiting specialist may never think to ask about: which route is acceptable, when a meeting will clash with essential work, or why a seemingly modest request carries a difficult history.

None of this means communities can meet every need without support. It means support enters an existing world. Our first task includes learning how that world works.

It also includes noticing differences within it. A community is not one person with many houses. People disagree. They have different resources, obligations and ideas about the future. Someone respected as a leader may understand a great deal while knowing little about the daily experience of a young woman, a person with a disability or a recently arrived family.

An outsider can be grateful for an introduction and still ask who else should be heard. Respect need not mean treating the first account as the final account.

Nor should admiration for resourcefulness become an excuse for leaving people to struggle. “They are so resilient” can be an expression of respect. It can also become a comfortable sentence spoken by someone with the money to leave. The ability to endure difficulty does not make the difficulty acceptable.

I want us to hold both realities in view. People have knowledge and abilities. They may also face conditions no amount of individual determination can overcome. Partnership takes those abilities seriously while helping address the conditions that restrict them.

Faith belongs to ordinary life

Religion in this setting involves much more than an answer on a form. Theravada Buddhism is important in much of Shan social and cultural life. Monasteries can be places of learning, memory and community connection. Religious commitments may shape family obligations, celebrations, identity and the meaning people give to hardship.

Christian communities also have local histories. Their members are neighbours, teachers, health workers and relatives. They have their own ways of reading the Bible and responding to their circumstances. Treating them as overseas Christianity’s local branch misses both their independence and their experience.

Shan State includes other religious traditions and combinations of practice too. We cannot infer a person’s beliefs from an ethnic label, or their opinion of Christian work from their religious affiliation. Someone might value a church’s assistance without accepting its theology. Someone might distrust an international organisation while having Christian friends. Another person may have given the matter very little thought.

Those possibilities should save us from announcing what “the Shan people” think about Christianity. We do not have a representative survey that allows such confidence. More fundamentally, people are entitled to answer for themselves.

A Christian worker arriving in this world therefore has something to learn before having something to explain. We can ask what matters to people, how they understand care and which institutions they trust. We can listen without treating every answer as an opening for our preferred subject.

There will be time for honest conversation about differences. It will be a better conversation if we have first discovered that the person before us has a life larger than our question.

When ordinary decisions become difficult

To understand why development matters, imagine an ordinary family decision. A child needs to go to school, an adult needs work, and an older relative needs regular care. Nobody in this imagined household has extravagant ambitions. They are trying to get through the week and keep next month possible.

Now make the journey to work uncertain. Increase the cost of food. Add a debt incurred during an earlier emergency. Make the health service harder to reach. The family still makes decisions, but the range of acceptable options shrinks.

This illustration cannot represent every household in Shan State. It helps explain what a list of crises can conceal. Pressures interact. Lost work makes transport harder to afford. Delayed care can make further work difficult. A move that offers safety may interrupt schooling or separate a person from the people who know how to help them.

The military coup of February 2021 intensified conflict and disruption across Myanmar. Human rights and humanitarian reporting documents civilian killing, displacement, attacks on services and severe restrictions on daily life. The military bears a central responsibility in the documented national pattern of violence. Other armed actors have also committed abuses. Naming those responsibilities matters; describing all violence as an unfortunate atmosphere can obscure the people making decisions that cause it.

Shan State's experience is not identical in every area. Nor did difficulty begin in 2021. Earlier conflict and exclusion form part of the background. Flooding, other natural hazards and economic shocks can then fall upon families whose reserves have already been spent.

We do not need an alarming number in every paragraph to recognise the seriousness of this. A person who has to decide whether a journey is worth its risk is living with a problem that remains real even when outsiders cannot count everyone affected.

The journey to care

Health makes the limits of a simple project description particularly clear. "There is a clinic" sounds reassuring. It leaves many questions unanswered.

Can people reach it? Can they communicate with the staff? Is treatment affordable? Can they return when necessary? Do they fear being recognised or being asked about their status? Does the service have the supplies and support it needs?

Research with selected Shan migrants living with HIV in northern Thailand describes barriers involving language, cost, fear and anticipated rejection. It also describes

practical help from Shan networks and people who assist others in navigating services. Those studies tell us something important about the experiences of the people interviewed. They do not tell us how common HIV is among all Shan people.

Keeping that distinction is an act of respect. A study about barriers to care should not become a label attached to an entire population. People who contributed their experiences did not agree to become evidence for every claim an outsider might find useful.

The wider lesson concerns continuity. An appointment is one part of a relationship with care. A person who moves, loses income or becomes afraid of travelling may need help maintaining that relationship. Local knowledge and trusted contacts can matter as much as the existence of a building.

Here Christian concern can take a practical form. It may involve supporting those already doing the work, making services more accessible or refusing to add shame to someone's difficulty. We should be guided by appropriate expertise and by the people who know where the obstacles lie. Sympathy alone cannot tell us which obstacle matters most.

Moving is not the same as being trafficked

People move between Shan State and Thailand for many reasons. They may seek employment, safety, education, treatment or proximity to family. More than one reason can be present in the same journey.

Migration can involve courage, planning and a realistic hope of improving life. It can also involve deception, coercion and exploitation. We should be able to recognise danger without treating every migrant as a helpless victim.

Trafficking does not always resemble the story an audience expects. It need not involve a dramatic abduction, and it does not require an international border crossing. A person may initially accept an offer of work and later find themselves trapped by threats, debt or the confiscation of documents. A plausible opportunity can become a means of control.

Poverty can reduce the alternatives available to someone considering an offer. It does not make the person responsible for being deceived. Nor is poverty the only factor. Traffickers may exploit education, ambition, family obligations or the desire for a better job. Assuming only one kind of person is at risk can make other people less able to recognise danger.

For development work, the useful question is how people can gain safer options and reliable information, alongside protection and access to appropriate services. It is a broader task than telling people to stay where they are. Staying may itself carry serious risks.

We will return to trafficking later. For now, we need to remember that a person's movement is part of a life. We cannot understand it properly by beginning with the label we want to attach.

Numbers with people still attached

I understand why speakers use statistics. A number can convey a scale of need that one story cannot. It can also acquire a confidence it has not earned simply by appearing in large type.

Information gathered during conflict has limits. Some places cannot be reached safely. Telephone surveys miss people without dependable access to a phone. A clinic sees those

who manage to arrive. An organisation's records describe people known to it, while others may remain unseen.

The appropriate response is care in what we claim. A study of selected migrants in Chiang Mai is not a survey of everyone in Shan State. A count of reported injuries and deaths cannot be described as a count of deaths. Two organisations may be reporting the same people. Adding their totals may enlarge the claim without adding a single person to our knowledge.

These distinctions can sound fussy until we imagine ourselves on the receiving end. Most of us would object if a stranger used a study of a small group in our town to describe our family. Distance should not reduce that standard of fairness.

We can speak clearly about documented suffering and still acknowledge what we do not know. Honest uncertainty does not require indifference. It asks us to take care with the trust an audience places in us, and with the people whose lives make our presentation possible.

Before we arrive with an answer

The picture that emerges is demanding. There are urgent needs, histories of conflict and institutions under strain. There are also people with experience, practical skills and ideas about what should happen next.

That combination should change the way we approach help. We are entering relationships with people who have been thinking about their circumstances for much longer than we have been preparing our visit. They may need resources we can help obtain. They do not need us to assume that resources make us the only people able to recognise a problem.

This is where a popular Christian discussion can become very practical. Before asking whether our project demonstrates our values, we can ask whether it answers a need people themselves regard as important. Before describing their gratitude, we can ask whether they had room to suggest a different approach.

Meeting people properly requires curiosity and time. It may unsettle the story we expected to tell. I think that is a reasonable price for discovering who we are actually talking about.

But there is another difficulty waiting for us. Even when we are willing to listen, people may have reasons to be cautious about what they say. To understand those reasons, we need to look at the history and power that arrive with us.

Chapter Three

Who Gets to Decide

Imagine that a generous stranger offers to improve your home. They have money, experience and an impressive folder. You invite them in.

They immediately announce that the kitchen should move, your favourite chair is impractical and the room you use for quiet reading would be better suited to meetings. They are pleased to consult you about paint colours. The larger decisions, however, have already been made.

You might appreciate the offer and still begin looking at the front door.

That imaginary visit captures a problem which generosity can make surprisingly difficult to discuss. Receiving something valuable does not mean surrendering the right to say what matters. Yet the person providing the resources may regard disagreement as ingratitude. The person receiving them may decide that being agreeable is safer.

Development relationships can carry that tension. Christian history gives us additional reasons to take it seriously. We enter a conversation about help with words such as love and service. The people listening may hear those words alongside memories of institutions that claimed the authority to rearrange other people's lives.

The history in the room

We would like our intentions to introduce us. History sometimes gets there first.

Christianity's relationship with political power has included episodes that deserve plain acknowledgement. Religious

authority has been used to justify conquest, enslavement and the suppression of other people's beliefs. These were not merely occasions when somebody failed to be pleasant. They involved institutions deciding who had the right to rule, to own land and to define acceptable belonging.

The early sixteenth-century Spanish Requerimiento offers a stark example. It asserted religious and royal authority over Indigenous peoples and threatened grave consequences for refusal. Whatever form its announcement took in a particular encounter, the principle involved was far removed from a conversation between people free to disagree.

We do not need to make every later Christian institution a direct continuation of that document to recognise the problem it exposes. A religious message changes character when refusal can bring dispossession or violence. The listener hears the threat as part of the message.

More recent history supplies other painful examples. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission documented the residential-school system's removal of Indigenous children, attacks on language and culture, and abuse. Churches administered many of the schools within a state-created system. Education was offered within relationships that inflicted profound harm.

For a Christian reader, the temptation may be to move quickly to examples of good work. Those examples matter. They do not cancel the experiences of the people harmed. A truthful account needs room for each without using one to make the other disappear.

It is possible to love a faith and be honest about what has been done in its name. Indeed, honesty should be part of that love. Our concern for Christian reputation cannot take

precedence over our concern for people who suffered under Christian institutions.

Christians have also challenged power

The history is not one uninterrupted story of Christians supporting domination. Christians have argued against slavery, racial hierarchy and the misuse of state authority. Their arguments have often required challenging other Christians.

John Wesley's final letter to William Wilberforce encouraged opposition to slavery. In South Africa, the Kairos Document challenged theology that supported apartheid, while the Belhar Confession rejected racial separation and connected reconciliation with justice. These interventions remind us that Christian language can expose abuses of power as well as excuse them.

That does not leave us with a tidy balance sheet. We cannot place an act of courage in one column and suppose it settles an act of cruelty in another. The people affected were living particular lives. They were not entries in an argument about whether religion has, overall, been useful.

What these different histories offer is a responsibility to discern. Which reading of our faith are we following? Whose experience can correct it? When a respected institution acts unjustly, do we defend its standing or pay attention to those living with the consequences?

Local Christians belong in this history as thinkers and actors. People who received the Christian message did not merely reproduce everything an outsider intended. They translated, interpreted, organised and sometimes used their faith to resist the powers that had brought it. Any account

that gives outsiders all the initiative misunderstands both history and people.

What happened in Burma

Christian presence in Burma predates the completion of British conquest. Nineteenth-century Protestant mission expanded during the period of British imperial advance, but missionaries and colonial government were not one organisation. American Baptist missionaries, for example, were not simply British officials with a religious department.

That distinction matters. So does the changing world in which mission took place. Colonial power altered access, security, education and administration. Institutions could benefit from that altered world even when individual workers disagreed with officials or understood their own motives very differently.

Mission schools and medical work could bring real benefits. Translation and literacy could support the preservation and development of minority languages. Those activities could also introduce hierarchies in which foreign knowledge was treated as superior and local beliefs as obstacles to progress.

Both things can be true within the history of one institution. A student might gain skills and opportunity while encountering contempt for practices important to their family. A community might use a school to strengthen its position while also being expected to adopt somebody else's categories of respectable life.

This is why I find the simple question "Were missionaries good or bad?" unhelpful. It invites us to give a verdict on people when we also need to understand relationships. Who controlled the school? What could students question? Which

forms of knowledge were recognised? What happened to a person who valued the education but rejected the religious teaching?

Local teachers, translators and early Christian communities deserve particular attention. Their work made communication possible. Credit has not always travelled in proportion to contribution. A book that praises a foreign translator while leaving local language experts unnamed can quietly repeat the hierarchy it describes.

In independent Myanmar, the association of Christianity with minority identity and foreign influence has sometimes contributed to suspicion. Yet Christianity also belongs to local family histories and institutions. It would be inaccurate to call every Christian expression foreign, just as it would be unwise to assume that every neighbour experiences Christian work in the same way.

Buddhism also needs to be treated fairly. Buddhist identity, nationalism and state power have intersected in consequential ways, but Buddhists have not responded with one voice. Religious institutions and individuals have supported, accommodated or resisted different forms of authority. We should extend to our neighbours the care we want others to exercise when they describe Christianity.

The past does not answer for a person

Historical knowledge can help us listen. It can also become another means of deciding what someone must think.

We might learn about colonial Christianity and then assume that a Buddhist neighbour necessarily distrusts us. Or we might conclude that a local Christian's faith is merely an effect of foreign influence. Either move substitutes our explanation for their account of their own life.

Someone may understand the history and still freely choose Christianity. Someone else may value Christian friends while declining every religious invitation. A person can hold several feelings at once: respect for a teacher, discomfort with a mission institution and affection for a Christian relative.

Freedom of conscience includes that complexity. We cannot defend people's right to reject our beliefs while becoming doubtful of their ability to accept them for their own reasons. The same respect belongs to people whose answer pleases us and people whose answer does not.

Our practical task is to ask and to notice. What does our Christian identity mean to this partner? What past experience might make an invitation difficult to interpret? What would allow someone to disagree without fearing damage to the relationship?

A general history will not supply every answer. It can make us less surprised when trust takes time.

Power can be very ordinary

Most of us will never issue a decree or command an army. We may still hold power that another person has to consider carefully.

The budget is power. So is access to the people who approve it. The language used in a meeting can affect whose explanation receives attention. Control of a vehicle, a password or an important contact can determine what a supposedly independent committee is able to do.

Time is another source of influence. An organisation may need a decision by Friday because its funding application closes on Monday. The deadline can be real. It does not automatically become a reasonable timetable for everyone

else. People may need to speak with relatives, consider consequences or find a safe way to raise disagreement.

