

TIMOTHY KELLER'S PRAYER LETTER

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Smuggling for the Starving

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Under the cover of darkness, I proceeded carefully down the road to my destination in Zimbabwe. As I approached yet another roadblock, I slowed my pickup truck to a halt. I was hoping that the police officer would just wave me through as the previous roadblocks had done, but not this time. He began looking around with his flashlight. "What's this in the back?" He asked as his light shined on the bag behind my seat. I turned around to look. When I saw what he was looking at, I knew I was in trouble. The contraband was carefully concealed but the bumpy road had shifted things around. It was exposed, and I could see no way out of this mess I was now in. "Oh that's just beans," I said, pretending that it was no big deal to have 50 kg of beans in Zimbabwe. "Pull over here to the side," he responded. As I pulled to the side, about a million thoughts my mind, but not one of them was positive.



Off loading in Zimbabwe -
operation "Love Box" Successful
passed through

One wouldn't think that carrying 400 kg (880 lbs) of food could get a person into so much trouble, but in a country with a Communist dictator like Robert Mugabe, even the absurd is possible. Zimbabwe, although once a great country with vast wealth and resources, is now a complete wreck. Even the most basic necessities of life, such as food or fuel, are scarcely found.

As I drove through the countryside, I could see the many commercial farms that used to be highly productive, now only vast fields of weeds and grass. Mugabe's thugs have seized most of the farms for themselves, leaving a trail of human rights abuses in the process. Now that the farms have been taken, they are no longer producing anything. This has begun a famine that is expected to get worse than the one in Ethiopia back in the 1980's. This famine was caused deliberately by ZANU-PF (Robert Mugabe's party) to starve out their opposition, many of whom are Christians.

With many already starving, we devised a plan to help meet this need through our love box project. Love boxes are the size of a shoebox, filled with basic necessities like non-perishable food and soap. A number of churches and individuals from all over South Africa donated boxes. Getting the boxes together was a great blessing, yet delivering those boxes into the right hands would be a real witness of God's power.

There are two ways to get food into Zimbabwe to meet the needs of the people. There is the legal way, by which one can go through all the official channels with the correct paperwork, bribes etc. However, using this way, the food goes to the very government that is responsible for the famine and the people really in need are neglected. The official route doesn't actually solve anything. Then there is our way, which unfortunately is illegal. This involves smuggling the food across the border and through the many roadblocks undetected.

Either of these methods is dangerous because the country has become so lawless. A few weeks prior to my trip, an American man working for a secular NGO bringing in food through the right channels was murdered. At one of the roadblocks, he was shot and slowly bled to death, while slumped over his steering wheel. This was done in spite of the fact that he had all the correct paperwork with him for the food he was transporting. After an investigation into this matter, the conclusion reached was that he was accused of trying to drive through the roadblock. Yet witnesses who saw the incident reported no indication that an attempt to run the roadblock was ever made. We could easily have our food confiscated, be locked up, tortured or even killed for our activities. The price of compassion can be very high in Zimbabwe.

From the very outset of my first trip into the country, God's blessings were evident. With only a few tyre punctures and car problems, our trip went well. We got through the border and four roadblocks without a single

hassle. The fact that gasoline wasn't available created a logistical challenge, yet even in this, God made His provision known.

Upon arriving at our destination, we were warmly welcomed by our friends who were incredibly grateful for what God had used us to bring them. We successfully delivered 65 love boxes, numerous books, and over 10,000 Gospel booklets for distribution. I also equipped two evangelists with the Gospel Recordings tape Messengers and one pastor with an audio visual kit.

On the way out of the country, we were stopped at one of roadblocks and thoroughly harassed by the police. But by now we had delivered everything and the vehicle was empty - so we made a safe exit. In this I could see what the Lord had protected us from on the way in. This completed our first run, and now the job was half done.



Sunday morning service in Zambia

During the second mission trip into Zimbabwe things got interesting. The border and the first couple of roadblocks went fine, but when I was asked to pull to the side of the road at the last roadblock I became concerned. The policeman who asked me to pull to the side remained, while a man in civilian clothes approached my vehicle and began to interrogate me. I remember being warned by friends before entering the country that the officials dressed in civilian clothes are the worst hands to fall into. They are either CIO (Mugabe's version of the KGB) or so called "war veterans" with every kind of evil in their heart. My guess was that this guy was CIO.

After answering a few questions, I handed him a letter with my excuse for being in the country. He left and then came back. "God bless, please pray for us," he said as he handed back my letter, letting me go. I was shocked. I don't know what the Lord had done in this man's heart, but it was a miracle and I was on my way! I successfully arrived in the middle of the night to another warm welcome. We offloaded everything while it was still dark because if anyone finds out that someone has food reserves, then Mugabe's thugs come, beat everyone up and confiscate it.

While I was there, everyone had a story to tell of human rights abuses or suffering. Some of the people are feeding their children dog food because they have no other food left. When I went to the shop, there was food on the shelves, but because the inflation rate is so high (over 230%) few can afford it. In one of the shops, I saw a group of people staring in awe at a container filled with packets of milk. They were amazed to see that milk was available. However, this didn't do them any good, because they couldn't afford it. Please keep our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters in your prayers.

God's blessings were upon us in our ministry in Zambia as well. Shortly after the Zimbabwe ministry, Peter Hammond met up with us in Lusaka. Over the next week, Peter and I presented over 80 lectures, Bible Studies and sermons in four different seminars. I also trained numerous pastors and evangelists on using the Gospel Recordings messengers as well as the VCD kits. We were also able to deliver thousands of Gospel booklets to the Frontline mission base in the Eastern province. Some of these soon were being taken up in to Mozambique.

There is a great need for Muslim evangelism training and discipleship in Zambia. Mosques are being built all over Central Africa, and there is a big push for Islam in Zambia, through education and welfare programs. Lord willing, we are trusting the Lord for the resources to sponsor Christian textbooks for schools to counter the Islamic and Humanistic education currently being received.

Thank you for your continued participation through prayer and support in this opportune time.

Pro Rege,

Timothy Keller

"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in...Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." Matthew 25:36,40

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