

Forge Podcast with Bev Kauffeldt

Pete Wooding: [00:00:07] Welcome to The Forge Leadership podcast. Last week we heard from Kendell Kauffeldt and this week we're joined by his wife Bev who is a senior program manager in Samaritan's Purse Liberia. In a very moving interview Bev shares the deep emotions of living through the Ebola crisis and not knowing whether she would live or die and how this has shaped her identity.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:30] So welcome to the Forget Leadership podcast. Today we're joined by Bev Kauffeldt. Bev works for Samaritan's Purse in Liberia and last week we listened to her husband Kendell talking about his experiences of leadership and the Ebola crisis in Liberia. Bev, welcome to the podcast.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:00:49] Thank you very much, Simon.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:50] So you're sat in Monrovia today is that right. It's a public holiday and you're speaking to us. Describe where you're speaking to us from.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:00:59] Yes it is a it is a public holiday today and I'm in the office. It's beautiful sunny and warm I spent some time in the beach today so it's just gorgeous today.

Simon Barrington: [00:01:08] It's cold here in the UK and winter and I'm feeling jealous. Hey listen what made you want to go work in Liberia in the first place.

[00:01:20] Why leave the comfort of being brought up in Canada and go and live in West Africa.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:01:26] So I've been working with Samaritan's Purse since 1999 and just really felt this is the type of work that God wanted me to do. So really it wasn't about coming to Liberia. It really was more about going overseas anywhere. I was honestly willing to go anywhere before Liberia I worked in Central and South America Africa and Asia I'd worked in Angola, Kenya, Uganda, Benin and so I worked literally everywhere and I just loved the work. And I really felt that God was, well I didn't even feel I just knew that this is what God wanted me to do. And when the opportunity came up for Kendall for Liberia again I knew a little bit about the country but it was more for me just about going overseas.

Simon Barrington: [00:02:13] What was it. What was the bug about going overseas. How did that get inside you early on.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:02:20] I think it was always there. I honestly believe that at least for me it's something that God planted in me probably you know the day I was born because I was always on the go. My mom says and growing up where I grew up in the far north of Canada in the Yukon it was very adventuresome. And roughing it was no big deal like digging my own latrine hole or you know having no electricity it never bothered me because that's how I grew up. I also was brought up by a family that is just incredibly serving within the church within their community. Always had people over always had the homeless over and I think that really influenced me a lot to be, because it became second nature. I didn't understand actually why other people didn't do it. So I think that always was there through a little bit of nurture a little bit of nature probably. And yeah I grew up as a kid in the 80s you know Ethiopian famine of course. And that's when the media really started to show other parts of the world and the struggles and the suffering of this world. And so I think that started to open my eyes as a young child and just again being brought up in the home I was brought up in my first experience overseas was with my husband Kendall who grew up in Africa very different from me and you know I remember going to Kenya in 1994 and seeing kids eating out of

garbage for the first time in my life. I was just like this is just not right. And it was more than just that oh you know social conscience thing it was a deep felt, like this is not right. Like just a moment of almost morality in a sense of like you know. And so from that point on I really believe in that that first seed that was planted when I was younger all of a sudden began to find that fertile soil and make those cracks. And then which you know in 1999 five years later it took a while and I had to be very patient and wait on the Lord having that opportunity as an intern after Hurricane Mitch to go to Honduras with SP Canada. It just everything in my internship the work that I did doing clean water Biosand filters everything you know even though I'm not a WASH person per se I was able to learn. But at the same time I also experienced a lot of hardship in just living overseas. Being carjacked at gunpoint getting sick being homesick. All those things and it just felt like God was preparing saying Your work will go well. But there's a personal price. And there always will be. And I look back at that time in all honesty as God affirming but also giving me a taste of what it would be like. Now of course I could never have imagined what the next 18 years would hold but I always look back to that point as God affirming but at the same time revealing.

Simon Barrington: [00:05:29] Isn't it incredible how God uses even our upbringing and the environment of our upbringing and to prepare us for the life of service that he's he's called us to. And what better preparation for Liberia than having no electricity and bad roads. What do you love about Liberia as a country. You've been there nearly 13 years now what have you come to love about it?

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:05:54] I was just down in our base in Fishtown in River Ghee, I think Simon you've been there and I was talking with the staff and we were talking about the elections and I say you know I know I'm not Liberian but I love this country and I love this country because the same reason I love you as my staff because there's so much potential. And if if you allow God to use that potential and if you yourself can believe that you have the potential this country could be incredible. And I think that's what I love about it the most is that there's so much potential and there's a satisfaction of personally when we're working with staff and they all of a sudden realize that they have potential and they also realize that it's OK to have potential and want to dream big because you have people behind you but more importantly you have the Lord. And for so long the people of Liberia have gone through conflict or they've been told that they're nothing or that they're a country boy or that they're just a girl child so they don't have any rights or you're not important. And I think that's what I love about Liberia the most. It's also the most frustrating thing about Liberia. But I think that's why I just I love this country is that there's so much potential and it's so exciting to see it. When it starts to move because you know that it's God.

Simon Barrington: [00:07:25] