Lessons from a Life in Burkina Faso

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[0:00] Well, when Alexandra asked me to come to Learners Exchange, she asked me when I was in the middle of traveling here and there and to Niger and to Mali and back and forth, and she said, well, just choose a topic.

And I said, well, I have no creative energy left, so you tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do that. And then she said, well, you know, lessons learned from a life in Burkina Faso so that I can talk about anything.
So this may be a little scattered and a little around. I'm just going to talk a bit about my experiences, things I've learned.
And if you want to ask a question, please do. That way I know that I'm telling you what you want to hear or what you're interested in. I've been in Burkina Faso for almost 28 years now.
If you're not sure where that is, it has been in the news more recently, unfortunately. We don't get in the news unless it's bad news, usually.
[1:06] So if you, like, you have the hump of West Africa, and it's sort of in the middle of that hump, just north of Ghana and Ivory Coast and south of the Sahara Desert.

So that just sort of situate where it is. It's landlocked. One of the poorest countries in the world. They traditionally used to say the bottom 10, but that bottom, how you measure that depends on who you talk to.
There is Internet. There are cell phones. There are schools. But it's also 90% of the population are still subsistence farmers. As Alexandra said, I'm now in a new role as a regional director for SIL in Francophone West Africa.
I'm responsible for four countries, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger, and help coordinate work in Togo Benin and Senegal.
But most of my time in Burkina was spent working in a language project, living in a small village. That was 20 years of my life in Burkina, so that's most of it.
[2:25] And when I was thinking about the lessons I've learned over the years, I was thinking that one of the things that I'm uncomfortable with often when I come home, you know, as people say, oh, you're a missionary.

You know, and the pedestal is up there. And somehow this is a special thing. And it's, you know, somehow heroic and courageous. And in some respects, it may be all of those things.
But as I was thinking about what God has taught me, there are no different lessons than what God teaches any of us wherever we are. And perhaps maybe more so in a cross-cultural context.
But what I've experienced in Burkina would be not a lot different than somebody who comes to Canada as a refugee. Same kinds of experiences, same kinds of things that God has been teaching me.
I think one of the most difficult lessons I've learned over the years was just to take one step at a time. I'm somebody that likes to know the big picture.
[3:32] I like to know where I'm going. I like to know what the steps are. My sister, who's exactly the opposite of me, jokes that if we go on a vacation together, I'll have it all mapped out.

And all she cares about is getting on the plane. But that's not how things worked.
And that's, you know, God's been sort of teaching me day by day that all I'm responsible for is today. I'm not responsible for next year, the next 10 years.
All I'm responsible for is today. And, you know, I think the most difficult thing I ever did in the last, well, going back now, 30, 36 odd years, was to quit my job in Vancouver.
And the rest of it was easy. The difficult thing was deciding to quit my job. I've always liked languages. I've studied languages in university.

[4:32] I think it's actually Jonathan and I go back to my university days at Simon Fraser. But I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with that when I finished university.

So I worked in business. I worked in accounting. I was a stockbroker. And it paid fairly well. But God was just speaking to me after a period of time that, you know, maybe it was time to consider something else.
Some of those experiences weren't, you know, earth shattering. Some of them were just difficulties in the workplace. Nothing anybody doesn't experience from time to time.
There was no voice from heaven saying, you need to apply to Wycliffe. It was just a sense that, well, maybe need to move somewhere.
So I thought, okay, I'll study at Regent for a year. Theology can't hurt. And, you know, then maybe God will show me that I can continue to work in business and support missions.
[5:40] And that'll be fine. And that's a good thing. Because if there weren't people who are working and supporting missions, I couldn't do what I'm doing.

So there's nothing second rate about that. But the courageous thing for me at that point was just opening myself up to listen to what God wanted me to do.
And it was scary leaving a salary. I mean, it was nice to have a salary. But it was just moving in that direction.
And my one year at Regent turned into four. And as I was there, I was exploring different options for working overseas.
I thought about teaching English as a second language. Excuse me. Because, again, usually you get a salary for that. And the salary is kind of nice.
[6:41] But those doors kept closing. And the one that opened was Wycliffe Bible Translators, which is a faith mission. Which meant I would be responsible for raising my own support.

I don't get a salary. All of that was kind of scary. And when I was applying to Wycliffe, there were another number of issues. And there was this long form that you had to fill out of your doctrinal statement and what you believe and backing it up from Scripture.
And, you know, it was, I was saying, well, they're never going to accept me. So why should I bother? And a good friend of mine at Regent at the time said to me, you know, do you feel God is calling you to apply to Wycliffe?
And I said, yeah. So he said, well, then it doesn't matter if they accept you or not. What matters is that you're doing what God wants you to do today. And that's advice that stuck with me over the years.
That what matters isn't the outcome or what might happen as a result of this, that, or the other thing. Although, not that it's not important to plan.
[7:56] But what matters is that I'm in tune with God and that I know what he wants me to do now and not next year or 10 years from now. And I think that's probably a good thing because if I had had any idea of everything that was ahead, I probably wouldn't have moved.

People ask me, too, about why Burkina Faso. And often people think, well, did you have a call to Burkina Faso?
And actually, no. If I had a call at all, it was sort of thinking about, okay, what gifts has God given me?
What do I know? What do I bring? What do I like and not like? I think God gives us preferences innate in ourselves.
I don't think he wants us to be miserable. So I said, well, I studied French in school, at university. I already know French.
[9:03] There's huge needs in the Francophone world. So it's really silly to go somewhere where I'm not using French. So I said, okay, I want to go somewhere where they speak French. And then I was born in Winnipeg.

I really hate Vancouver winters. I still hate Vancouver winters. Sunshine is wonderful today. So I said, send me where they speak French and it doesn't rain.
That was the extent of my call to Burkina Faso. So I've ended up on the edge of the Sahara Desert. And God's been good in that, too, because he's given me an appreciation for rain that I never had before I went there.
An appreciation for green. It's a lovely color out there, especially after months and months where it's just brown and dry and there's not seemingly a piece of green in sight.

And you have a little bit of rain. And, well, anyone who's been on a desert after it's rained, everything that was dormant starts to sprout and bloom. And it's beautiful.
[10:16] So that's how I ended up in Burkina Faso. Again, no great call, just sort of one step at a time.

And I didn't arrive in Burkina Faso knowing where I would work. I trained as a linguist, as a translator. But I didn't have a specific people group in mind or a specific place to work.
And at the time I arrived in Burkina Faso, the administration was together with Niger. So I could work in Niger as well. And we just sort of looked at a number of options.
The leadership in the area said, well, you know, these are our priorities. Would you consider these? Buamu was one of them. But the person I was going to work with at the time did not want to work in a language with tone.
It's a language like Chinese where meaning of words changes depending on the pitch of the word. She had troubles with that. So she did not want to work in a language with tone.
[11:27] Well, in West Africa, that reduces the options considerably. So we were looking at Fufulde, the language of the Fulani people, because that's not tonal.

And we went all the way across Niger to visit a team out in eastern Niger, the part of Niger where we can't go anymore, and talked to a couple there who were leaving their project and really wanted us to take it over.
And we looked at it. We were two single women. We weren't teachers. We weren't nurses. This is like almost entirely Muslim context.
So, you know, our colleagues suggested, yes, the people would have trouble imagining what we were doing. They might think we were prostitutes. The nearest missionaries, other white people in general, regardless of what they were doing, were going to be an eight-hour drive away.
And we just said to them after being there, we just don't really feel called enough to deal with this. We don't feel a strong enough call.
[12:46] And the best, another piece of advice, you know, from this source, which really held on to over the years, was Sue said to me, you have to feel called whatever you do.

She says it doesn't matter how easy or how difficult it looks. The enemy is going to find your weak points. And that's true whether I'm in Africa or in Vancouver, wherever it is.
It doesn't matter how easy or difficult it looks. You have to feel that where you are is where God wants you to be. And call isn't something incredible or fabulous or extraordinary.
It's just doing what God is asking me to do today and being who God wants me to be. And that's as true for me as it is for any of you. So, yeah, like I said, when I was thinking about what I would say, it was like, well, it's nothing extraordinary, really.
It's just this is the context that I've learned it in. But each of us, I think, needs to learn this. It's being faithful to God one day at a time.
[14:02] Not for tomorrow, not for 10 years from now, but just one day at a time. Another thing that I've learned is that God is incredibly faithful, and he knows what I really need.

He also knows what I don't need. One of the things I've learned that I don't need but I think I need is to be in control. And God's been very good at teaching me over the years that I know I don't need that.
Because he keeps putting me in situations where I'm not in control. But he's still there, and he's still faithful. Especially in my current position, the four countries are a third of the size of Canada.
And there's 250 languages spoken between those four countries. We're working directly in 40 language programs and collaborating in another 40 or so.
So, I mean, there's just the learning curve is almost vertical. And I can't be in control. There's no way other than one day, one day at a time.
[15:22] And trusting in God. But God knew, you know, as I look back over the years, he knew that I needed a sense of place wherever I was.

And he provided for that without me knowing that I needed it. Because, you know, I'm somewhat of an independent person and, you know, tend to think I can do this on my own.
But God provided a village. And I know in Africa there's a common saying, you know, that it's a village raises a child.
And I came into the situation in the Boamu language as a child. I couldn't speak the language. I couldn't communicate. You know, talk about being out of control.

Couldn't look after basic needs. And the village that I ended up in was one also that wasn't planned. When I ended up, maybe backtrack, when we ended up in Boamu after we went all the way across Niger and said, no, we didn't feel called enough to be there, it was the church leaders from the Boamu community that came into our boss in Tawaga to visit our boss and said, we need you to send somebody now.
[16:41] So he said, okay, I've got a team. Here they are. We said, okay, I guess this is where we're working. You know, and in God's sense of humor, it has one of the more complex tonal situations, which was a stretch for my partner.

But we knew where we wanted to live generally in the area because that was the dialect we wanted to learn. And there's a town, but there wasn't any place available to rent in the town.
Well, there was one place, but it was, you know, every time we went, the pastor of the church showed it to us, and every time we said no. It just would not have been appropriate.
It was like three yards off the main road, and, you know, the landlord suggested, yes, he could dig a pit toilet, and he could put it like right there next to the road.
We're sitting there like, no. And, you know, we went, made two trips, and every time they showed us the same house, and every time we said no, isn't there anything else?
[17:48] And the third trip, in a village outside of this town, a house had become available because the widow who had been living in it had died, and she had no sons, so it was vacant.

And the landlord, who was, you know, her deceased husband's brother, was willing to rent it to us. And the church wasn't so crazy about this because there was no church in the village.
The village, well, there was Christian families in the village. It wasn't a particularly Christian village. The owner of the house was the village chief, so that meant he was connected with the traditional religion.
And, but it was, we figured it was perfect for us. It was a village, small village. They only spoke Bwamu, so we would have to learn Bwamu.
And that village has been such a sense of place and belonging. And I honestly do not know if I could have stayed as long as I did without that village.
[19:02] And it's been a real gift of God. Because it's one extended family, and they adopted us. Not formally, but just for various things over the years, just saying, you're one of us.

And it was only many years after that I began to appreciate how important it was for them that we succeeded. Because, first of all, they saw it as a great honor that we had chosen to live in their village.
They didn't believe we would stay. They said other outsiders had come and lived in the village, other African outsiders, and they had never stayed.
So they believed that there were all kinds of things going on there. You know, the spiritual dimension was there as well. They believed that their spirits did not want outsiders.
And so the spirits had chased other people away. Again, we only found out about this like ten years later. So, and it was, it was just the little things.
[20:13] Like, they just sort of said, okay, you're here, you're part of us, we want you to be here. one of the elders in the church sort of became my adopted father and, you know, just sort of brought us into the family.

He was constantly amazed that we didn't know the basic things, like the first funeral in the village. Well, we need to go greet the family. Well, what's that mean and who do we greet? You know, like, well, don't other people do this?
I have difficulty with funerals in this context, much less that context. And, um, it was just a real blessing to see the love that these people had for me.
And, you know, mostly coming from believers in that village. Even though they had no idea, like, my, my adopted father couldn't speak French. So, I mean, communication was very limited in the beginning.
Um, but just love and care and wanting to look after me. And, um, the first couple weeks we were in the village, um, one woman came to visit me with her baby.
[21:23] She didn't speak a word of French and I didn't speak more than a couple words of Bois-Mau. And, um, I had been reluctant to go and visit people in the village because I couldn't communicate.

