

Why I Would Die for South Africa

by Michelle Cantrell
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South Africa has the best rugby side in the world, the famous Big Five, fabulous weather, beautiful cities and friendly people. But it also has its darker side. It is dangerous to live in South Africa. Crime is rampant. We have the most liberal constitution in the world. We live in fear of an economic collapse like Zimbabwe's. We see all the benefits of this country-- including family ties and a rich history, but is it enough to keep us here? Why risk the safety of our family? Why gamble with the future university choices and career options of our children? Why stay?

Why Stay?

We stay because Jesus calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves. We stay because we are not here by accident and we have hope that the gospel can transform South Africa. We stay because we are convinced that a legacy of self-sacrifice and pure devotion to Christ on the front lines is the best gift we can give to our children. We stay because we are willing to die to see the gospel advance in this strategic country.

In South Africa we have more opportunities to fulfil the second greatest commandment than in any first world country. The poor are all around us, on our street corners, working in our gardens and in our kitchens. The hospitals are spilling over with AIDS sufferers and orphans. James tells us that pure and undefiled religion is to care for the orphan and widow in their distress. The poor, the orphan and the widow cannot afford to leave South Africa. They can't even afford security fences and armed response. Who will stay and fight for justice for them? "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Can We Make a Difference?

If we stay, can we make a difference? Think of what a difference William Wilberforce made as he persevered against all odds for 40 years in the British Parliament to see slavery abolished. We can make a difference. We can adopt the orphans. We can care for widows. We can develop residents associations that fight crime (ours has seen a 100% drop in crime in the past 2 years). We can educate the young so that they will vote with a Christian worldview. We can thus impact politics, crime prevention and every field of service. We can care for our aging parents, the AIDS sufferers, and the poor. The possibilities for works of mercy and justice are endless. This isn't an optional elective for Christians. It is our life to be "zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14).

I could faithfully serve Christ and the gospel in another country. But I wouldn't expect to reap the same amount of fruit as in a desperate place like Africa: "God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him." (James 2:5). People here see their need for the Great Physician. People are suffering. We have the cure that they are asking for. The gospel (a biblical worldview) is the ultimate cure for AIDS and poverty and crime. In more western countries, people are

deceptively self-sufficient and hardened to the gospel. Why not stay where the harvest is ripe and the workers are few?

The Task is Unfinished

Our Christian forefathers gave their lives to reach South Africa with the gospel, with great results. Over 70% of the population claim to be Christian. But the job is not done. Have believers been truly disciplined? Do they understand God's plan for the church, for the home, for integrity in the work place, the role of government, use of finances? They are hungry for the truth of God's Word. We have the chance to give it to them, through thriving local churches, church planting, radio ministry, schools, and countless other ministries of truth and mercy. The gospel can truly transform this country when Christians are taught to obey all that Christ commanded (Matt. 28:18-20).

Pastors and missionaries will never change a nation on their own. This only happens through grassroots godliness: model Christian homes with godly husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and faithful children; and godly business people who are salt and light in their workplaces, who serve in the church, and who finance ministry.

What About Our Children?

But what about our children? Isn't their safety and future success more important than our fruitfulness or fulfillment? Yes, our children are our first and foremost disciples. Their safety is our responsibility. But their souls are our biggest concern. Do we want to teach them to run away from trouble or to run to the battle? Do we want to teach them that life is all about how much stuff you can accumulate and how comfortable you can be, or that life is about serving others, building Christ's church, and giving up your life to find it? "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? (Mk 8:34-36).

I want my children to follow the examples of people like Jim Elliot who said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." As I think of protecting my children, I need to remember that there are other dangers beside physical ones. I would rather that they lose their lives than their souls. As they follow God and seek first His kingdom, He will provide for their needs (Matt. 6:33, Mark 10:29-31, Phil. 4:19). If they have a strong Christian character and work ethic they will not usually have trouble providing for their family wherever they live (Proverbs 10:4). I choose to stay because I don't want to rob myself or my children of crowns that they can lay at the feet of our risen Lord.

Are We Testing God?

Am I putting God to the test by staying here? When Satan tempted Jesus to throw Himself off the temple and let the angels catch Him, Jesus refused to put God to the test. If I do something foolish that requires a miracle from God to save me, then I am testing God. Or on the other hand, if I complain about the circumstances that God has put me in and demand that he deliver me, I am also testing God like the Israelites when they demanded water (Deut. 6:16, Ex. 17:1-7). But if I joyfully carry out my duties in the land

God has put me in, cultivating the ground, fighting the thorns and thistles, trusting Him to care for my family, even having to turn down amazing offers to go elsewhere, I am not testing God; I am trusting Him.

So much of God's Word encourages us to trust Him and persevere in the midst of trouble and corruption. For example, Psalm 37 is packed with such counsel:

Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him and He will do it...For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land... Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have a posterity. But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked will be cut off. But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. And the Lord helps them, and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in Him. (Psalm 37).

There is much work to be done here. So we believe that God wants us to take refuge in Him while we stay here, not to take refuge in a safer country.

Where Are You Called?

We stay because we are called to South Africa. When you are called, no promise of greater security or comfort can lure you away. You are free to enjoy all the beauties of South Africa without constantly wondering if it is time to abandon ship. How do we know that we are called to South Africa? Because this is the place where we can be most useful in God's harvest field. This is the place where our talents can best be multiplied for the Master until He returns (Matt. 25). This is the place where we find the greater blessing of giving rather than receiving (Acts 20:35). This is the place where we can raise our children to be true self-denying Christ-followers. Unless He calls us somewhere more difficult, this is where we will stay--to live and even die for South Africa. Where are you called to die?