



SHALOM ROCKWOOD TALK: “More Questions Than Answers”

To give you a little context, I need to tell you that until last summer my family and I lived for 26 years overseas in a very fruitful, powerful, and exciting ministry serving refugees from around the world (most of whom came from Islamic cultures). Our youngest daughter’s special needs necessitated us moving back to the U.S. and we found ourselves in Portland on a team raising awareness and working toward the **prevention** of Child Sex Trafficking. Most of the “paths of prevention” are the same ones you would walk while making holistic community investment. The Lord eventually revealed that Rockwood was the community He was calling us to invest in.

Not wanting to “come to the table” with grandiose ideas and answers right away (firstly because we were ignorant, secondly because it did not seem the way of humility, and thirdly because there are servants of God—like yourselves—who have been here much longer and know much better than we do what the needs of Rockwood are), we made a commitment to spend 2014 **SERVING, LISTENING, AND LEARNING**. We are in the process of building relationships with (and trying to serve) individuals, ministries, and organizations in Rockwood. We’re asking questions and trying to listen: ***What are the strengths and weaknesses of Rockwood? What are the challenges and opportunities? What are the hopes and dreams? What are the “root” and “foundational” issues? Is there anything helpful or unique we can bring to the table?***

Personally, this has been **both** DIFFICULT and GOOD. The DIFFICULT part almost seems like a “**pruning**” process.

DIFFICULT, because while we are building a necessary foundation that is about going long and going deep (in the context of relationships) it is not necessarily exciting or dramatic. It is not the stuff of interesting newsletters (like we have been able to write the previous 26 years). The **sensational** has been **cut** out of my life in the last year. (*cut a rose off the bush*)

DIFFICULT, because while I might have a dozen GOOD ideas a day about what we **could** do in Rockwood, we need to find GOD-ideas about what **He will** do through us. **Immediacy** has been **cut** out of my life in the last year, and replaced with waiting on God. (*cut a rose off the bush*)

DIFFICULT, because I am in the context of a high learning curve where I have no pre-existing education or experience to help me speed up the transition process. My own

knowledge has been dramatically **cut** (it has become mostly irrelevant to this context).
(cut a rose off the bush)

DIFFICULT, because while I serve with the **Salvation Army**, distributing food to the hungry or sharing my testimony/preaching at a service for the elderly, or while I speak to a group from the **Center for Family Success** about the risks to their children of being trafficked into sex slavery, or while I get trained how to lead community discussion groups with the **CDC** I am not immediately seeing people come to Christ, or immediately seeing “fruit” of my labor. My evangelism opportunities seem to have been radically **cut** this year. *(cut a rose off the bush)*

DIFFICULT, because since I was in middle school I have been more focused on a “conversion model” where I have actively led many individuals to faith in Jesus. I believed that if individuals “accepted Christ”, their hearts would change and in turn their families and churches and communities would see transformation. My observations have led me to believe that is not necessarily so. I am still active in sharing Jesus with individuals and (with God’s help) will do so until the day I die, BUT...I also want to see COMMUNITIES impacted for Christ...I want to see **Isaiah 60 glory** come to all of Rockwood...NOT only to help prevent children from being trafficked into the sex industry but also in order to see health and healing and “Shalom” for everyone in Rockwood...and this requires more than traditional evangelism methods. It requires “comprehensive engagement”. It requires holistic and integrated investments that not only proclaim but also DEMONSTRATE God’s love for the WHOLE PERSON and for the WHOLE COMMUNITY. This is harder, takes longer, and requires cooperation with more people. *(cut a few roses off the bush)*

And finally...**DIFFICULT**, because while leading homeless dads in personal transformation groups at “**My Father’s House**” (a shelter for homeless families), I have become convicted of my own struggles with the “fear of man” and “fear of failure”. I used to think and say, “I have a lot of problems but fear is not one of them.” However, fear of what people think and fear of failing in potential leadership positions **are** things I **am** struggling with in these days. *What will our supporters think when we cannot fill our prayer letters with regular testimonies of Muslims coming to Christ? What will the missions committee think when they come visit and we do not have a drop-in center filled to capacity with seekers wanting to hear about Jesus? What will potential supporters think when they ask me what our plans and vision are, and I have to say that I don’t know yet? What if I take a leadership position and fail?* **(cut a couple more roses)**

But it has also been **GOOD! Good** because I know that **PRUNING** is for the purpose of eventually causing MORE fruit to be borne, both personally in me and ministerially through me. **Good** because I know that in God’s time and in God’s way, **God’s** purposes will be accomplished **in me** and **in our team, through me** and **through our team** in a way that is good for us, good for the others at the table, and good for Rockwood...and in a way that brings the most glory to God.