And, she came and just sat in my courtyard for half an hour and, you know, we, sort of conversation was pointing at things. What's this? And how do you, what do you name that?
But, um, it really gave me courage because I realized she was, she knew she couldn't talk to me. But, she was willing just to come and be.
And, that's another lesson I think I've learned over the years is just how important presence and being is. Um, beyond, beyond words.
Um, one of the things we did when we were first there, um, our courtyard had no trees in it and in a hot, dry climate that's, um, difficult.
[22:27] Shade is good to have. So, one of the first things we did in the spring was to go out and buy some trees. And, you know, we bought, we bought one tree, a flame tree which spreads wide and has nice red flowers and then we bought a couple mango trees, planted them in our courtyard.

The day after we planted them, I think the entire village came through our courtyard. And they would just, you know, knock at the, well, knock, clap to enter and, you know, they would greet and then they would walk around and examine all of the trees.
Um, they were a little puzzled by the flame tree because, you know, do you eat the leaves? No. Do you eat the flowers? No. Does it have fruit? No. Well, what good is it? But the mango trees, you know, they'd go around, this is good.
Okay. And this repeated itself all day. Everybody came through our courtyard and said, this is good. We had no idea why it was good. Um, and it was a little later that somebody told us, well, planting a mango tree meant that you intended to stay.
Which wasn't what we meant, we just wanted shade. But, you know, but they said, well, no one would plant a mango tree if they weren't going to eat the fruit.
[23:54] Which is, you know, again, all this unknown communication because for us we were planting the tree in our landlord's courtyard, so if we left he'd have the fruit.

But, in their culture, in their context, if you plant a fruit tree, the fruit is always yours. Forever. If the fruit belongs to the person who planted the tree.
So, the fact that we planted a mango tree meant that we definitely intended to stay because it doesn't have fruit for four or five years.
And, well, actually, we never had fruit from those mango trees because the termites kept eating the roots and we had to keep planting trees. I finally, tenth tree, I now have mangoes in that courtyard.
So, it's just, just visiting and spending time and concern. in the, in the early days when we were there, the ladies in the village came with handfuls of leaves and, um, they just plunked them all down in front of us and gave us all the names for it and that's, so you can eat this, you can't eat that, you can eat this.
[25:10] And the next day they brought another pile of leaves and said, okay, now what's that? Total failure for me. but it was, you know, again, just the concern that they wanted to make sure that we knew what we could eat, what we couldn't eat, um, what was good in the sauce and what wasn't good in the sauce.

And, um, funerals. You know, often it's just going and being present. There's nothing to say, there's nothing to do.
It's just going and sitting with the women and just sitting. Um, time, you know, much less time-oriented because what's important are the relationships and being present.
Sometimes hard from our context when we're saying, okay, we need to translate so many verses today and so many chapters and, well, there's a funeral, so, okay, work stops.
We need to go to the funeral. In the work, I think one of the things God has taught me is just how beautiful the infinite variety of his creation is.
[26:31] Every, every language brings something different. There's, there's ways of expressing things that are, are just different and, um, when we were translating Revelation, you know, people said, well, that's hard to translate.

Well, actually, it's very easy to translate because we don't know what it means, so we can just translate it. Books like the Gospels, we, we have to understand what the intent is.
But there's a lot of colors in Revelation. You think of the description of the throne and, you know, it talks about jasper and carnelian and, you know, precious and semi-precious stones, which the Jews knew had color.

Um, but Bwamu doesn't have a lot of terms for color, as is true with African languages. Um, you know, there's, you know, red, yellow, dark, light, blue, brown.
That's about it. Um, at least in terms of this is this color. So, when you're trying to say, okay, like the, the stones around the foundation, you know, they were these, these stones.
[27:52] Well, you end up saying, well, it was, you know, emerald, which is this color, and I, I can't remember them all off the top of my head, but a lot of them are the same color. So, you're sitting there with a limited vocabulary.

It doesn't sound too spectacular. But then we discovered in the process, well, you know, if we aren't translating it that way, there's actually a lot of adverbs um, that express color.
And they end up with things like, it was, it was redly like blood, or redly like fire, or, and, and it, we sort of discovered this infinite variety of expression.
And, um, in Revelation 4, what is it, 4, 3, when it's talking about the, the stones on the throne, and we were really struggling with how to do that, and one of the translators said, well, couldn't we just use, kia kia karo?
Well, what's it mean? He says, well, it means it was beautiful and colorful. I mean, we, we still had the stones in there, and what it was, but trying, rather than just saying, it was this color or that color, we were sort of saying like, well, it was, it was beautiful, and it was colorful, and, I thought, that's great.
[29:17] That's what we did. Um, you know, and one of the most enriching experiences for me was translating the Gospel of John.

um, I say translating, my colleagues, the Boamu speakers, were doing the translating. My, my role was to make sure they understood the Greek, and, um, John uses a lot of metaphor.
You know, you've got all the I am statements. Um, Boamu doesn't use a lot of metaphor. So, when we were, we were talking about this, we're saying, well, you know, if somebody said, I am the bread of life, well, they would just be insane.
Because, you know, he was a man, he can't be bread. He can't be a door. He can't be, you know, and yes, you can say he is like, you know, you can do that.
Um, but, even then, we had to think, okay, what, what does that actually mean? And I said, Revelation was easy to translate because we don't know what it means.
[30:26] John was hard because we had to think about, well, in what way is Jesus a door? In what way is Jesus truth? In what way is Jesus life? And, I grew up in a Christian home, been going to church all my life, in Canada, predominantly Christianized culture anyway.

I realized I didn't know. You know, even after my studies at Regent, you know, and sort of like, when they said, I said, well, it means he's like light.
Okay, but what does that mean? You know, and having to think about, okay, what are the qualities of light and what, in what way is Jesus light or truth?
Um, you know, for instance, for I am, I am the life, you know, we ended up translating that as, I am the source of true life. you know, sort of, well, what does it mean when he says, I am life?
Um, or I am, I am bread, well, we don't use bread in Womu because that's a luxury item, but, um, you know, I am the, I am the food that gives true life.
[31:36] Um, or truth, you know, there we say, I am the owner of truth, which means that everything that is true belongs to me. So, if it's different from what I am and what I say, it's not true.

Um, and, and that to me was just, you know, just having to think through those things for myself of what does that mean and how do I explain that to somebody else?
And, the other thing is just how, how different, everything shows a different aspect of how we see God and how we relate to God. Um, the story of the, when the visitor comes to the village and, um, there's no food, the host has no food, so he's knocking on the door to say, you know, give me some bread, I've got this stranger, I have nothing to feed him.
I tend, from my Western perspective, to see that it's because the person was really persistent that, that I finally got up and gave him food. In their cultural context, it was, well, of course he had to get up because it would have been a shame to the entire community if the visitor had been hungry.
You know, so it was, it was less a sense of seeing God as responding to somebody who's persistent and doesn't stop talking as God needing to defend his honor that it would be a shameful thing if the stranger didn't have food.

[33:05] Um, so just incredible variety. I'm still learning that it's one step at a time. I never thought I would be doing what I'm doing today when I first went to Africa.

In fact, I thought I would now be moving into a nice consultant role and working with language rather than being responsible for four countries. Um, the security situation remains challenging, which is unfortunately why we've been in the news.
We have, um, jihadists in the north. There's been kidnappings. There's places we can't go. And in other, in the south, in other areas, there was a mutiny in Ivory Coast to the soldiers just last week. Um, the political situation is not stable. And that makes us, that's brought us more and more to, to really seek God and say, okay, what is it that God wants us to do?
And there's, I said, there's 250 languages in the area. There's at least 40 or 50 definite translation needs. Some of those are in places we can't go.
[34:25] Um, there's no way we can do it all anyway. So, what is it that God wants us to do? What, what is our part in this job? There's not enough resources.

We don't have enough money. We don't have enough people. Um, so again, what is it that God's doing and how does he want us to join into it? And that, that sort of comes back to the beginning is, is seeking God every day and just say, okay, what do you want me to do today?
What, what is it that's most important for me to do today? And I'm constantly amazed at the different possibilities God opens up that we never even imagined.
Just technology. I've talked, I know I've talked to some of you in this room about just the possibilities that are there with cell phones and the internet and audio. 20 years ago, we could never have imagined this.
Um, we can share God's word through cell phones and, you know, in the village they show me how to Bluetooth on my cell phone. I, I don't know how to transfer files this way, but they can show me how to do it.
[35:42] You know, you still have little hubs and people come and they can download, you know, download onto their cell phone the entire New Testament in print and audio. They can download it off the internet.