The outsider may regard a delay as indecision. Local participants may regard the request for speed as evidence that consultation is decorative.

I know how tempting urgency can be. A clear plan, an available opportunity and a deadline make an appealing combination. They also make it easy to confuse movement with agreement. A signed form does not tell us how much room a person had to think.

Language creates similar difficulties. Translation involves more than changing words. A term such as “ownership” may sound reassuring while leaving unanswered who can alter a budget or remove an unsuitable project leader. We need to explain what decisions are genuinely open and what constraints remain.

There is nothing respectful about pretending every matter is negotiable when it is not. Funding limits, safety requirements and professional standards can be explained honestly. People are better placed to decide whether to participate when the actual terms are clear.

A local face is not the same as shared authority

Hiring local staff can improve understanding and communication. It does not, by itself, settle who makes the important decisions.

Imagine a local project worker who explains a community's concerns to an overseas office. The office praises their cultural knowledge but refuses to reconsider the timetable, the budget or the definition of success. The worker has been given responsibility for persuading neighbours to cooperate, with little authority to change what is proposed.

That is an illustration, not an account of a named organisation. It shows how local participation can be visible while decision-making remains elsewhere.

The reverse problem also exists. Giving all authority to a local leader does not guarantee fairness. A leader may exclude rivals or overlook people who already find it difficult to speak. “Local” describes a relationship to a place. It does not certify wisdom or justice.

Sharing authority therefore requires more than identifying a suitable person. It involves understanding who is affected, making decisions understandable and giving people a way to challenge them. It also involves recognising that disagreement within a community is real. Our task is not to discover one convenient opinion and declare it authentic.

An outside organisation may have expertise worth contributing. People may want it. Respectful partnership need not mean arriving with nothing to offer. It means being willing to discover that our contribution needs changing, or that this is not the right occasion for it.

The story belongs to someone

Fundraising adds another layer of power. The person holding the microphone can decide where a story begins, who appears active and what the audience is invited to admire.

If every story begins when the organisation arrives, local effort becomes invisible. If every difficulty ends with the donor’s gift, the continuing work of families and staff disappears. A compelling account can be misleading without containing a plainly false sentence.

We should also think about what someone has agreed to when they allow a photograph or share an experience.

Consent to a conversation is not automatically consent to worldwide publication. A story can reveal identity through details even when a name has been changed.

People may feel pressure to help the organisation tell its story because the organisation has helped them. That makes the invitation to participate worth handling with care. Refusing a photograph should be an ordinary choice, not a test of gratitude.

A more honest account can still move an audience. We can describe a real need, explain the contribution requested and acknowledge the people already responding. We can say what remains uncertain. We can give local workers credit without exposing them to unnecessary risk.

The audience loses the fantasy of a simple rescue. It gains a more truthful invitation to participate in something other people are already doing.

Trust needs a place for disagreement

The point of remembering history is to improve the relationships we are making now. Guilt alone is not a plan. Neither is a cheerful announcement that we have learnt from the past.

A useful beginning is to make authority visible. Explain who decides what. Let people know how to raise a concern and what will happen when they do. Share information they need in a form they can use. Ask what burdens the project may create, including burdens that will fall on people absent from the meeting.

Then notice whether criticism changes anything. An organisation can invite feedback with great enthusiasm and receive it with very little appetite. People learn the difference quickly.

Sometimes the most significant sign of trust is an answer we would rather not hear. A partner says the project is inconvenient. A family declines an activity. A worker challenges a flattering report. If the relationship survives those moments and improves because of them, something valuable is happening.

For Christians, being corrected should not be a foreign idea. Repentance belongs to our vocabulary. It asks us to recognise that sincerely held intentions can coexist with harm, and that changing direction may be an expression of faithfulness.

That brings us back to the source of this book's question. We want to know how help relates to Jesus. We have looked at some of the history that makes the question complicated. Now we need to open the Gospels and ask what kind of good news Jesus himself announces.

Chapter Four

Good News for Whom

A meal can mean very different things depending on whether you have eaten.

For someone comfortably fed, it may be an opportunity for conversation. For someone hungry and far from home, it answers an immediate question about how the day is going to end. The conversation may matter to both people. Only one can postpone the food without difficulty.

That seems a useful place to begin reading the Gospels. People arrive with questions, hopes and bodily needs. Jesus teaches them, challenges them and responds to what they face. The stories do not let us turn the people into an audience with no life outside the sermon.

They also refuse to give us a Jesus whose entire message is that we should be helpful. He makes claims about God and about himself. He calls people to change. His death and resurrection belong at the centre of the accounts. Compassion is part of that larger story.

So what sort of good news is being announced, and who discovers it to be good?

Four accounts to listen to

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell the story with different emphases. Reading them is rather more interesting than extracting a collection of verses which all appear to agree with me. That method is efficient, but it does leave me suspiciously well informed about God's endorsement of my existing opinions.

We need to let each account speak. Luke's attention to wealth and poverty deserves to be heard on its own terms. John's concern with the identity of Jesus cannot be removed simply because we are discussing practical compassion. Mark's urgency and Matthew's teaching each contribute something we might otherwise miss.

We should also notice the difference between a story and our application of it. When Mark says Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants, we can observe that the man's answer matters in the encounter. When we suggest that a development organisation should ask people what matters to them, we are making a contemporary application. Whether the organisation actually does that well is a further question.

Keeping those steps clear protects us from an easy mistake. The Bible can help us judge our conduct. It cannot establish, by itself, that a particular project is effective. Quoting Jesus above a budget does not make the budget wise.

Nor can we assume that the modern language we favour describes exactly what the Gospel writers intended. "Sustainable development" is a useful contemporary phrase. Jesus did not give a lecture under that heading. Our task is to explain how attention to his words and actions should influence the way we respond to people now.

Jesus did not invent concern for neighbours

Before we go further, there is a habit of Christian storytelling we need to leave behind. We sometimes present Jesus as introducing kindness into a religious world that had never thought of it.

Jesus was Jewish. His teaching takes place within a Jewish scriptural and religious world. The commands to love God and love a neighbour did not begin as a Christian correction

to Judaism. In Luke's account, the legal expert supplies those commands, and Jesus approves his answer. In Mark, a scribe recognises their importance and receives Jesus' commendation.

The disputes in the Gospels should therefore be read with care. They concern people arguing about faithful life before God. They are not permission to describe an entire religion as uncaring.

The Good Samaritan offers a familiar example of how we can add things a text does not say. Luke tells us that a priest and a Levite pass the injured traveller. He does not explain their motives. If we invent a confident story about ritual rules preventing compassion, we may be repeating a prejudice rather than explaining the parable.

This matters to the argument of our book. We cannot make a convincing case for treating neighbours with dignity while caricaturing the religious tradition to which Jesus and his first followers belonged. Careful reading is one small way of practising the fairness we want to recommend.

It also keeps the challenge close to home. We may prefer stories in which someone else's religion explains a failure of mercy. The more uncomfortable question is what happens when people who understand themselves to be faithful walk past a need.

The kingdom is near

Mark introduces Jesus' public message with the announcement that God's kingdom has drawn near and a call to repent and believe. That language goes beyond an invitation to become a little nicer. It asks people to respond to God and to reconsider the direction of their lives.

The episodes that follow include teaching, healing, prayer and the calling of followers. Jesus moves between encounters and places. He does not allow one activity to exhaust the meaning of his work.

For a modern reader, “kingdom” can sound remote. We may picture a crown, a castle and an administrative arrangement involving people who own too many horses. The Gospels direct us towards God’s rule and purposes. In Matthew, the prayer Jesus teaches asks for God’s will to be done on earth.

That gives earthly life significance. It does not allow an organisation to declare that its preferred plan is identical with God’s will. Christians can work for better conditions while admitting that their proposals are partial, fallible and open to correction.

The Gospel accounts also look towards fulfilment and judgement beyond what any development programme can deliver. Their hope cannot be reduced to the gradual improvement of our institutions. Nor should that larger hope become a reason to neglect someone whose need is immediate.

Repentance has a practical implication for the person doing the helping. The call to change is addressed to us too. When Jesus challenges pride, wealth or the desire for status, those concerns belong in our examination of generous work. We may discover that the person controlling the funding has as much to reconsider as the person being invited to hear about faith.

I find that a useful defence against the assumption that Christian service always carries correction in one direction. Following Jesus means remaining capable of being changed by what we learn.

The announcement in Nazareth

Luke places a striking scene near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus reads words concerning good news to the poor, release for captives, sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed. He then connects that announcement with what is happening in their hearing.

It is difficult to read the passage and conclude that people's bodily or social circumstances have no place in the message. Poverty, captivity and restricted life are present in the words themselves.

We should be equally careful about asking the passage to answer questions it does not address. It does not tell us how to organise a health service or design a livelihood fund. It gives us a reason to pay attention to deprivation and release. The practical arrangements require further thought, knowledge and listening.

Luke later records blessings addressed to the poor and hungry, with warnings directed towards people who are rich and satisfied. Those sayings are uncomfortable for readers who would like faith to leave the organisation of ordinary life alone. They ask us to consider what our comfort can prevent us from noticing.

They do not make poverty desirable. The promise that hungry people will be filled gives no reason to preserve their hunger. We should be suspicious of any explanation that turns someone else's deprivation into a spiritual advantage while leaving our own comfort intact.

The Nazareth scene also develops into conflict when Jesus recalls prophetic help extending beyond familiar boundaries. Whatever we make of the details, the story unsettles an

assumption that God's favour is the secure possession of one group.

That is a live question for Christian organisations. Do we expect compassion to remain within the boundaries of the people who recognise our authority? Or can we act for someone's good when their response remains outside our control?

A crowd that needs feeding

In Mark's first feeding account, Jesus sees a crowd and responds with compassion. He teaches. As the day advances, the practical problem of food becomes impossible to ignore.

The disciples suggest sending people away so they can obtain something to eat. Jesus involves the disciples in responding to the need. The account ends with the crowd fed and food remaining.

In Mark's later feeding scene, the concern is stated with particular clarity. People have been there for days and have nothing to eat. Some have come a long way. Jesus is concerned that they may collapse on the journey home.

The hungry body belongs in the story. Its need is not merely scenery for a theological point.

We should not turn these narratives into a modern project manual. They include miraculous provision and the particular authority of Jesus. They do, however, make it difficult to suggest that food acquires Christian significance only when we can attach a conversion to it. The danger faced by the hungry people is itself a reason for concern.

It also matters that teaching and feeding occur within the same account. We do not have to choose a Gospel in which Jesus speaks or one in which he cares. The harder task is to think about how our speech and conduct belong together.

John's account takes that relationship further. After the feeding, Jesus speaks about bread and life in ways that move the conversation towards his own identity. Some followers find the teaching difficult and leave. John will not allow us to say that providing food explains everything Jesus offers.

Neither should we describe the food as a trap designed to secure agreement. Departure remains possible in the narrative. The account holds together bodily provision, demanding speech and responses Jesus does not conceal.

For our purposes, this gives us a useful discipline. We can value practical care fully while recognising that an account of Christian faith includes more than the care. We can explain those beliefs without making someone's access to assistance depend on receiving our explanation favourably.

The giver has something to give up

The disciples' interest in status makes the Gospels refreshingly difficult to sentimentalise. People can spend time with Jesus and still wonder who will receive the best position. Proximity to holy things does not appear to eliminate professional ambition.

In Mark, James and John ask for places of honour. The conversation that follows challenges the way rulers dominate others and directs the disciples towards service. Luke also records a dispute about greatness, including a reference to powerful rulers being called benefactors.

That word should catch the attention of anyone involved in charitable giving. Being known as generous does not establish that a person uses power well. A benefactor can make valuable gifts while keeping everyone dependent on their approval.

The Gospel challenge concerns what a person does with a position of advantage. Do resources become a means of making others more able to act, or a means of keeping the giver important? Can the person with authority bear the cost of being challenged?

John makes service concrete in the washing of feet. Jesus performs a task for his disciples and tells them that his example should shape their conduct. His role as teacher and Lord remains explicit. The scene changes what authority requires of him and of those who follow him.

A modern leader can imitate a humble gesture while keeping every important decision. We should therefore be careful about substituting symbolic service for changes in how an institution works. Helping stack chairs is good. It does not answer the question of whether staff can question an unsafe instruction.

The application will differ according to position. A wealthy donor may need to relinquish control over a preferred outcome. A poorly supported worker may need better protection and a stronger voice. Asking both to “sacrifice more” without noticing the difference can place the heaviest burden on the person already carrying too much.

More than an example of kindness

At this point someone may reasonably ask whether we are making Jesus useful for an argument about development. We should take that question seriously.

The Gospels present his identity, his relationship with God, his death and his resurrection as central. John states an intention that readers should believe and find life in his name. Luke’s risen Jesus connects suffering and resurrection with the proclamation of repentance and

forgiveness. Mark's account of service includes the giving of his life.

If we leave those claims out, we may still write a thoughtful book about generosity. We will have given an incomplete account of the good news these texts present.

Compassion belongs within that account. It gives bodily and relational substance to a message about God's purposes. A Christian understanding of salvation need not make the present life of a neighbour inconsequential. The person who hopes to speak of eternal life can still notice whether someone has enough to eat today.

There are substantial differences among Christians about how to describe the relationship. This book does not need to settle every theological dispute to establish a practical obligation. Speaking about Jesus calls us to examine whether the relationship we create bears some resemblance to the character we attribute to him.

An accurate explanation delivered through coercion creates a serious contradiction. So does kindness that becomes conditional when a person disagrees. The message is heard through the relationship as well as through the sentences.

Bringing the question back to our work

What, then, can we say about development?

We can say that work addressing avoidable suffering and strengthening people's ability to act has a serious place within Christian faithfulness. We can ask whether it attends to people who are easily overlooked, whether it distributes responsibility fairly and whether it allows those receiving help to speak honestly.

We cannot say that a successful project completes God's kingdom, or that a Christian name makes an ineffective

project worthwhile. We still need evidence about what the work does. We also need the humility to hear a Gospel passage that challenges our favourite approach.

This may seem less satisfying than a slogan. It is more useful when decisions become difficult. The language of compassion should help us ask better questions, including questions about ourselves, instead of protecting our plans from examination.

There is one more step before we turn fully to organisations and programmes. The Gospels place these matters inside particular encounters. People ask, interrupt, object and offer something of their own. Watching those encounters closely may change what we mean when we say we want to help.

Chapter Five

Compassion That Changes Relationships

Bartimaeus is making a noise, and the crowd would prefer him to stop.

Mark tells us that he is a blind beggar sitting beside the road as Jesus leaves Jericho. When he hears who is passing, he calls for mercy. Many people rebuke him. He calls out more loudly.

The scene is easy to picture in its essential movement, without inventing details. Someone seeking attention is being treated as an interruption. The crowd has a sense of what should happen next, and his voice does not fit comfortably into it.

Jesus stops.

He tells the people around him to call Bartimaeus. The same gathering that has discouraged his voice now helps him come forward. Jesus asks what he wants. Bartimaeus answers for himself: he wants to see.

I find that question arresting. Mark has already told us about his condition. The need may appear obvious to everyone. Yet a description of Bartimaeus is not treated as a substitute for hearing him.

Who gets through to us

Most organisations believe they listen. The more revealing question is who manages to reach the people making decisions.

A complaint may have to pass through someone who finds it inconvenient. A meeting may be open in principle and difficult to attend in practice. A confident speaker may receive a full hearing while a quieter person's concern is translated into something less troublesome.

Mark was not writing a study of administrative systems. Still, the crowd around Bartimaeus gives us a searching picture. People close to the person who can help may become a barrier without thinking of themselves as unkind.

The application is close to hand. Who explains a participant's request before it reaches us? Who decides that an objection is unreasonable? Who is absent from a meeting that appears to have gone very well?

We may discover that the smoothness of a process depends on certain people having learnt to remain quiet. Listening then requires more than improving our manner in the room. It requires changing how people get into the conversation.

Immediately before the Bartimaeus encounter, Mark records another request. James and John want places of honour. Jesus also asks what they want, but their desire is not granted on its own terms. Listening does not mean approving every proposal.

That matters when people within a community disagree. Someone may ask for a benefit that would burden another household or strengthen an unfair arrangement. We need to hear the request and consider its consequences. Respect includes taking people seriously enough to discuss difficult answers.

Bartimaeus helps us see the cost of silencing a person. James and John help us avoid treating every forceful request as morally decisive. Compassion requires attention and judgement together.

A woman who acts

In Mark 5, a woman who has experienced years of bleeding approaches Jesus through a crowd. The account describes prolonged suffering, expensive treatment and deterioration. She reaches out and touches his clothing.

Her initiative matters. She hears, decides, approaches and acts. A retelling that presents her only as the recipient of someone else's power misses much of what Mark has put before us.

When Jesus asks who touched him, she comes forward in fear and tells him what has happened. He addresses her as daughter and acknowledges her faith. The encounter includes recognition as well as healing.

We should resist the temptation to supply a complete biography. The text does not tell us everything about her household or how every neighbour treated her. Even a sympathetic invention can become a way of speaking over a person whose story we claim to honour.

There is also a limit to our application. A public encounter in a Gospel does not give a charity permission to reveal someone's medical history. We are not entitled to publish the most moving details because they help us explain the value of our work.

The contemporary question is whether someone retains a say in the account we give of their life. They may welcome assistance while declining publicity. They may want their achievement recognised but disagree with our explanation of it. They may be grateful and still want to be left out of a newsletter.

That can disappoint a fundraiser. I include myself in the category. A story may seem exactly what an audience needs

to hear. Its usefulness to us is not the only matter to consider.

The person living the story continues to live after we finish telling it. Their privacy, relationships and safety matter beyond the few minutes in which the story holds an audience's attention.

People who cannot insist

It would be a serious mistake to turn persistence into another eligibility requirement. Some people cannot keep calling until we notice.

Luke describes a woman who has been bent over for eighteen years. She is present while Jesus teaches in a synagogue. The account does not record her asking for healing. Jesus sees her, calls her and responds to her condition. He later describes her as a daughter of Abraham in the dispute about what has happened.

Her belonging matters. She is not required to make an impressive case about what she will contribute once she is well. The narrative does not justify care through a forecast of future productivity.

This is a useful challenge to systems that favour people who can explain themselves confidently. Forms, interviews and group meetings can reward skills that are unrelated to the seriousness of a need. The person most able to describe their hardship is not necessarily the person facing the greatest difficulty.

We should also be careful with the way we speak about healing. Someone whose condition persists is not thereby shown to have less faith or less worth. A Gospel healing story cannot be used to blame a person for continuing to need support.

Compassion may mean adapting an environment, arranging reliable assistance or making communication possible. A person can gain freedom through dependable support. Independence from every other human being would be an odd standard to impose when most of us struggle to manage a week without asking where someone put the charger.

The serious point is that dependence is part of human life. What matters is whether the relationships on which we depend respect us, support our choices and remain accountable when they fail.

The person we meet may have something we need

John's account of the Samaritan woman begins with Jesus asking for a drink. He approaches the encounter with a bodily need, and she has something to offer.

That is worth noticing if we are accustomed to arriving with supplies, skills and a plan. The person we meet need not begin as the one who lacks something. We may be the ones who need help understanding, travelling, communicating or simply finding our way.

The conversation at the well develops through the woman's questions. She raises issues about water, worship and ancestral authority. Jesus makes substantial claims. Their differences remain part of the encounter; respect does not depend on pretending that they agree about everything.

Her personal history is often described more confidently than the text allows. John mentions five husbands and a current relationship that is not a marriage. He does not explain how those earlier marriages ended. We should not turn uncertainty into a moral verdict, or fill it with a reassuring story of our own invention.

What John does show is a woman engaged in theological conversation, who then speaks to people in her town. They come to hear for themselves. She has a role in what happens next. She is more than an illustration of Jesus being kind to an outsider.

For development work, the invitation is to become able to receive. A partner may teach us how a problem works. A neighbour may correct our understanding of faith or community. Someone we expected to assist may be the person who recognises the flaw in our plan.

Receiving correction can be harder than receiving hospitality. Hospitality lets us enjoy being welcomed. Correction asks us to reconsider the position from which we arrived.

If we want relationships in which people's knowledge matters, we need to be willing to make that adjustment. Otherwise we are asking them to enrich our experience while leaving our authority untouched.

The difficult conversation

Not every Gospel encounter settles into a comfortable lesson. Matthew's account of the Canaanite woman deserves particular honesty.

She asks Jesus to help her daughter. At first he does not answer. The disciples want her sent away. Jesus speaks about his mission to Israel, and the exchange that follows uses the difficult image of children's bread and dogs. The woman persists. Her answer makes room within that image for the help she seeks. Jesus praises her faith and grants her request.

It is tempting to smooth the scene by adding a reassuring tone of voice or an unspoken plan to test the disciples. The

narrator does not supply those details. Christians interpret the passage in different ways, but we should distinguish an interpretation from something the story actually tells us.

What is unmistakably present is the woman's speech. She answers. She gives a reason. The account remembers her persistence and ends with praise of her faith.

I do not think we should turn this encounter into a technique for dealing with applicants. An organisation that humiliated people to test their sincerity would be misusing the story. Nor should we claim that every stage of every Gospel encounter straightforwardly models our modern idea of equal participation.

The passage can still ask something difficult of us. What do we do when the person seeking help challenges the terms on which help is offered? Do we listen to the reason, or become preoccupied with the fact that they have challenged us?

A complaint may arrive awkwardly. Fear, fatigue and repeated disappointment do not always produce polished correspondence. We should not require the person carrying the burden to make their criticism pleasant before we consider whether it is justified.

At the same time, staff deserve protection from abuse. Listening carefully does not mean having no boundaries. The task is to distinguish an uncomfortable challenge from harmful conduct, and to avoid using the second possibility as an excuse to ignore the first.

What repayment do we expect

Luke records Jesus telling a host to invite people who cannot repay the invitation. The ordinary cycle of hospitality among people able to return the favour is interrupted. The guest's

inability to provide a comparable meal does not disqualify them.

Charitable work can carry expectations of repayment even when no money is requested. We may hope for gratitude, loyalty or public enthusiasm. We may expect someone to attend an event because the organisation has been generous. A religious response can become another form of return.

Some expectations belong to a fair agreement. A project may reasonably require appropriate use of resources or honest accounting. The difficulty arises when unspoken demands are attached to a gift and the recipient only discovers them after accepting it.

A person should not have to guess whether our kindness has created a debt they cannot name. Clarity protects the relationship. If there are conditions, they should be relevant, understandable and proportionate. If there are no religious conditions, our behaviour needs to make that believable.

Giving can also bring status to the giver. Luke's warning about powerful people called benefactors remains uncomfortable for that reason. We may enjoy being known as compassionate while making it difficult for others to question us.

The test is often ordinary. How do we react when someone declines our advice? Can a participant credit their own effort and local relationships without being reminded who supplied the grant? Do we need to be thanked again whenever a decision is made?

Generosity that requires us to remain central can place a quiet burden on others. Learning to let a relationship grow beyond our importance may be one of the more demanding forms of service.

The passage people expect

Many Christian readers will be thinking of Matthew 25, where the treatment of hungry, thirsty, sick and imprisoned people is connected with the king himself. It is a powerful judgement scene, and it belongs in this discussion.

There is a real interpretive disagreement about who is meant by the king's brothers. Some readers understand the passage as referring broadly to people in need. Others connect it more particularly with Jesus' disciples or vulnerable messengers. Matthew's language elsewhere gives the narrower reading reasons that deserve consideration.

We do not need to pretend the disagreement has been settled in order to take the scene seriously. On either reading, bodily need matters. Even if the people in view are messengers, their proclamation does not make hunger, exposure or imprisonment spiritually irrelevant.

Nor does the wider case for compassion rest on this passage alone. The love of enemies, the Samaritan story and Luke's teaching about hospitality provide substantial grounds for concern beyond a circle of people who already agree with us.

The judgement setting also resists a sentimental account. Matthew presents the consequences of neglect as grave. Compassion is not an optional decoration added to an otherwise complete religious life.

For me, the value of acknowledging the disagreement is practical as well as intellectual. Readers should be able to trust that we have not hidden a difficulty to make our argument easier. A case for honest relationships should begin with honest reading.

Recognition needs consequences

Taken together, these encounters give us people who speak, act, receive and contribute. They also give us moments when someone is noticed without managing to demand attention. Compassion responds to the person rather than requiring every person to approach in the same way.

For an organisation, that means we need more than a sympathetic manner. Recognition should affect what happens. A person's explanation may change the plan. Their refusal may change the timing. Their criticism may reveal that something we call helpful is creating a burden.

This does not turn every request into a command. Resources remain limited, obligations can conflict and people may disagree. But those difficulties should be addressed openly. They should not become reasons for listening politely while keeping every consequential decision elsewhere.

There is a difference between feeling heard and having influence. Both matter. We can offer warmth without giving someone a meaningful say. We can give formal voting rights while making dissent socially costly. Compassion asks us to notice the relationship as it is experienced, not only as it appears in our procedures.

The same questions apply when we speak about faith. We have considered how people are treated when they need practical help. What happens when we want to tell them why Jesus matters to us? The freedom to answer honestly becomes especially important then.

Chapter Six

Sharing Faith Without Applying Pressure

Suppose someone asks why you do this work. You explain that following Jesus has shaped your concern for people, and that you hope your conduct reflects something of his compassion. The person listens, asks a question and then says they see things differently.

What happens next?

The answer is likely to tell them more about the relationship than a further explanation of our intentions. We may continue the conversation with interest. We may let the subject rest. Or we may begin behaving as though they have disappointed us in a way that affects everything else.

That imagined exchange takes us to the centre of this chapter. Speaking about faith is not inherently disrespectful. People can share convictions, offer reasons and invite one another to reconsider. The question is whether the listener has meaningful room to respond, especially when the speaker also controls something the listener needs.

Words have a job to do

I have sometimes reached for the familiar saying about preaching the gospel through actions and using words when necessary. It captures an important concern about practising what we profess. It is less useful as a complete explanation of Christian witness.

Its familiar attribution to Francis of Assisi is not securely established. More importantly, a memorable saying cannot

settle the relationship between care and Christian belief. An act of kindness can be valuable and still leave a person unsure why Christians speak about Jesus' death and resurrection.

If I want someone to understand those beliefs, I will need to explain them. They should not have to infer an entire theology from the fact that I helped organise a useful service.

Matthew's final commission makes teaching explicit. Jesus sends his followers to make disciples, baptise and teach obedience to what he has commanded. Luke connects the risen Jesus with proclamation of repentance and forgiveness. John states a purpose concerned with belief and life in Jesus' name. These passages deserve a place in any answer we give to a church audience.

There is another implication in Matthew's ending. Teaching people to follow what Jesus commanded sends us back to the teaching itself. We encounter mercy, truthfulness, forgiveness, generosity and the love of enemies. A person's agreement with a statement cannot stand in for the whole life of discipleship.

The practical result is that we need to take words and conduct seriously. A service may express Christian commitment without explaining every Christian claim. A clear explanation may communicate those claims while leaving serious questions about the speaker's behaviour. We should be honest about what each does.

A charity has a particular task

A church deciding how to spend its resources faces real choices. It cannot support every worthy activity. Someone who gives priority to evangelism may reasonably ask

whether a development charity fits the purpose of a particular fund.

We should answer that question clearly. If a programme exists to improve livelihoods or support community decisions, we should explain that purpose and its relationship to Christian faith. We should not imply that it runs an evangelistic programme if it does not.

Different Christian organisations can have different responsibilities. A congregation may worship, teach and provide pastoral care while supporting a specialised organisation able to undertake work it could not competently administer itself. Specialisation needs explanation. It is not, by itself, evidence of diminished faith.

Serious evangelical discussions have recognised both social responsibility and evangelism while disagreeing about their relative priority. The Lausanne Covenant affirms both and gives evangelism priority. The later Grand Rapids consultation allows that caring for an injured neighbour need not include a sermon, while continuing to defend proclamation's importance. These positions are more thoughtful than the suggestion that one side cares about souls and the other about bodies.

We will not resolve every funding disagreement. A donor may understand our reasoning and choose a different cause. That freedom belongs to the donor too. Our responsibility is to describe the work accurately and give good reasons for supporting it.

I would rather have an honest disagreement than a donation secured by leaving someone with an impression I know is mistaken. The ethics of a project begin before the money reaches the project.

Invitation is different from a condition

An invitation offers a possibility. Persuasion gives reasons for accepting it. Both can be respectful. A person may hear a demanding religious claim, find it uncomfortable and still be entirely free to reject it.

Pressure becomes a different matter when an important benefit depends, or appears to depend, on the desired answer. Food, employment, training or access to a useful contact can change the meaning of a conversation.

Consider an expressly imagined example. A development meeting is followed by a devotional gathering described as optional. The only transport home leaves after both. Some people remain because they are interested. Others remain because they need the lift. Counting everyone in the room as spiritually engaged would tell us more about our preferred interpretation than about their beliefs.

Now imagine that people can leave, but those who allocate future opportunities are watching. No penalty has been announced. Participants may nevertheless wonder whether leaving will be remembered. A voluntary activity needs more than a voluntary label.

These examples are not reports about Circuit. They illustrate why intention, logistics and authority all matter. The same invitation can carry different weight when it comes from a friend, a visiting speaker or the person who controls your place in a programme.

The useful question is practical. If this person declined the religious activity, would the relevant decision about assistance remain the same? We need to consider entry, continuing support and everyday treatment. Someone may receive the benefit and still be made to feel disloyal for refusing the extra activity.

Clear arrangements help. Explain eligibility in understandable language. Avoid making a religious response part of an unrelated decision. Listen when people say the distinction is unclear. Experience over time will make the assurance more believable than repeating it with increased enthusiasm.

A serious invitation can be declined

The Gospels contain responses Jesus does not secure by force. In Mark, a wealthy man asks about eternal life. Jesus looks at him with love and gives a demanding invitation involving his possessions, the poor and following him. The man leaves sorrowful.

His circumstances differ greatly from those of someone dependent on aid. We should not treat the encounter as a complete guide to consent under poverty. Still, the story makes room for an unaccepted invitation. Love does not mean agreeing with the man's existing priorities, and the account does not describe preventing his departure.

John records followers leaving after difficult teaching. Luke describes a Samaritan village refusing to receive Jesus. When James and John suggest a destructive response, Jesus rebukes them and continues elsewhere.

These passages do not erase the Gospels' warnings about judgement. Christian teaching makes consequential claims about responses to God. Honesty requires acknowledging that rather than presenting Jesus as indifferent to what anyone believes.

But belief about divine judgement does not grant a charity authority to impose material penalties. Control of a grant is not control of salvation. A worker's conviction that the

message matters cannot justify making unrelated assistance depend on agreement.

The distinction is essential. It allows people to speak seriously about faith while restraining what they may do with institutional power. We can hope for a response without treating our ability to provide help as a means of obtaining it.

Christians have said this together

In 2011, the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance issued recommendations about Christian witness in a world of different religions. They affirmed witness while rejecting the exploitation of poverty and vulnerability. They supported religious freedom, including the freedom to change belief, and called for time and personal freedom in religious decision-making.

That agreement concerned conduct. It did not settle every difference in Christian theology. Its relevance here is straightforward: openly Christian identity and a rejection of coercive practice can belong together.

We need not conceal why we care. We do need to examine whether the way we express that care leaves another person free.

This also includes accuracy when describing other religions. If we make Christianity appealing by presenting a version of Buddhism that our Buddhist neighbours would not recognise, we have created a problem of truthfulness. Disagreement is more credible when we have understood what we disagree with.

Listening to someone explain their beliefs is not a promise to adopt them. It is a way of treating the person and the

conversation seriously. We should be prepared to offer the attention we hope to receive.

What about prayer

A simple rule requiring religious language in every encounter would be unhelpful. So would a rule assuming it can never be appropriate.

Someone may freely ask for prayer. Responding with care can be part of respecting that request. Another person may want practical assistance and no religious conversation. Respecting that preference is also possible.

The difficult cases concern the surrounding relationship. Is the person able to decline? Have we understood what they are asking? Could our role make an offer feel like an expectation? Is the response appropriate to the setting and to the person's vulnerability?

These questions require judgement. They should not become an excuse to make ordinary conversation fearful or artificial. They help us notice when our authority changes what an otherwise familiar gesture means.

Some encounters have a task that is enough for the occasion. Helping someone obtain the information they need, honouring an appointment or listening without interruption can be a faithful thing to do. The person is not obliged to remain for a complete explanation of our worldview before we finish the task.

It is also possible to be direct when someone asks. We can say that our faith motivates us, explain what that means and make clear that they are not required to share it. A calm, honest answer usually has more integrity than either embarrassment or an unexpectedly lengthy sermon.

The conversation belongs to both people. That remains true when one of us has prepared considerably more material than the other requested.

Freedom goes both ways

Concern about manipulation can produce its own mistake. We may become so suspicious of religious influence that we refuse to believe anyone could freely become a Christian.

That would also deny people a voice. Someone may consider Christian claims, find them convincing and choose a new commitment. They should not have to prove that every influence in their life was absent before we take their decision seriously.

All of us form beliefs through relationships, language, experience and the possibilities available to us. Complete independence from influence is not a realistic standard. The question is whether someone has used control over important resources to dictate the answer.

The freedom to remain Buddhist or to belong to another tradition matters. So does the freedom to become Christian or to profess no religion. A community leader's preference cannot settle every member's conscience, any more than an overseas donor's preference can.

This may create difficult tensions within families and communities. Those relationships deserve care and attention. We should avoid both the assumption that communal belonging erases personal choice and the assumption that personal choice takes place without social consequences.

For an outside organisation, humility is particularly important. We are not entitled to decide in advance which religious decision would prove that someone is liberated.

Our responsibility includes making our own offer clear and ensuring that our resources are not used to purchase the answer we prefer.

The trouble with a reassuring number

An audience may ask how many people have become Christians. The question can come from sincere concern. A number may still give less information than we think.

Attendance, interest, a public profession, baptism and lasting involvement are different things. Counting one does not establish another. Nor does a count tell us how freely a response was made or what it means to the person over time.

Numbers can also create incentives. If staff believe that future funding depends on a religious total, they may feel pressure to produce a reassuring account. That is a risk to examine, not an accusation about any particular worker. A reporting requirement shapes attention even when everyone begins with good intentions.

For a development programme, the evidence should fit the purpose. If the aim is a more secure livelihood, we need to examine what happens to livelihoods. A profession of faith cannot establish whether income is dependable or whether debt has become less burdensome.

Equally, an improvement in income cannot prove the truth of Christianity. A person's religious commitment should not be treated as a financial instrument whose value depends on producing a measurable return.

There may be legitimate reasons for a congregation to maintain records connected with its religious life. That does not give a development charity an unlimited reason to collect personal religious stories for donor reassurance.

People deserve clarity about what is recorded, why and who will see it.

Privacy matters especially where religious change can affect relationships or safety. Someone's willingness to share a testimony on one occasion should not be understood as permanent permission to circulate it wherever the organisation finds useful.

When somebody says we got it wrong

Even a carefully designed arrangement can fail. A worker may make an assumption. A participant may experience pressure that nobody intended. A promise of equal treatment may not survive an actual selection decision.

The organisation then needs a way to hear the concern. Requiring a complainant to confront the very person whose authority they fear is unlikely to reveal everything we need to know.

Accessible complaints involve language, practical availability and trust. A form is helpful only if someone can use it and believes that doing so will not make matters worse. People need to understand what can be kept confidential and what may need to be shared to address the problem.

We can take an effect seriously without inventing a malicious motive. A sincere worker may need to change their approach. A selection decision may need correcting. A policy may need clarification because its practical meaning was different from what its authors intended.

Christian language should assist that work. Repentance can support acknowledgement and change. Calls for forgiveness should not hurry someone into protecting an organisation's reputation before the difficulty has been addressed.

The important question is what becomes possible after disagreement. Can the person continue on fair terms? Can staff acknowledge a mistake? Does the experience change what happens next time?

Care after the answer is no

We return, finally, to the imagined conversation with which this chapter began. The person understands why faith matters to us and sees it differently. The useful work remains useful. Their need has not become less real. Their contribution to a community has not lost its value.

We can continue to care. We can also remain honest about our convictions. There is no need to turn the relationship into an indefinite campaign in which every conversation is assessed for signs of progress towards our preferred answer.

For me, that is a demanding expression of confidence in the faith we profess. It allows us to speak without assuming responsibility for controlling another person's conscience. It also allows us to recognise good that has happened in their life even when it does not produce the result we hoped for religiously.

That freedom is necessary. It is not the whole task. A programme can avoid religious pressure and still be poorly designed. Now we need to look at the help itself, and ask what happens when good intentions meet ordinary decisions about money, work and responsibility.

Chapter Seven

When Good Intentions Hurt

Let us imagine a water project.

The need is real. Residents want a more dependable supply, an organisation can help, and people agree on a location. There are meetings, practical contributions and a day when the new system begins to work. Photographs are taken. Everyone has good reason to be pleased.

Then a part fails.

The replacement has to come from somewhere else and costs more than the plan allowed. The person trained to maintain the system has moved away for paid work. A committee has responsibility, but no dependable way to meet the expense. The organisation has already described the project as locally owned and sustainable.

This is an invented example, not a report about Circuit or a particular village. Its usefulness lies in how ordinary the problem is. We do not have to imagine a villain. We need only imagine that enthusiasm ran ahead of the arrangements required to keep a useful thing working.

What would we say now? That the community failed to take ownership? That people had become dependent? Or that the original plan left important questions unanswered?

Help has to fit the situation

Some circumstances require immediate assistance. A person in danger may need food, shelter or access to urgent care. There is no virtue in withholding appropriate help until a person can demonstrate how they intend to become self-sufficient.

Other circumstances call for restoring something that has been lost or strengthening people's ability to act over time. A livelihood, a service or a local institution may need support that goes beyond emergency provision.

Christian development writers Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert distinguish relief, rehabilitation and development as a way of asking whether a response fits the situation. The distinction is useful when it makes us pay attention. It becomes less useful if we turn it into a staircase everyone must climb at the same speed.

A family may be rebuilding an income and still need food assistance. A person with a disability may hold a responsible position while requiring continuing practical support. Conflict can destroy assets that had taken years to establish. People can move between kinds of need because circumstances change around them.

We should therefore be careful about diagnosing failure from continued assistance alone. A household that needs help after repeated displacement has not necessarily lost initiative. A service that requires a subsidy has not necessarily failed to become valuable.

The question is what people need now, what the proposed response makes possible and what other realistic options exist. That is harder than applying a category, but it is more likely to produce help that fits.

What do we mean by dependency

"Dependency" can describe several different concerns. An organisation may rely on outside money. A person may become less confident about making decisions. A local service may become unable to act without a donor's

permission. Someone may reduce paid work while receiving assistance.

Those are different claims. We need to know which one we mean before deciding what to do about it.

There is research that challenges the easy assumption that receiving money makes people stop working. A review of seven randomised evaluations of government cash transfers in six developing countries found no systematic evidence of reduced adult labour supply. That result does not settle every question about every kind of assistance. It does ask us to stop treating a familiar suspicion as an established fact.

Even a change in working hours needs interpretation. Less paid work might allow someone to leave an abusive job, continue education or provide essential care. More work might indicate opportunity, or it might mean a person has to work longer to afford the same food. The number alone cannot tell us whether life has improved.

We should ask about conditions, alternatives and the person's own judgement. We should also notice how freely we accept support in our own lives. Public infrastructure, education and dependable institutions make many of our choices possible. We rarely describe that support as evidence of a defective character.

The more useful distinction concerns needing others and being under their arbitrary control. Reliable support can increase a person's freedom. Unpredictable assistance, tied to pleasing a powerful individual, can reduce it.

That is the relationship worth examining. We should not make people prove their dignity by needing less than their circumstances require.

The costs missing from the budget

Return to the imagined water project. The organisation can account for equipment and installation. What might remain outside the financial report?

Residents may have travelled to meetings, missed paid work or supplied materials. Someone may have translated after their normal working day. A volunteer may have accepted maintenance responsibility because the need mattered deeply, without having the resources to remain available indefinitely.

Those contributions can be generous and freely chosen. They still have costs. Calling them free can make a project look efficient by moving its expense into lives less visible to donors.

Time is often distributed unequally. A meeting held at an inconvenient hour may be easy for one person and almost impossible for someone with caring responsibilities. A required contribution may express commitment for a comfortable household and exclude a poorer one.

The solution is not to assume people should never contribute. Participation can be meaningful and valuable. The question is whether the contribution is affordable, understood and fairly negotiated. Can people say that the burden is too great? Are there ways to take part that do not depend on having spare cash or spare hours?

Christian language about service can either help or obscure this discussion. A sense of calling may sustain demanding work. It should not become a reason for an employer to expect unlimited availability. The fact that someone cares does not make their rent disappear.

If an organisation values local knowledge, it should take seriously the conditions under which that knowledge is contributed. Fair pay, preparation and realistic workloads belong within compassion. They are not unfortunate administrative deductions from the real work.

The workshop and the work

Training can be valuable. It can also be easier to report than the conditions people need in order to use it.

A workshop has a date, a register and a clear ending. A person's ability to apply what they learnt may depend on equipment, time, permission and continuing support. The certificate can travel home more easily than those other requirements.

Imagine a repair course where participants understand the lesson but cannot obtain the tools. Or a business course offered where customers have little money and transport is unreliable. The teaching may be competent while the intended result remains unlikely.

We should ask what has to be true for the learning to become useful. Can participants practise? Is the content suited to the setting? Is there someone to consult when a difficult question arises later? Does the course respond to a need people recognise, or to a topic someone is available to teach?

Researchers Ann Swidler and Susan Cotts Watkins have questioned versions of sustainability that favour training and unpaid commitment while neglecting the resources local people need. Their work concerns particular settings. It does not prove that workshops are useless. It encourages us to examine what a preferred activity leaves out.

The same question will become personal when we turn to the healthcare programme I helped establish. Good teaching requires more than expertise in a subject. It also requires attention to the people learning and to the conditions in which they will work.

When the organisation needs a success

An organisation has obligations to supporters. It needs to explain how money was used and whether the work achieved anything. That responsibility can improve practice. It can also create pressure to make the account tidier than the experience.

A building is visible. A number of trainees is easy to count. A dramatic personal story can hold attention. Changes in who gets heard, whether a service remains dependable or how fairly work is distributed are harder to put into a short appeal.

