

FORWARD TOGETHER: HOPE-FILLED STORIES FROM THE GLOBAL CHURCH

A PODCAST SERIES BY WORLD RELIEF: EPISODE 2

Matthew: Hi, everyone. This is Matthew Soerens. I am the US Director of Church Mobilization and Advocacy for World Relief. It's great to be back with you again. I am really excited about the conversation you're going to be a part of today because I have Berger Bireo joining me from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Berger has been working at World Relief DR Congo since 2013. He's also the pastor at a local church in Goma.

I'm really eager to hear from him about how the global church is moving in DR Congo, what we might be able to learn from them and how we can join them in the work they're doing. Berger, welcome. Thank you for joining me today.

Berger Bireo: Thank you very much, Matthew. It is my pleasure also to meet you and talk together. As you said, I'm a pastor of a Pentecostal church in Goma City, North Kivu Province in DRC.

Matthew: So, You're working with lots of local churches working together there, but you also are the pastor of a local church. I'm wondering if you could tell me how you ended up being called to be a pastor.

Berger: Yes, Matthew. As I said before, to be a pastor is my passion. It mean that I took decision to serve the Lord when I was 12 years old, just after the death of my father. When I lost my father, I understood that I had to have a father who could take care of me and it was in dream that I had received the call from God and I had quickly confident in a pastor from my local village who had oriented me for my spiritual growth.

I started my ministry as an evangelist at the same age. It means that at 12 years old, and when I was 31 years old, I was ordained as a pastor of my local church, a Pentecostal church, as I said, after having study in Bible theological. As you can see, my name is Berger because Berger means a shepherd. It was a prophecy of what God had or intend me as a pastor. It means that I'm a pastor, but since I was a child, my parents called me Berger. It means a shepherd. Thank you.

Matthew: Wow. I didn't know that Berger meant a shepherd, but you've had that spoken over you since a very young age. That's really amazing. One of the things, Berger, that I love about our work with World Relief is we get to interact with people from so many different parts of the global church and recognize the many things that we have to learn from each other. I'm wondering if there's something that you could think of that as a Congolese man, you have learned about God that maybe I as an American may not know or may not understand.

Berger: Yes, Matthew. As a Congolese man of God, I learned many things from God. I understood that God is a protector with the various conflicts, wars, and problem of food, security and security. I feel that existent dependings of this God who I believe from Him in faith. It's different from maybe American people because in the American people believe from God because they have peace, but for us here in Congo, we have war, we have conflict. When we see how God is protect us, this give us a faith to believe to him. This is a different that I can see.

Matthew: Wow. That's really powerful. Most of us are at least a little bit aware that Congo has gone through just a very long season of difficulty and war and conflict. What's the state of the church in Congo in the midst of all of that? Not just one local church, but the church overall in the country.

Berger: Yes. In generally, Congolese church currently face several challenges including theological interpretation of Bible, which of basis of several division because many people who call themselves servant of God are now creating churches not because they are a servant of God, but for raising money for themself. This is a big challenge in general..

Matthew: So, Here in the United States, I think that a lot of churches have gone through some significant shifts and transitions, and there's a lot of divisions among congregations and people based on maybe different denominational traditions or political persuasions. Is that something that you've experienced as a pastor in the DR Congo, and if so, how have you handled it?

Berger: Yes, Matthew. I have experience to that. It is true that, in DRC, also we have a division between congregation and people of different faith and political conviction, but personally, since I believe in the Lord, I have never changed my church. However, in the area where we work with World Relief, we have come across churches that are divided by their conviction or beliefs.

Church leaders who could not meet together, but with the teaching organized for them on integral mission, the changing of harmful belief by the truth of the Word is of God, that help the leader local church and religious denomination to build unity and the commitment for working together through the church network committee for saving the most vulnerable in their community. It means that I have experience in this, but with what we do as the World Relief staff, we try to help different churches to come to together to build unity in his part to division.

Matthew: I wonder Beja, have you ever had a time in your own life when maybe you've you were doubting God or doubted the work that he was doing through the global church?

Berger: Yes, that is very question because one day I had doubted the presence of God when I had lost all things. I lost my house, I lost my clothes and other things because of the war, but quickly, I had taken courageous by reading the word Bible, the Word of God in Isaiah 43:18, that he say that, forget about what is happened, don't keep going over

all the story, but be alerted to be present. God promised that He are going to do new things for us. This word give me courageous but I first had to doubt that in my my life.

Matthew: That's so neat to see how God uses His word to encourage us in just the way that we need in the right moment.

Berger: Yes.

Matthew: What would you say, Berger, to someone who's feeling discouraged or maybe even ready to give up on the church or on their faith in God today?

Berger: Okay. As I have experience in this, what I can do is just able to give the person who is in the same situation, to give him the same exultation that I had from God, the exultation that give-- strengthened me and to remember that God is still give promise to His people to come and to help them. It is just to beside, I have to remind him of all of the good things that God is continue to do. This is what I can say, and to encourage that person.

Matthew: That's really helpful. At World Relief, we've been talking a lot about what it means to move forward together as one body. My question for you is how can the church as a unified body move forward together? What could it look like to move forward together even in differences?

Berger: You know, for the church, as a unified body to move forward together, member of different denomination must learn to understand one another as described in Philippians 2:5-11. God's word say that pray for God to help you understand what makes others happy and unhappy in their life. We cannot move forward together if we don't have that sense to know, if I do this, my friend will be happy, and also if I do this, my friend will be unhappy.

Then the member for the different denomination must learn to work, not for their own interest, but for their interest of overflowing Jesus' model. Member of different churches should learn how to cooperate well with others and to know that cooperating well begin with valuing the person created in the image of God, listening to other people's ideas, getting to know the colleagues better, their skills and what they can do with skillr.

This is what I can say, it is mean moving forward together even if our difference is like a body, having several organs that must help each other to achieve a goal. As we have a body, the God has many parts, but all those parts have the same objective, have the same goal to achieve.

Matthew: Yes. I love that imagery from the Bible of seeing the church as one body, with every part, needing every other part. So, Last question for you, Berger, do you believe the church can change the world, and if so, why do you believe that?

Berger: You know, . In Matthew, your name is a book of Bible, Matthew 28:19, we have a comment from Jesus who say that go make disciple of all nation. It means that Jesus

or God gave that mission to the church to change the world. If the church cannot change the world, it means that the church is not doing there his mission.

Matthew: Well, thank you so much, Berger. As we end our time, I wondered if you would mind saying a prayer over us and overall who are listening.

Berger: Okay. Thank you for having time to talk together. Thank you for sisters and brothers who are listening for us and them as a requested, let us have a short prayer for closing this time. I will just pray.

Lord, thank you for the time we just spent with my friend, Matthew. I'm very happy for this time. I pray for all who are listening to us, bless each one. I pray that you can help us to become the instruments to change the world despite our difference as your words say in the Bible. I pray in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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