So, we're able to reach people, speakers of these languages not only in the country with, this is the physical book in Buamu. You know, in the past it depended on people being where the book was available to buy.
But, there's millions of speakers of these languages living all over the world who are students, who are working, who are doing other things.
And this is, these are still their heart languages. No matter how well they speak English or French or whatever other language it is where they're living and working. And they can download it off the internet.
Record it. So even if they've never learned to read their own language, they can listen to it. We have apps for cell phones that put dictionaries in these languages on cell phones. Even basic primers of how to read on cell phones.
[36:51] And it's all out there and available. And so that's opening doors to go places where we physically can't go. but the doors are opening really wide.

So that's what I had to share with you this morning. Just the day by day learning and what I'm still learning. Especially being.
That's a lesson I've been slow to learn. But if you have questions. On the African culture, I heard they emphasize on water. So how that manifests is baptism by immersion is very much favored in Africa.
I can see it's a hot country so water is so appreciated because of the hot. And also not just sprinkling but baptism by immersion. Do you find it's a lot of immersion baptism or depends where?
I'd say it depends on the church that was there and the missionaries that came. In the Francophone countries, the Catholic church is the largest church. I'd say three quarters of those who identify as Christians in Burkina are Catholic and they of course don't baptize by immersion.
[38:05] No way. So I say it depends on the denominational tradition that came. Often in different initiation ceremonies, they're also very different from one culture to another.

There's not a uniformity there. But is water valued in a certain way, even though they don't be baptized by immersion, but would water be valued something a little bit more since it's a hot country, whether they baptized by immersion or not over there?

Well, water is precious because it's scarce. Oh. At least in the Sahel, where I live. But I wouldn't say that it gives it deeper meaning.
sort of what you said illustrates what I read about Africa. People are poor in material goods, but rich in relationships. People always have time for you.
Is that? Yeah. And I think coming from the West, that's something that we often communicate that we don't care because we're not willing to spend time.
[39:11] I had once somebody come and ask me for a loan in the village and I wasn't going to give them the loan and they get this whole story. I listened to it and I said, I'm really sorry, but I can't.

And they repeated the request over and over again and I couldn't figure out. I thought I was communicating quite clearly, but no wasn't being taken as an answer.
And finally, my friend who did my washing for me in the village said to him in Boamoo, she said, said exactly what I had said. And he left and I was talking to one of my co-workers the next day and saying, I don't understand, did I not say it right?
Did I not communicate? What did I do wrong? And he said, you didn't show you cared. He said, I said, was it something I shouldn't have said no to?
And he said, no, you were absolutely, no was fine, there wasn't anything wrong with that. But I didn't show that I cared. That's what I hadn't expressed verbally.
[40:29] So, yeah, my question was, well, how would you do that, but actually say to this person?

To identify more that, yes, I understand this is difficult and it must be really hard. I hadn't adequately communicated, that's a complicated grammatical sense, that I cared.
And that was why he didn't take my no for an answer. So the person that did communicate that was able to communicate your care? No, but it was the third person saying, you know, like, she said, it's time to go now.
You know, he would take it from her, but not from me. And she was an insider and I'm still an outsider. So. Maybe this is out of date, but I remember you talking before about the music on the radio.
Could you just talk a little bit about how normal scripture music worked? Yeah, well, that was another of those God things. When we first translated the Gospel of Luke, we connected with a young griot in Ouagadougou.
[41:53] Griots are traditional singers in the cultures, and they're the ones that hold the oral tradition, and they tell the history and the stories through song.

They're present at all weddings, at all funerals. Their role is really important in the culture. And this young man was a fairly new Christian, and he came from this background, and when he got hold of a copy of Luke, he said, I want to put it to music.
I want to sing it. So we thought this would take some time. It took him about two weeks. And he came back with a whole series of songs from the birth, from the nativity, through to the crucifixion and the resurrection, just telling the story in griot style.
This is how you tell stories. So he just was telling the story. And it was a mix, because he'd been in the music scene in Wagga, so it wasn't completely traditional.
It was a blend of traditional and modern styles. And so he's saying, so can we record it now?
[43:11] We didn't have any money to record it. Anyway, God provided all the means and it came together in a truly incredible way. And, you know, very professional recording.