There is a risk that the things easiest to report begin to determine what gets done. Staff may learn that delivering the promised activity is rewarded more reliably than pointing out that the activity needs changing.

We should not assume this is the motive of every organisation with a cheerful newsletter. We should recognise the incentive and make room for unwelcome information. A report that says a plan was revised because participants identified a difficulty may be evidence of responsible work.

Supporters have a role here. If we demand a dramatic success every time, we make honesty harder. We can ask for clear accounts of progress and limitations without requiring every project to become a small miracle before the end of the financial year.

For Christian organisations, the desire for a religious result can add another pressure. Practical outcomes and religious responses should be described accurately, without allowing either to become a substitute for understanding people's lives. A favourable number cannot tell us that nobody was excluded or made uncomfortable about their beliefs.

What changed because of the project

Suppose a livelihood programme begins and participants' earnings rise. That sounds encouraging. To understand what the programme contributed, we still need to ask what else changed.

Perhaps prices improved for everyone selling the same crop. Perhaps a road reopened. Perhaps participants had more experience or resources than people who did not join. These possibilities do not make the improvement unreal. They affect how confidently we can say what caused it.

Researchers use different methods to make better comparisons. Some studies allocate an intervention by chance. Others compare groups carefully, follow people over time or combine records with interviews. No single method can answer every question in every setting, particularly during conflict.

For a general reader, the essential question is manageable: compared with what? A result means more when we understand the starting point and a realistic alternative.

We should also ask whose result we are seeing. A report about people who completed a course may miss those who withdrew. A survey of service users may miss people who felt unable to approach. A satisfied group of participants may represent a genuine success while leaving an important pattern of exclusion unseen.

This is where careful evidence protects compassion. It helps us notice the people who disappear from the account when we look only at those easiest to reach.

It can also protect good work from unfair dismissal. The absence of a perfect experiment does not mean every observation is worthless. We can describe what we know, explain the limits and use the best available information to improve decisions.

A benefit can come with a burden

A programme may improve one aspect of life while making another more difficult. Average income might rise while certain participants carry too much unpaid work. A community process might strengthen relationships while pressuring individuals to discuss experiences they would rather keep private.

Research on a reconciliation programme in Sierra Leone found improvements in some social outcomes alongside worse psychological outcomes. The study concerned a particular intervention combining activities. It does not show that forgiveness itself is harmful or that every participant experienced the same effects. Its value here is the warning against assuming that one favourable outcome tells us everything important.

We need to ask about possible harms before they become inconvenient surprises. We should also leave room for people to identify burdens we did not anticipate. An organisation cannot design a complete list of other people's experiences in advance.

That requires proportionate judgement. One difficulty does not automatically invalidate all the good a project has done. Serious harm cannot be dismissed because the average

result is positive. We need to understand who bears it, whether it can be prevented and what remedy is appropriate.

People should not have to compete with a success story in order to have a problem taken seriously. Their experience belongs within the evaluation rather than outside it as an awkward exception.

Good help can continue

The word “sustainable” often creates an image of an organisation leaving while everything carries on happily. Sometimes that is realistic. Sometimes a service needs enduring relationships and financial support.

A clinic may continue to require subsidy. A community may need access to specialist advice. A useful water system may need an arrangement for replacement parts that extends beyond local purchasing power. Continued partnership is not necessarily a sign that development failed.

The relevant questions are concrete. What needs to continue? Who will do the work? What resources are required? What happens if a key person leaves or conflict interrupts the plan?

It is more honest to answer those questions than to promise independence on a date selected for donor convenience. A plan can be ambitious without pretending that every future risk has been removed.

Withdrawal also changes lives. If people have made commitments in reasonable reliance on promised support, an organisation needs to consider what departure will mean. That does not create an unlimited obligation to continue every activity. It does require more than treating the end of a grant as the end of responsibility.

Back in our imagined water project, the useful response may be to repair the financial and maintenance arrangements. Perhaps responsibilities need renegotiating. Perhaps the technology was unsuitable. Perhaps continuing outside support is appropriate. None of these possibilities can be understood by declaring that the community lacked ownership and moving on.

Correction is part of the work

The phrase “help can hurt” should lead to better help. Used carelessly, it can become a sophisticated reason to leave people with fewer resources and no realistic alternative.

The comparison matters. Would a different approach serve people better? Can the current approach be improved? What would happen without it? These are questions to answer with those affected, while recognising that they may not all agree.

Sometimes correction is small and immediate. Change a meeting time. Pay for work that had been assumed to be free. Explain a decision. Restore access after a mistaken exclusion. Sometimes the problem lies deeper, in who can decide what happens or in a programme whose purpose no longer fits the circumstances.

Our willingness to make those changes gives compassion practical meaning. We are allowing someone’s experience to alter our account of what we are doing.

That can be difficult when we helped design the work or have publicly defended it. We may hear criticism as a verdict on our character. It is usually more useful to ask which decision needs attention.

I cannot leave this point as a general lesson directed at other organisations. Research on a programme I helped

establish has asked some of these questions very close to home. The next chapter is about what it means to allow that research into the story.

Chapter Eight

What I Had to Learn

It is easier to welcome criticism of a development programme when somebody else helped start it.

We can nod thoughtfully, identify the lessons and feel encouraged by our commitment to honest evaluation. The exercise becomes more demanding when our own name appears in the history. Suddenly the distinction between explaining a decision and defending it can become remarkably hard to locate.

Before I started Circuit International, I established the Shan Healthcare Training Programme through Partners. Sharon Bell later examined that programme in her doctoral research at Massey University. Her thesis, Health justice for all, was completed in 2018.

The study belongs in this book because it concerns work with which I have a direct connection. It also belongs here because it makes some of our questions concrete. What does useful expertise look like in a difficult setting? How does local leadership develop? What happens when the methods of an organisation do not fully match its intentions?

I cannot ask readers to take such questions seriously while selecting only the parts of the research that make my own history comfortable.

A beginning is not the whole story

Bell's account identifies my initiating role in the programme and also records local recognition of need that preceded the partnership. That second part matters as much as the first.

The need for healthcare did not come into existence when an outside organisation noticed it. People were already living with it, responding to it and recognising what was missing. An initiative grows within that history. The person who helps establish a programme joins work and concern that have other beginnings.

Founding stories can compress this. A problem is described, someone has an idea, and the organisation arrives. The resulting account may be sincere while making other people's knowledge appear only after the founder's vision.

A fairer story leaves room for contributions we did not make. Local colleagues teach, organise and adapt. Trainees carry learning into circumstances a visitor may never experience. Families and communities make participation possible. The programme depends on relationships whose importance cannot be reduced to a sentence thanking everyone who helped.

That changes what I should claim from a platform. I can explain my part without making the work the unfolding of my intention. I can be grateful for an opportunity to contribute without treating subsequent achievements as personal property.

The distinction is particularly important when the story involves Christian motivation. It would be strange to speak about service while assigning ourselves the central role in every achievement.

What the research actually examined

Bell undertook qualitative research involving four fieldwork visits between 2014 and 2016. She examined one programme and its relationships within the conflict-affected setting of Shan State and the Myanmar-Thailand border.

This was not an experiment comparing Christianity with another religious or secular approach. It was not an evaluation of Circuit's current programmes. It offers a detailed account of an earlier undertaking, with the opportunities and limits that such research carries.

Her discussion includes increased confidence and preparedness among medics. It also makes clear that she could not directly assess rural community health outcomes. That distinction should remain intact when we describe the findings. A person's greater confidence can be important without proving every later effect we hope for.

The thesis also reflects on the researcher's relationships with programme staff and what those relationships meant for access and interpretation. Knowing people can make research possible. It can also influence what is said and what appears most significant. Making that visible helps readers assess the account.

The practical lesson is wider than one study. Evidence becomes more useful when we understand what question it can answer. We should not ask a thoughtful piece of research to certify claims it was not designed to test.

For me, this creates a useful discipline. I can describe a finding accurately, then explain what I think it means for practice. The finding and my interpretation should not merge into one confident sentence.

Expertise has to reach the learner

Among Bell's criticisms are concerns about volunteer preparation, English-language instruction and aspects of a curriculum that was overly technical for the setting. She also identifies weaknesses in monitoring, learning and accountability to local partners.

Those observations raise questions that anyone involved in training should recognise. Knowing a subject is not the same as being able to teach it appropriately. A lesson can be accurate and still be difficult to use.

Imagine, as a teaching exercise rather than a reported event, a visiting specialist describing a procedure within a familiar system of equipment, colleagues and referral options. The explanation is clear to people who share that system. A learner working elsewhere has to translate more than the words. They have to decide which assumptions apply, which resources exist and what can be done when the expected support is absent.

The visitor may leave believing the material was delivered successfully. The learner may leave with useful knowledge and unresolved questions they did not feel able to ask.

This is why preparation and local input belong at the centre of teaching. What are people already able to do? What decisions do they actually face? Which examples make sense? What should a visiting expert learn before deciding what the session will contain?

Technical standards still matter. Adapting teaching does not mean replacing sound knowledge with whatever is easiest to hear. It means helping learners understand and apply appropriate knowledge within real conditions, including recognising when further support is required.

The expertise of local practitioners is crucial here. They know where a textbook assumption collides with daily work. Their questions can improve the teaching for everyone, provided the relationship permits them to ask.

Understanding is more than translation

Language is easy to treat as a practical detail after the important content has been decided. In teaching, it is part of the content's usefulness.

A person may recognise a technical term without feeling confident enough to discuss a difficult judgement. They may answer a short question correctly while remaining uncertain about how an idea applies. They may need time to formulate a disagreement, particularly when the teacher is respected and the room is moving quickly.

Good interpretation requires more than someone willing to stand beside the visitor. The interpreter needs preparation, an understanding of the subject and room to ask for clarification. The session needs enough time for people to think and respond.

I can see how easily a busy programme might regard those requirements as slowing things down. But speed is a doubtful achievement if the apparent efficiency depends on learners carrying unresolved uncertainty home.

We should also consider who determines whether understanding has occurred. Nodding is not a reliable assessment method. Instructions for assembling furniture offer a familiar warning: confidence before the first screw is not always confidence after the final unexplained bracket. In a consequential training setting, we need better ways to discover what people have understood and what support they still need.

Practice, discussion and locally meaningful examples can help. So can a teacher who responds well when someone says the explanation does not fit their situation. The aim is not to make the session comfortable for the expert. It is to

make the learning useful for the people who will carry responsibility afterwards.

These are implications I draw from the issues Bell raises. They should not be mistaken for claims that her study tested every teaching method I have mentioned.

The visit has a before and an after

A volunteer's willingness can be valuable. Availability alone does not tell us whether the person is suited to a particular role or adequately prepared for it.

Bell's research questions reliance on volunteers whose involvement is shaped by availability rather than the full requirements of the context. That is a serious issue to face without becoming dismissive of people who want to help.

A willing volunteer may bring valuable skill, energy and commitment. The organisation still has to decide how that contribution fits a longer plan. What should happen before arrival? Who will explain the local setting? Who is responsible after departure? What happens if the teaching raises questions that require continuing support?

The visit is one part of the relationship. For local colleagues, it may create work as well as provide help. They arrange communication, accommodate different approaches and restore continuity afterwards. Those responsibilities should be recognised and resourced.

This also changes how we discuss the value of a short trip. The visitor's sense of meaning is real, but it is not the principal measure of benefit to the programme. A rewarding experience for the person who travelled does not establish that local priorities were well served.

We should be able to welcome generosity and make demanding decisions about fit. Sometimes the useful

contribution is preparation, remote support or funding the person already doing the job. The appropriate form follows the need and the agreed plan.

Leadership means the work can change

Bell describes a positive transfer of basic Community Health Worker training to Tai leadership. She distinguishes that development from advanced training, which had not become fully Tai-led.

The distinction gives us something concrete to recognise. Responsibility changed within part of the programme. We can value that without describing the entire institution as having completed a transformation it had not completed.

It also prompts a further question. What does leadership enable someone to decide?

Being responsible for delivering a curriculum is not necessarily the same as being able to revise it. Running a programme can involve substantial work while important decisions remain elsewhere. We need to understand the scope of authority alongside the title.

In practice, local leadership needs resources and support. It should include opportunities to develop expertise and to obtain specialist advice without surrendering every other decision. Asking for outside assistance can be an exercise of leadership. It does not automatically demonstrate dependence in a diminishing sense.

A programme may become more locally directed while continuing to rely on international relationships. The quality of those relationships matters. Are expectations clear? Are resources dependable? Can local priorities alter what the partner offers?

For a founder, this can require a change in how success is imagined. The work may develop in ways we did not anticipate. A decision we would not have made may be well grounded in knowledge we do not possess. Remaining useful may involve contributing to a direction we no longer control. That is a practical expression of the earlier Gospel question about service. What do we do with the advantage of having helped begin something?

What other practitioners can teach us

Robert Kilpatrick's doctoral research offers another perspective. His thesis, *The business of peace-building*, examines how practitioners understand faith, compassion and their contribution to peace in Myanmar and Armenia.

I have a connection to that study too. Kilpatrick acknowledges assistance from me through Circuit International with research access and technical questions. Readers should know that when considering my use of his work.

His interviews involve practitioners with different religious positions and experiences. They describe faith as a source of perseverance and obligation, and compassion through practical responses to people's circumstances. These accounts help us understand why people commit themselves to difficult work. They do not independently establish how every community experienced that work.

One particularly useful theme concerns influence travelling towards the organisation. Practitioners describe recognising capacities already present and reconsidering an approach when local priorities differ. The question becomes whether a partner can be changed by the people it intends to assist.

I find that a demanding idea. We are accustomed to asking what change a programme will produce in a community. We should also ask what the community may require the programme to change.

Perhaps the timetable is wrong. Perhaps the priority is secondary to another concern. Perhaps a delivery method gives an influential person too much control. Listening becomes significant when it affects resources and decisions rather than merely improving the atmosphere of a meeting.

Kilpatrick's practitioner accounts are useful for identifying that possibility. They are not a substitute for hearing directly from people who received, declined or questioned assistance.

Keeping the evidence in its proper place

Kilpatrick also includes a separate survey component from World Vision programmes in Armenia. It compares participants with earlier national survey data. Differences in time, location and sampling limit the conclusions, and the thesis acknowledges that the comparison cannot establish causation.