And then because he was known in the music scene, it's like, well, you have to have a launch. So he knew DJs at the radio stations. And, you know, so we had an official launch. And he was interviewed on this radio station because he knew the DJ.
And it wasn't a Christian station. It was just a radio station. And, you know, DJ's saying, well, he wrote one was on the Lord's Prayer. So the DJ sort of says, well, who is this father you're singing about?
And so he gave his testimony on the radio station about who this father was that he was singing about. And it just struck a chord at that particular point in time where there was a desire in the country to have Burkina music and Burkina musicians rather than foreigners performing.
And it was good. So, yes, it was played on all the Christian radio stations. And it was also played on non-Christian radio stations because it was Burkina and it was good music.
[44:33] music. We had one report somebody was walking past a courtyard where there was a Muslim wedding in process and they were playing the music.

You know, because they liked the music. And I still remember one story when the translator said to me his neighbor wasn't a Christian but he listened to the cassettes we produced more over the years.
And he listened to them all the time. And, you know, he said, well, you know, the music is great and the words aren't bad. You know, we're sort of hearing like, and we've done locally a lot more traditional music.
Again, there's a number of Christian griots and so we've been able to do a lot of Christian music with Christian musicians. And because it's the way they tell stories, it's connected with people of particularly the older generation Christian, that feels much of Western church services that have come into the country are foreign, but they relate to that because that's their culture.
And so it's provided a point of contact, less so maybe on the radio stations now other than local ones, but it's still really a powerful way of communicating the gospel.
[45:55] Would you tell us a bit more about your new role please, what it means to be in charge of the whole countries? I'm still figuring that out. We have just reorganized the SIL, the partner organization of Wycliffe, who I work with in West Africa.

We've reorganized the work bringing together four separate country organizations into one administrational structure. That's basically because we don't have enough resources and we don't have enough people, so we're trying to find more efficient ways of sharing what we do have.
And so in my new role I'm responsible for coordinating the work in all four of those countries. I have a team of four country directors, one in each country, as well as a director for language program services that's coordinating all the consultant resources available to the language programs in those countries.
So we're trying to bring that together at a regional level rather than each country trying to do its own thing. So a lot of what I'm doing, I'm still trying to figure out what I'm doing, but it's more developing the strategy and using the resources as well as some basic administration day to day.
I'm still kind of weak in my team on the finance side, so I'm doing more finance than I would like to be doing long term.
[47:38] We're in the middle of budgets right now. So are all the projects Bible translations? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So there's 40 active Bible translation projects.

Some are Old Testament, some are New Testament, some are a mix of the two. We're starting now a couple new projects which will be mostly audio, oral translation, particularly of the Jesus film. Just trying to build interest in the community so if we can get that translated but they don't have, rather than spending the two years or more that's necessary to develop a writing system to have something in print, there's now strategies being developed to work with communities on an oral basis and actually translating using mother tongue speakers who can't read and write their own language but who understand the other language well enough and doing it orally and then making those recordings available.
I have a question about the translation. How do you decide, is there a prescribed order in which you always translate the Bible and does it change region by region?
There used to be. You know, it used to be you started with the Gospel of Mark because it was short. It's also one of the more difficult Gospels to translate.
[49:08] But now it depends on the context. We look in each language community what the needs are in that community. For instance, in Wamu, because there was a large Catholic presence and they were involved in the translation, while we were translating the New Testament, we also translated the Old Testament lectionary portions that they needed because they would use it right away.

In a non-Christian context, often we now start with Old Testament, particularly Genesis and Exodus, or a combination because that's, they can identify with that, particularly if it's in a Muslim context.
context. That gives a point of connection and interest in developing their language. So we're not, yes, we want to translate the Bible, but we also want to help the community develop their language and use their language in all aspects of life.
The Rio singers and storytellers, do they have recordings of the local lore? Like, has someone recorded their proverbs and stories somewhere, too?
Some of that is being done now. We didn't think of doing it, of recording the griots singing early on.

[50:36] We did collect the traditional stories and have those in print. But I think now, particularly with cell phone technology, I have this picture I took a number, a lot of years ago now, but when cell phones were really becoming prevalent and common in the village, you know, when I first arrived, we were always, we had the tape recorders, you know, cassette recorder days, and we had the cameras.

So we were the official recorders and photographers for all the weddings. But now I have this picture where I was sitting in this, in this, under this thatched roof at a wedding, and there was a thatched sort of barrier behind the pastors at the, at the front.
And you can just see those arms. Everybody's holding up a cell phone, recording the wedding. So now that that possibility is there, I know when I go to the village, I hear recordings they've made of griots and songs and things they're composing.
So it's not out there in any formal sense, but it's out there. Yeah. Have you still kept your house then?
I still have my house in the village. I haven't been there very much, but I still, still have it. That's very nice. Did they think it was bad luck when the termites ate the mango?
[52:09] They never said it was. They just sort of, they kept trying to help us try and figure out ways to stop the termites from eating the roots. But I finally have one that's successful.

What you said about symbolism, it's not only variable from culture to culture, but even in our own history. But not a lot long ago, pink was a masculine color. In fact, more masculine than blue because it focused on the strength of the color.
In other words, a clergyman wore a pink dog collar. He was making a masculine statement. Oh. I didn't know that. Pink was what he said.
A clergyman wore a pink dog collar. He was making a masculine statement. Why would pink be masculine? It's cultural.
Yeah. Because pink is a strong color and strength is associated with masculinity. Oh. Instead of, you know, little girls like pink, therefore it's feminine. Oh. Well, it's like white in some cultures is the color of mourning.
[53:17] Yes. And, you know, for us it's black is the color of mourning. The color, the meanings of color is very culturally connected.

And with black and Portuguese culture, if your brother dies, you wear black for 40 days and 40 nights. This Portuguese guy, he wore it in the summer. Mm-hmm. Whoa. I've got a question about the person who came to ask you for money.
I've heard that in Africa that's a common situation and it's sort of maybe respectful even to ask someone important for money. Is that true? I don't know, do people ask you for money regularly?
There's a sense, it depends on the relationship. Within the Boamu culture, the first year we were there was a famine year and nobody asked us for help, which surprised us because we were quite prepared to be inundated with requests and nobody asked us.
I was told that asking for help, it's a shameful thing. So they won't generally ask for help. On the other hand, as we were there longer, I got asked more because they wouldn't ask a family member.
[54:38] Well, a family member should just help. You shouldn't have to be asked. But because I was an outsider, then if I say no, it's less damaging to a relationship.

If somebody in my family asked me for help, I can't say no. First of all, they would think I should have noticed. I should have offered before they had to ask.
But, you know, if somebody asks, I can't say no. Because then that breaks the relationship and the relationship is the most important thing.
whether it's driving somebody to the hospital in the middle of the night or whatever it is. If somebody from my family asks, I can't say no. And so asking for money or asking for help is a way of building relationship.
relationship. You know, it creates a situation of reciprocity. If this is what I can do for them and they do things for me and that's what makes the relationship.
[55:48] In an employer-employee situation, it's often the sense of that if, you know, if they owe me too much money, they've got job security. Because I can't fire them.

They owe me too much money. You know, there's a sense in employment situations often, at least in my experience, where employees want to have loans because that gives them job security.

But, again, it's all having these relationships. It's having ties and reasons to keep you together. Because the worst thing that can happen to you in that context, there's no social security. There's your family, your relationships is your social security. So to be cut off from your family and to not have relationships is a really bad thing.
You know, like being a single woman in the culture, you know, that's a shameful thing. It's a shameful thing for women not to be married. Well, it's even more shameful not to have children whether or not you're married.
[56:58] But it's also shameful to not be married. So, like, when they first found out that I was single, it was a problem for them to solve. You know, it was like, well, I can help you solve this problem.

I'll marry you. So, you know, but again, it's, you know, the idea that I didn't have a relationship. I didn't have that family structure. So, you know, it's very important for them to know, like, who I'm connected with. So, I'm fascinated.
I find this really nice. And I do get your newsletters and stuff. But if people want to find out more about what Wycliffe does, is there a way of just following you or finding out more about one or what would you recommend to people interested in Wycliffe or in your mission?
Well, you can, I've got some cards of my cards if anyone's interested. You can email me. You can go on the Wycliffe Canada website. It's, friends of mine have told me it's not very user-friendly.
[58:08] It's a teen update. So, this has my contact information and the Wycliffe website information on it if anyone's interested.

Any more questions? I'm going to do the walk. Do the walk. Do the walk. I just want to thank Sharon so much for taking time. How long are you in Vancouver for? Another three months.
Another three months. So, you'll see her around St. John's. Shake her hand. Get her a coffee. Say hi. But I want to thank you so much for taking time out. And what an interesting window you've given us into Africa and Burkina Faso and into what Wycliffe does.
So, thank you so much for coming. applause Thank you.