Those results must not become a claim that a Myanmar programme produced a measured benefit, or that Christian faith itself caused improved wellbeing. Moving a finding from one country into another would make the argument sound stronger while making it less accurate.

The broader lesson is straightforward. An interview can tell us how a worker understands their motivation. An outcome study can investigate changes under specified conditions. A theological argument can explain why a Christian regards a practice as faithful. Each contributes something. None should quietly take over the work of the others.

This protects positive findings as well as difficult ones. We can recognise commitment, useful provision and promising developments without requiring the evidence to endorse every part of our preferred story.

It also makes criticism more precise. If a teaching arrangement needs improving, we can address that arrangement. We need not pretend the entire undertaking was worthless, or defend every method because the original purpose mattered.

What I want the lesson to change

The easiest response to research is to say that we have learnt a great deal. The more useful response is to identify what learning should alter.

For the work discussed here, I would want preparation to be shaped by local needs, teaching to be understandable and usable, and responsibilities to continue beyond the visiting expert's departure. I would want people doing the work to have ways of changing it. I would want evaluation to include concerns that do not fit a reassuring account.

These are commitments I argue for, rather than a report that every requirement has already been met. A book can explain a standard. An organisation has to demonstrate how it lives by it.

The same applies to the stories I tell. I should distinguish my contribution from those of others, describe results within the limits of the evidence and allow criticism to affect the account. A founder's affection for a programme cannot become an exemption from scrutiny.

There is hope in that process. Work does not have to begin perfectly in order to become useful. It does need people willing to notice where it falls short and to respond. Honest

examination can preserve what is valuable while making the relationship more dependable.

The person who asks where the gospel fits deserves that honesty. So do the people whose lives give the discussion its substance.

We have now reached the practical question towards which the book has been moving. If a community is to shape its own future, what must people actually be able to decide? And how might those decisions help make a life safer?

Chapter Nine

Communities Shaping Their Own Future

Imagine a meeting about a proposed livelihood project. A respected local leader welcomes it. Several people speak enthusiastically. The visiting organisation records strong support.

Near the end, someone mentions that the activity will take place during hours when some participants have to earn their daily income. Another person points out that the required contribution will be difficult for the poorest households. A third asks whether families who recently arrived can take part.

Nothing dramatic has happened in this imaginary meeting. There has been no confrontation. Yet the quality of the project may depend on what happens to those three questions.

They can be treated as minor details to resolve after approval. Or they can change the design before people are asked to commit.

That is where community influence begins to become visible. It lives in the decisions, especially the decisions an organisation would otherwise have made differently.

A choice needs an alternative

Researchers sometimes use the word “agency” to describe people’s ability to act and influence their circumstances. The word is useful if we keep its meaning close to ordinary life. Can people decide what matters to them? Can they pursue

it? What happens when they want something different from the person holding the resources?

Naila Kabeer's work on empowerment distinguishes resources, the ability to act, and what people achieve. The distinction helps explain why a favourable outcome alone cannot tell us whether someone had meaningful choice.

Two people might earn more through the same activity. One chose it from several acceptable options. Another felt compelled by a household member or had no tolerable alternative. The increase in earnings matters, but it does not tell the whole story of either life.

This is not an argument that every constrained decision is meaningless. People make intelligent decisions under difficult conditions every day. It is an argument for noticing the constraints and asking which ones assistance can reduce.

Information matters too. Agreeing to something whose costs have not been explained is different from agreeing with a clear understanding. A person needs to know what is expected, what is uncertain and what will happen if circumstances change.

In practice, a more meaningful choice may be modest. Someone can delay a decision, request a different meeting time or decline a contribution they cannot afford. The change may look small from a donor's office while making participation possible for a family.

Who is included in the word community

We often speak about a community as though it reaches decisions the way one person chooses lunch. Real communities are more complicated. So, for that matter, are most families choosing lunch.

People have different interests and different opportunities to express them. Age, gender, income, disability, language and relationships with influential people can affect whose view carries weight. The relevant differences have to be learnt locally; a general list cannot describe every place.

A recognised leader may be essential to a fair process without representing every experience. A public meeting may be useful without being the safest place for every concern. Someone who says little may be content, anxious, tired or simply waiting for another person to finish.

We need more than one route to understanding. Conversations in smaller groups, accessible information and opportunities to ask privately can reveal matters a formal meeting misses. The appropriate arrangements should be shaped with local people rather than imposed as another imported procedure.

The aim is not to find unanimous agreement where none exists. A decision can be legitimate while leaving some people dissatisfied. What matters is whether affected people had a meaningful opportunity to contribute, understood the decision and retained a way to challenge unfair treatment.

Outside organisations should not use the difficulty of local disagreement as a reason to take over. Nor should they treat a convenient endorsement as proof that everybody has been heard. Shared responsibility requires more patience than either shortcut.

Make the important decisions visible

In our imagined meeting, it would help to explain which parts of the proposal can change. Is the organisation committed to this particular activity, or to addressing a

broader need? Can participants choose the timetable? Is the budget fixed in total but flexible in how it is used?

People can work with limits when the limits are clear. Frustration grows when a consultation appears open but every consequential suggestion turns out to be outside its scope.

The same clarity is needed after the project begins. Who can approve a different supplier? Who responds if a cost rises? Who can pause an activity when participants report a risk? Who explains why a request was declined?

These questions do not require a complicated constitution for every small undertaking. They require an understandable account of responsibility. The form should fit the scale and circumstances of the work.

Budget information can be particularly important. Knowing the total amount is not the same as knowing what decisions are possible. Participants may need to understand continuing costs, restrictions and who can authorise changes.

At the same time, transparency is not identical with publishing everything. In a conflict-affected setting, personal details or financial arrangements can expose people to risk. Appropriate access should serve accountability while taking that risk seriously.

The aim is for people to know enough to exercise their responsibilities and question decisions that affect them. Secrecy needs a reason. So does disclosure.

A partner can have obligations too

Accountability often travels downwards. Local partners report expenditure, explain delays and respond to questions.

The organisation supplying money may feel less need to explain its own changed timetable.

That imbalance matters. A late payment can affect work, household income or a commitment made to someone else. A new reporting demand can consume time that was intended for the programme. An unexplained change can damage local trust even when the overseas office regards it as administrative.

Partnership should include responsibilities in both directions. An organisation can require honest accounting while also committing to clear decisions, timely communication and realistic demands. It can acknowledge when its own actions create costs.

Technical obligations remain important. A community preference does not make an unsafe structure safe or an inaccurate health claim true. Expertise should enter the discussion where it is needed, with reasons explained in terms people can understand.

Equally, a technical qualification does not answer every question about acceptable burden or social priorities. An engineer may know what a structure requires. Residents may know why a technically convenient location is difficult to use. The best decision needs both forms of knowledge.

This is a more useful understanding of shared power than assuming that one side must always give way.

Responsibilities are discussed, relevant knowledge is respected and reasons remain open to examination.

A building is not the same as a changed institution

Research on community development in Sierra Leone provides a useful caution. The GoBifo programme produced material benefits, while its early evaluation did not establish

the broad institutional changes anticipated beyond the programme's immediate activities. Later follow-up found lasting material gains and smaller institutional effects, with further intervention having occurred in the intervening years.

We do not need to master the statistical details to understand the lesson. Something useful can be built without every relationship of power being transformed. Change can also take time, and a later result should not be ignored because an earlier one was less encouraging.

For a donor, this supports a more precise conversation. Was the facility completed? Is it useful and accessible? Can people who previously had little influence now affect important decisions? Those are related questions with different answers.

There is no shame in reporting a bounded success. A dependable service can be worth supporting without a claim that it has transformed the entire community. An organisation becomes more credible when the size of its claim matches the evidence.

Influence can be investigated through actual decisions. Can participants identify something they changed? Did the change survive beyond one meeting? What happened when a less powerful person raised a concern? These accounts should be considered alongside records and the experiences of people who disagree.

A single happy example cannot establish everything. It can be a beginning for a more useful inquiry than counting attendance alone.

The cost beyond this year

There is another question inside the word “sustainable”. What does a useful activity require from the place around it, and who will live with the consequences later?

Imagine a proposed enterprise that could increase household earnings. Its financial plan looks promising. But it also requires water, land or materials that other people use. A calculation limited to the participating households might miss a cost being carried elsewhere.

This is an illustration of a question to investigate, not a claim about a particular enterprise in Shan State. The point is that an improvement does not become sustainable merely because the organisation can stop paying for it. We need to consider what allows the improvement to continue and what it may make harder for others.

Those affected may include people outside the group invited to join. A neighbour could depend on the same water source. A household without secure access to land might be unable to benefit while still bearing some of the burden. People who will use a resource in future cannot attend today’s meeting, but their interests still deserve consideration.

Local knowledge is essential to understanding those relationships. So is relevant technical knowledge. Neither a visiting specialist nor a familiar leader should be expected to know everything. A good process makes room for the questions each can see and for evidence that challenges an attractive proposal.

This need not turn every small undertaking into an endless study. The attention should be proportionate to the possible consequences. A modest change may need a straightforward conversation. An activity with substantial effects on land or

water may require expertise and wider consultation before money is committed.

The same reasoning applies to future financial obligations. A project may earn enough during a good season while leaving nothing for replacement equipment or interruption.

Someone needs to ask what happens in an ordinary bad year. Who carries the loss? Can participants pause without losing everything already contributed? Is there a reserve, a dependable partner or another realistic arrangement?

These questions are easier to discuss before a difficulty arrives. Once families have invested time, savings or reputation, admitting that an assumption was weak becomes much harder. Enthusiasm is useful at the beginning. It should leave room at the table for the person who asks where the replacement part will come from.

Changing a plan in response to such questions is a practical achievement. A less ambitious first stage may allow people to learn without taking an unaffordable risk. A different activity may serve the same purpose with fewer burdens. Sometimes the responsible answer will be to wait until an important uncertainty has been resolved.

Waiting also has a cost, especially when need is urgent. We therefore have to compare actual alternatives, including the consequences of doing nothing. The aim is not to discover a proposal without any risk. It is to understand the risks well enough for those affected to make a considered decision and to know who will share responsibility if things go wrong.

For Christian supporters, this extends the meaning of neighbour-love across both distance and time. The neighbour includes someone who gains little from our project but could bear its costs. Compassion should remain

interested in their life even if they never appear in the report we planned to write.

What a safer choice might look like

Circuit's purpose connects sustainable development with reducing poverty and vulnerability to human trafficking. The connection makes sense when we consider the choices economic security can make possible.

Imagine a household facing an urgent expense after income has been interrupted. A recruiter offers work with an advance payment. The offer may be legitimate, deceptive or difficult to assess. The household's need for money makes time and alternatives especially important.

Now imagine that the family has access to dependable support, manageable debt and someone independent who can help them understand the offer. They may still choose to migrate. The difference is that they have more room to investigate, delay or refuse.

This is a proposed pathway, not a measured result for a particular programme. Greater security may reduce some vulnerabilities. Whether it does so, and whether exploitation is prevented, requires evidence.

That distinction should not make us dismiss the value of the earlier improvement. Being able to meet an urgent expense or reject an unacceptable condition is worthwhile in itself. We do not need to enlarge every benefit into a count of trafficking cases averted.

The conditions of a choice matter more than whether the decision looks like the one an outsider would have made. Someone may use greater resources to leave home for study or work. That movement may be part of the improvement they wanted.

Trafficking is about exploitation

The international framework for trafficking focuses on acts such as recruitment, means such as coercion or deception, and exploitation. It does not require crossing a border. Children are treated differently within that framework, including the rule that the specified coercive or deceptive means need not be established.

For this book, the practical importance is to avoid confusing movement with trafficking. A person can choose a journey and later be subjected to threats or deception. Someone can be exploited without making a long journey at all.

The problem is also broader than one familiar image. Forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage and forced criminality can involve different routes into control. Human rights reporting on online scam operations describes people recruited through apparently attractive employment and then coerced into criminal activity. Some had education and professional experience.

That should make us cautious about assuming that only the poorest or least informed people are at risk. Deception is the responsibility of the person practising it. A victim's hopes or initial decision do not excuse what follows.

Poverty reduction can contribute to prevention while remaining only one part of the response. Protection, responsible recruitment, access to appropriate services and action against exploiters also matter. No livelihood project can reasonably promise to replace all of them.

Nor should prevention place the entire burden on a potential victim to make a flawless decision. People can assess an offer carefully and still be deceived. A just response asks about the conduct and power of those exploiting them.

Information needs somewhere to go

An awareness session can be useful. It can also leave a person knowing more about danger while having no better option.

Imagine being told to avoid risky employment when the alternative is an expense you cannot meet. The advice may be accurate. Its practical value depends partly on whether you can act on it.

Information is stronger when connected with reliable support. People may need an independent source of advice, a way to ask about an employer or a service they can approach if conditions change. What is appropriate depends on the setting, language and risks involved.

These are questions for programme design and local expertise. They are not a promise that following a short checklist will make migration safe. A popular book should not offer reassurance it cannot justify.

We should also be careful about what we measure. Remembering a warning immediately after a session is not the same as being able to use it months later. Increased confidence is not necessarily increased accuracy. Attendance is an activity measure, not proof of protection.

The useful task is to discover what changed in people's options and what obstacles remain. That inquiry may reveal a need for practical resources alongside information. It may also reveal that our chosen message does not answer the question people are actually facing.

Safety has more than one dimension

Income matters, but it does not carry the whole burden of security. A household may earn more while one member remains unable to obtain care. A participant may succeed in

a project while fearing an armed actor or an abusive employer. A person may have work and still lack a safe way to seek help.

The migrant health research discussed earlier reminds us that language, privacy and access can influence whether a service is usable. A health problem may interrupt work or create costs that narrow other choices. Improving access could strengthen security, but those studies do not establish that an HIV service prevented trafficking.

Drug-related harm also requires care in the way it is described. Production, drug use and dependence are different matters. Research from Shan State identifies links between precarious livelihoods, harmful drug economies and unequal power. It does not justify treating every person who uses drugs as the same kind of case, or as a symbol in someone else's political argument.

A livelihood activity may help some people while leaving a need for appropriate health support. Shame and forced disclosure can add obstacles. We should ask what people need and involve relevant expertise, without claiming that employment or religious commitment can substitute for every form of care.

Conflict can disrupt all these relationships at once. A service may become inaccessible, work may disappear and contact with trusted people may be lost. Long-term development needs to remain responsive to such changes rather than insisting that the original plan continue because it has already been approved.

What can honestly be claimed

Suppose a programme improves participants' ability to meet an unexpected expense. That is a meaningful finding. The

organisation may explain why it could reduce vulnerability to certain exploitative offers.

To claim that trafficking itself has been prevented requires a further investigation. The absence of a known case does not establish that everyone was protected. People may move, withdraw or remain unable to disclose what happened.

Recorded cases are difficult to interpret too. An increase might indicate more exploitation, better recognition or safer reporting. A decrease might indicate improvement or reduced access to the organisation recording them. We need to understand the process behind the count.

This is not a reason to give up evaluating prevention. It is a reason to distinguish what we observed from what we hope it means. We can track relevant changes carefully without turning participants' lives into an intrusive monitoring exercise.

A person's privacy and safety come before our desire for a complete dataset. Evaluation should collect information for a clear purpose, with appropriate protection and an honest explanation of its use.

The resulting account may be less dramatic than a promise that a gift has saved a certain number of people from trafficking. It can be more trustworthy. Supporters are capable of understanding a useful contribution with limits when we take the time to explain it.

A future people can help shape

We can now return to the imagined meeting at the beginning of this chapter. The questions about timing, contributions and newly arrived families are part of the substance of development. They determine whether a

project expands opportunity or mainly serves the people already best placed to take it up.

When those questions change the plan, people's knowledge has consequences. When they can continue to raise concerns after the project begins, influence becomes more than an opening ceremony.

The same principle reaches into safety. A family's ability to refuse an exploitative offer, obtain appropriate care or choose a different direction depends on conditions that can be strengthened through dependable relationships. Development can contribute to those conditions while acknowledging what lies beyond its control.

For Christian supporters, this is a serious account of neighbour-love. It asks us to value choices we do not own and improvements that may not produce the story we expected. It also asks us to support the patient work that makes such choices more possible.

We have enough now to return to the question after the talk. The answer should be clearer than the one with which we began. It should also ask something of the people giving the help.

Chapter Ten

What Faithfulness Might Look Like

We return to the room where someone has been listening to a presentation about Circuit International.

There has been an account of work with communities in Shan State, an explanation of the needs and an invitation to care. Then comes the question that began this book.

“Where does the gospel fit into all this?”

I still understand the impulse behind my first response. Compassion seems so closely connected with following Jesus that I can become impatient when somebody asks where the Christian part is. But impatience does not explain the connection, and the person asking may have a concern I have not yet understood.

I hope I can now give a more useful answer. I would begin by asking what they want to know. Are they asking why we do the work? Whether we speak about Jesus? Whether people are free to become Christians? Or whether practical improvement has a place in Christian mission even when it produces no religious response?

Those questions belong together, but they are not identical. Taking a moment to understand the question may save both of us from an argument neither intended to have.

The answer I want to give

My answer would be something like this.

Following Jesus gives me a reason to care about the circumstances in which people live. The Gospels present him

teaching about God, calling people to follow and responding to hunger, illness and exclusion. They also challenge the way people use wealth and authority. I believe work that helps communities gain safer options and a meaningful say in their future can express that commitment.

Such work does not explain every Christian belief by itself. Words are needed when we want people to understand what we believe about Jesus. We should speak truthfully and make room for serious conversation. We should also make sure that people can decline a religious invitation without losing assistance for which they otherwise qualify.

The practical work must be examined. We need to know whether it helps, who benefits, who bears the costs and what happens when people disagree. Christian motivation is a reason to undertake that examination honestly. It cannot establish the results in advance.

That is the answer I would want to stand behind. It expresses a conviction and a responsibility. It does not turn an organisation's name or purpose into proof that every decision it makes is faithful.

It also leaves room for a continued conversation. Someone may still disagree about priorities or about how a church should allocate its money. I would rather discuss the actual difference than settle for a slogan which makes my position sound simpler than it is.

The neighbour is not a means to our reassurance

A donor wants to know that a gift matters. A speaker wants to offer a convincing account. An organisation wants to show that the work deserves support. Those are understandable concerns.

The person receiving help has a life beyond them.

Their livelihood, beliefs and choices cannot fairly be arranged around our need for reassurance. They may value a service and have no interest in our theology. They may become Christian and remain poor. They may gain confidence and begin criticising a programme that previously seemed easy to manage.

Each possibility asks us to consider what we actually value. If we say we want people to have a stronger voice, we should expect to hear things we did not choose. If we say assistance responds to need, a religious refusal should not make the need disappear from view.

This is demanding because it asks us to give up a certain kind of control over the ending. We can make commitments, work competently and seek evidence. We cannot reasonably require another person to become the conclusion of our preferred story.

The Gospels themselves contain responses that are complicated and unfinished. People understand, misunderstand, follow, leave and return. Their encounters with Jesus are not all reducible to one easily counted response.

For a charity, the practical implication is to describe what happened accurately and allow a person's own account to remain visible. We can celebrate something good without claiming ownership of everything that follows.

Good questions from a church

I would welcome a church asking how Christian faith shapes the work. I would also welcome questions that make that concern more concrete.

How were priorities chosen? Did people have room to disagree? What happened when somebody could not afford

the time or contribution expected? What did the organisation learn from those who withdrew or did not participate?

These questions concern the relationships through which compassion becomes real. They are not a diversion from the spiritual meaning of the work. They ask whether truthfulness, neighbour-love and repentance have practical consequences.

A church can ask about results too. What changed, and how do we know? What remains uncertain? Did an improvement endure? Were there harms or exclusions which the first report missed?

Such questions need not be hostile. Their purpose can be to support a more dependable partnership. A charity should be able to explain its limits without feeling that honesty will automatically cost it every supporter.

The question of religious freedom belongs here as well. Can someone decline prayer or Christian activity and remain on fair terms? How would the organisation discover that a person felt unable to refuse? What happens if a concern is raised?

Answers should be based on conduct and experience, rather than reassurance alone. A policy can be helpful. A concrete account of how a difficulty was addressed can tell us more about whether the policy has life in it.

What supporters make possible

The expectations of donors affect the conditions in which work is done. We may prefer a visible purchase or a short project with a clear ending. Those preferences can make it harder to fund the quieter responsibilities on which useful work depends.

Translation, preparation, fair pay and continued learning are easy to describe as overhead. Yet a service depends on the people and arrangements that make it competent. Removing those costs from view does not remove the need for someone to meet them.

We should ask whether expenditure is appropriate and proportionate. We should also resist the fantasy that almost no administration means almost perfect compassion. An organisation that cannot keep dependable records, support its workers or respond to concerns is not improved by having an attractive percentage in its appeal.

Longer commitments may be necessary too. Some useful services require continuing support. Some benefits become reliable only when a partner can plan beyond the next brief funding cycle. A promise of rapid independence may reassure donors while moving risk onto the people with the fewest reserves.

Supporters can make honest work easier by valuing careful accounts of change. A project revised after criticism may deserve confidence. A programme ended because the evidence did not justify continuing may reflect responsibility. A privacy decision that prevents a moving story from being published may be a sign that the organisation means what it says about dignity.

Giving then becomes participation in a relationship with obligations, rather than a purchase of a satisfying ending. We can ask for accountability while accepting that we do not control every event in another person's life.

The organisation is also being formed

Christian discussion often concentrates on the people we hope will change. The organisation doing the work is also learning habits, for better or worse.

It can become accustomed to listening or to explaining away concerns. It can reward staff who report difficulties early, or teach them that every problem threatens the next grant. It can share credit or steadily make itself indispensable to the story.

These habits are built through ordinary decisions. Who is thanked publicly? Who has to justify a delay? Whose working time is treated as valuable? What happens when a respected leader is wrong?

The theological language of repentance becomes practical at this level. An apology matters, and so does what follows it. A decision may need reversing. A person may need a remedy. A process may need changing so that the same problem does not recur.

We should not hurry to forgiveness as a way of making an uncomfortable matter disappear. The person harmed should not carry responsibility for restoring everybody else's sense of unity. Truth and repair deserve time.

An organisation also needs boundaries and fair treatment for its workers. Taking a complaint seriously does not require assuming that every allegation is established. It requires a credible process, proportionate action and attention to the people affected.

Faithfulness will not mean never making a mistake. It should mean becoming able to recognise and correct mistakes without protecting the institution at any cost.

When people need us for longer

Some lives will continue to require substantial support. A person with a disability may need dependable assistance. Someone living with a long-term illness may need continuity of care. An older person may not be able to become the productive graduate of a livelihood programme.

These realities belong within the account of development and compassion. They should not be treated as exceptions we reluctantly accommodate after celebrating everybody who becomes inexpensive to support.

The Good Samaritan pays for continuing care. Luke's teaching about hospitality includes people unable to repay. These passages help us question a moral scale on which the most worthy recipient is the one who needs us for the shortest time.

Dependable support can itself make a life more self-directed. A person who knows assistance will arrive may be better able to make plans, participate in relationships or contribute in ways a narrow economic measure would miss.

The concern is how the relationship works. Are people listened to? Is support reliable? Can they challenge poor treatment? Do they retain as much choice as their circumstances permit?

Those questions are more useful than treating independence as a universal finish line. Human life is sustained by others from its beginning to its end. Our ethical task is to make those relationships more just and dependable.

Hope without exaggeration

Shan State gives us reasons for urgency. It also gives us reasons to avoid promises that no charity can fulfil.

An organisation cannot control armed conflict, the actions of criminal networks, the price of essential goods or a natural disaster. A good programme may face disruption beyond its capacity to prevent. People may make careful plans and still experience loss.

That does not make patient work pointless. It means hope should be attached to a truthful account of what is possible. A service can remain useful within difficult conditions. A stronger local institution can help people respond to change. A family can gain an option it did not previously have.

Those are significant possibilities. We can support them without promising that one activity will end poverty or prevent every form of exploitation.

The same discipline applies to testimony. We should not enlarge an individual account into a claim about an entire population. Nor should we imply that a positive study establishes the effectiveness of another organisation in another country. Evidence retains its value when we keep its limits attached.

Honest hope may sound less triumphant. It is better able to survive difficulty because it has not depended on denying that difficulty could occur.

For me, this is part of Christian witness. Truthfulness matters when the news is encouraging and when it is awkward. The people described in our appeals should not have to bear the consequences of expectations we created carelessly.

A conversation across differences

The work we have discussed will involve people who do not share all our convictions. They may bring different religious

beliefs, political histories and hopes for their communities. Cooperation does not require those differences to vanish.

We can negotiate a practical task, respect one another's knowledge and remain honest about disagreement. A Christian can explain why Jesus matters. A Buddhist partner can explain what gives their work meaning. Neither account has to become a condition the other person accepts in order to contribute.

Such a relationship may challenge us. We may discover generosity we did not expect, criticism we need or a question we cannot answer immediately. Taking another person seriously includes allowing those discoveries to remain significant.

Local Christians should have room to interpret and exercise their own faith. Overseas funding does not make outsiders the only people qualified to decide what faithfulness means. Nor does local standing exempt any leader from questions about how authority is used.

The standard needs to travel in every direction. We ask whether people can speak, whether decisions are fair and whether disagreement can be sustained without unnecessary penalties. Those concerns become especially important when a religious invitation occurs within an unequal relationship.

Respect does not make every belief interchangeable. It makes truthful conversation more possible by refusing to use control of necessities as an argument.

What this asks of me

I began with a question I sometimes found difficult to answer patiently. Writing a longer answer has required me to recognise the responsibilities inside my own position.

As a speaker, I need to describe people accurately and give their contributions proper place. As a fundraiser, I need to explain what support can realistically make possible. As someone connected with the history of programmes discussed here, I need to allow evidence to complicate the account I might prefer.

Bell's research is a particular reminder. My part in establishing an earlier programme gives me reason to care deeply about how it is understood. It also gives me reason to examine my own interests in the story. Positive findings and criticism belong together when we ask what can be learnt.

Kilpatrick's work adds another challenge: a community may need to change its partner. That possibility should remain open in the work I support. Listening has substance when people's knowledge can alter our decisions.

I do not present these standards as an evaluation already completed for Circuit. They are standards by which I believe its work, and the work of other organisations, should be examined. Commitment to an organisation should increase our concern for that examination.

Readers are entitled to apply the same questions to this book. Have people been described fairly? Are findings kept within their evidence? Does an argument about dignity make room for those whose views differ from mine?

An honest book remains open to correction too.

After the talk

The presentation will end. People will go home, and some will decide whether to support the work. Elsewhere, the people whose lives we have discussed will continue making decisions within circumstances we understand only partly.

The value of our answer will eventually be tested there. It will appear in whether a promise is kept, a concern receives attention or an offer leaves someone with more room to act. It will also appear in the words we use and in what happens when those words do not produce the response we hoped for.

I believe compassionate development can belong deeply within following Jesus. It can give practical expression to concern for neighbours while requiring us to examine our own use of power. Speaking about faith remains important. So does making sure the relationship allows an honest answer.

We need not make the work carry every possible claim in order to recognise its worth. We can care for a person, support a useful service and learn from a community without treating any of them as proof that our organisation has completed God's purposes.

There is enough to do in being truthful, attentive and dependable. There is enough to learn from the people we meet. There is enough in the Gospels to keep calling our habits into question.

The question after the talk has brought us back to the neighbour before us. That is where I want the answer to begin.

Reading notes

These notes identify the main sources behind each chapter. They are a guide for readers who want to follow a question further, rather than an exhaustive bibliography. The fuller research edition of *The Shape of Love* records additional sources and the extent of the material consulted. A reference here does not imply that every part of a work has been independently checked.

Biblical passages are paraphrased, rather than quoted from a particular translation. References allow readers to compare the discussion with their own Bible. Interpretations and proposed applications to development are the author's arguments; they are not findings about the effectiveness of a modern programme. The numbered references in Chapter One correspond to its four notes below. Subsequent notes are grouped by subject within each chapter.

1 · The Question After the Talk

1. Mark 1:14–15 and Matthew 28:18–20 provide the references to proclamation, repentance, faith and discipleship.
2. Mark 6:30–44 and 8:1–10 describe the feeding of crowds. The second account explicitly raises the danger of people collapsing on the journey home.
3. Luke 10:25–37 is the parable of the Good Samaritan, including the arrangements for continuing care.
4. Sharon Margaret Bell, *Health justice for all: The development of alternative health system capabilities in the conflict-affected context of Shan State, Myanmar*, PhD thesis in Development Studies, Massey University, 2018. The author's initiating role and earlier local recognition of need are discussed on pp. 68–70, especially p. 69 n. 27. See the notes to Chapter Eight for the findings and limitations used here. [Thesis record](#).

Circuit's purpose. Circuit International, "Our Method", particularly "What We Do" and "Our Story", consulted for the research edition in September 2026. An organisation's account of its purpose is distinct from an independent evaluation of its results. [Source](#).

2 · A Place Beyond the Headlines

Identity and local institutions. Transnational Institute, *Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context: The 2014 Census, Identity and*

Citizenship in Burma/Myanmar, Burma Policy Briefing 13, 2014, discusses the problems of ethnic classification. This is a critical policy briefing, not a current population survey. Edward Benson and Carine Jaquet, “Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Northern Myanmar”, *Forced Migration Review* 48 (2014), pp. 48–50, describes local religious networks within a particular displacement response. [Identity briefing](#); [humanitarian article](#).

Narunee Srisuk, “The Process in Maintaining the Buddhist Identity of Tai People in Chiang Mai”, *Nakhon Lampang Buddhist College Journal* 9, no. 3 (2020), pp. 203–217, contributes a diaspora perspective. The bilingual abstract and selected Thai-language sections were consulted for the research edition. It is not a study of every community in Shan State. [Source](#).

Conflict and disruption. OHCHR, *Annual Update on the Human Rights Situation in Myanmar: Overview of Developments in 2025*, published 26 February 2026, opening summary and pp. 2–6; Amnesty International, *Caught in the Middle: Abuses against Civilians amid Conflict in Myanmar’s Northern Shan State*, 2019; and OCHA, *Myanmar Flood Situation Report 2*, 20 September 2024. These have different periods, purposes and geographic coverage. No combined casualty or displacement total is inferred. [OHCHR update](#); [Amnesty report](#); [flood report](#).

Migration and healthcare. J. K. Murray, A. S. DiStefano, J. S. Yang and M. M. Wood, “Displacement and HIV: Factors Influencing Antiretroviral Therapy Use by Ethnic Shan Migrants in Northern Thailand”, *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care* 27, no. 5 (2016), pp. 709–721. A. Ayuttacorn and colleagues, “Disclosure of HIV Status among Shan Female Migrant Workers Living with HIV in Northern Thailand: A Qualitative Study”, *PLOS ONE* 14 (2019), e0216382. Both illuminate selected participants’ experiences; neither estimates HIV prevalence among all Shan migrants. [Murray and colleagues](#); [Ayuttacorn and colleagues](#).

Trafficking. The international definition and the discussion of online scam recruitment are supported by the United Nations protocol and OHCHR report listed under Chapter Nine. The distinction between migration and trafficking is central to their use here.

3 · Who Gets to Decide

Conquest and residential schools. The *Requerimiento*, conventionally dated 1513, is available in an English translation reproduced by the National Humanities Center. Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939*, final report, volume 1, 2015, supplies the institutional history

discussed here. These are different histories; the chapter uses them to examine coercive relationships rather than treating every Christian institution as identical. [Requerimiento](#); [Commission report](#).

Christian dissent. John Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce, 24 February 1791; The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, 1985; and the Belhar Confession, drafted in 1982 and adopted in 1986. These primary texts document particular Christian arguments against slavery and apartheid. They do not assign Christians sole responsibility for resistance or reform. [Wesley's letter](#); [Kairos Document](#); [Belhar Confession](#).

Burma and Myanmar. Pum Za Mang, "Buddhist Nationalism and Burmese Christianity", *Studies in World Christianity* 22, no. 2 (2016), pp. 148-167; and "Mission Education in Burma, 1600-1948", *International Review of Mission* 111, no. 1 (2022), pp. 123-137. These historical interpretations help complicate a simple equation between mission and colonial government, while leaving questions about cultural power open. [Christianity and nationalism](#); [mission education](#).

Iselin Frydenlund, Pum Za Mang, Phyo Wai and Susan Hayward, "Religious Responses to the Military Coup in Myanmar", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2021), pp. 77-88, documents differences within religious traditions. It should not be read as a representative survey of every believer's response. [Source](#).

Participation and power. Ghazala Mansuri and Vijayendra Rao, *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?*, World Bank, 2013, overview pp. 1-6 and 8-11. The selected discussion informs questions about inclusion and institutions. It does not validate any particular arrangement in Myanmar. [Source](#).

4 · Good News for Whom

The Gospel passages. Mark 1:14-15; 6:30-44; 8:1-10; 10:35-52; 12:28-34. Matthew 6:9-13 and 28:16-20. Luke 4:16-30; 6:20-26; 10:25-37; 22:24-27; 24:44-49. John 6; 13:1-17; 20:30-31. These cover the kingdom announcement, feeding, service, teaching and the central claims concerning Jesus.

Jesus' Jewish setting. Amy-Jill Levine, "The Jewish Context of Jesus", *Bible Odyssey*, Society of Biblical Literature, 2016, provides an accessible introduction. Maurice Ryan, "Revisiting the Parable of the Good Samaritan", *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 16, no. 1 (2021), pp. 1-15, examines common distortions in readings of the parable; pp. 1-8 and

13-15 informed the research edition. Luke does not state why the priest and Levite pass by. [Levine](#); [Ryan](#).

5 · Compassion That Changes Relationships

The encounters. Bartimaeus and the preceding request for honour: Mark 10:35-52. The woman with bleeding: Mark 5:25-34. The woman in the synagogue: Luke 13:10-17. The Samaritan woman: John 4:1-42. The Canaanite woman: Matthew 15:21-28. Hospitality without reciprocal repayment: Luke 14:12-14. Love of enemies: Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-36.

Reading without inventing a biography. Karoline Lewis, “Commentary on John 4:5-42”, Working Preacher, Luther Seminary, 24 February 2008, informs the caution about assumptions concerning the Samaritan woman. YongHan Chung, “The Canaanite Women in Korean Context: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading of Matthew 15:21-28”, HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 81, no. 1 (2025), a10529, offers one contextual reading of that difficult encounter. Neither interpretation is presented as the only possible one. [Lewis](#); [Chung](#).

Matthew 25. The passage is Matthew 25:31-46. Jerry M. Ireland, “Matthew 25:40 and ‘The Least of These’: Interpretive Implications for a Missional Ecclesiology”, Journal of the Evangelical Missiological Society 6, no. 1 (2026), pp. 1-14, especially pp. 5-12, sets out a missionary reading. The book acknowledges the wider interpretive dispute and does not make its argument for compassion depend on resolving it. [Source](#).

6 · Sharing Faith Without Applying Pressure

Words, discipleship and refusal. Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:30-31; Mark 10:17-22; John 6:60-71; Luke 9:51-56. These passages inform the theological discussion. They are not a complete modern policy for consent in an unequal relationship.

Evangelism and social responsibility. The Lausanne Covenant, 1974, sections 4-6, affirms both while giving evangelism priority. Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment, Lausanne Occasional Paper 21, report of the Grand Rapids consultation of 19-25 June 1982, sections 4B-D, discusses their relationship and distinct callings. Its allowance for practical care without a sermon should be read alongside its continuing commitment to proclamation. [Covenant](#); [consultation report](#).

Christian witness and freedom. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Alliance,

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct, 2011, especially principles 4, 7 and 10. This joint document addresses exploitation of vulnerability, religious freedom and personal discernment. It is a statement of recommended conduct, not evidence that every signatory's organisation follows it. [Source](#).

The saying attributed to Francis. Pat McCloskey, "Origin of Saint Francis' Peace Prayer", Franciscan Media, 16 June 2026, also addresses the separate saying about using words when necessary. Its familiar attribution is not established. [Source](#).

7 · When Good Intentions Hurt

Kinds of help and dependency. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself*, revised edition, Moody, 2012. The research edition used extracts in the official Reconsider: Poverty sampler, pp. 58–66 and 72–73; the discussion here concerns that practical framework, not a review of the entire book. Paul Harvey and Jeremy Lind, *Dependency and Humanitarian Relief: A Critical Analysis*, HPG Report 19, Overseas Development Institute, 2005, executive summary and pp. 3, 8 and 40–43, questions undifferentiated dependency claims. [Sampler](#); [dependency report](#).

Cash transfers and work. Abhijit V. Banerjee, Rema Hanna, Gabriel E. Kreindler and Benjamin A. Olken, "Debunking the Stereotype of the Lazy Welfare Recipient: Evidence from Cash Transfer Programs", *World Bank Research Observer* 32, no. 2 (2017), pp. 155–184. The finding discussed concerns adult labour supply across seven randomised evaluations in six countries. It is not a complete measure of agency or a result for every possible assistance programme. [Author manuscript](#).

Training and continuing resources. Ann Swidler and Susan Cotts Watkins, "'Teach a Man to Fish': The Sustainability Doctrine and Its Social Consequences", *World Development* 37, no. 7 (2009), pp. 1182–1196, especially the opening sections. This contextual research informs the questions about training, unpaid work and resources; it does not establish that all workshops fail. [Source](#).

Mixed effects. Jacobus Cilliers, Oeindrila Dube and Bilal Siddiqi, "Reconciling after Civil Conflict Increases Social Capital but Decreases Individual Well-Being", *Science* 352, no. 6287 (2016), pp. 787–794, especially pp. 787–789, Table 6 and the conclusion. The study evaluates a particular combined reconciliation intervention in Sierra Leone. It is not a general experiment on forgiveness, and some follow-up observations cover a subset. [Source](#).

8 · What I Had to Learn

Bell's programme study. Sharon Margaret Bell, *Health justice for all: The development of alternative health system capabilities in the conflict-affected context of Shan State, Myanmar*, PhD thesis, Massey University, 2018. Programme origins and the author's role: pp. 68-70. Fieldwork and method: pp. 85-92 and 125. Scope and limits concerning rural health outcomes: pp. 68-69, 77-79, 243 and 250. Teaching, volunteer preparation and accountability: pp. 189-200 and 243-244. Tai leadership and the distinction between basic and advanced training: pp. 125-126, 205-207 and 244. [Thesis record](#).

The four fieldwork visits occurred between 2014 and 2016. The study concerns the earlier Shan Healthcare Training Programme through Partners. It does not evaluate Circuit's current work. Recommendations about teaching and organisational practice in this chapter include the author's applications of the findings; they are not all separately tested interventions.

Kilpatrick's practitioner research. Robert Kilpatrick, *The business of peace-building: Redeeming the entrepreneurial spirit for reconciliation*, PhD thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2016. The thesis acknowledges the author's assistance through Circuit International. Interview design and composition: pp. 25-27, 123-127 and 251. The 31 interviews, conducted between July and November 2014, comprise 16 in Myanmar and 15 in the Armenia-related group, including two in Georgia. These are selected practitioner accounts, not a representative survey of recipients.

Faith, compassion and motivation: pp. 176-180 and 199-208. Communities influencing organisations: pp. 209-217, especially 210 and 214. Limits: p. 34 and pp. 249-253. The separate survey component involved 500 Armenian World Vision programme participants in 2013-2014, compared with Armenian European Values Study data from 2008; see pp. 15, 121, 152-160 and 235. The comparison does not establish causation and supplies no measured Circuit or Myanmar programme effect.

9 · Communities Shaping Their Own Future

Choice and participation. Naila Kabeer, *The Conditions and Consequences of Choice: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*, UNRISD Discussion Paper 108, 1999, pp. 2-4 and 30-31, distinguishes resources, agency and achievements. See also Mansuri and Rao, *Localizing Development*, cited under Chapter Three. These

conceptual and institutional discussions guide questions rather than certify a programme's performance. Kabeer.

Sierra Leone's GoBifo programme. Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster and Edward Miguel, "Reshaping Institutions: Evidence on Aid Impacts Using a Preanalysis Plan", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127, no. 4 (2012), pp. 1755-1812. The selected design and results discussion used the June 2012 author manuscript, pp. 1-7. Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster, Edward Miguel and Maarten Voors, "Long-Run Effects of Aid: Forecasts and Evidence from Sierra Leone", *Economic Journal* 133, no. 652 (2023), pp. 1348-1370; the October 2022 manuscript, pp. 1-8, informed the research edition. Further facilitation and nonrandom additional grants formed part of the intervening history, so the follow-up is not a pure test after all support ended. Initial study; follow-up.

Trafficking framework. United Nations, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, adopted 15 November 2000. Article 3 contains the definition and the distinct rule for children; Article 9 concerns prevention. The chapter describes this international framework, not the current implementation of every domestic law. Protocol.

Vulnerability and exploitation. World Bank and International Organization for Migration, *Economic Shocks and Human Trafficking Risks: Evidence from IOM's Victims of Human Trafficking Database, 2022*, pp. vii-viii, 11-13, 23-24 and 29, discusses selected administrative cases and observational comparisons. OHCHR, *Online Scam Operations and Trafficking into Forced Criminality in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for a Human Rights Response*, August 2023, introduction, evidentiary approach and victim profiles, describes recruitment including educated and professionally experienced people. Neither source establishes the number of cases prevented by Circuit. Economic shocks report; OHCHR report.

Drug-related harm and health. P. Meehan, M. Sadan, S. A. Hla, S. K. Phu and N. M. Oo, "Young People's Everyday Pathways into Drug Harms in Shan State, Myanmar", *Third World Quarterly* (2022), doi:10.1080/01436597.2022.2090923, uses forty extended interviews and life histories. Its purposive Taunggyi evidence concerns pathways and experience, not statewide prevalence. The migrant health studies cited under Chapter Two inform the discussion of barriers to care; they do not evaluate trafficking prevention. Drug-harms study.

10 · What Faithfulness Might Look Like

The closing chapter draws together the preceding argument rather than introducing a new evaluation. Its biblical references return particularly to Luke 10:25–37 and 14:12–14, Mark 10:35–45, and John 13:1–17. The comments about Bell and Kilpatrick refer to the studies and limitations described under Chapter Eight. Questions proposed for supporters and organisations are the author’s recommendations; they are not a claim that a formal assessment of Circuit has already been completed.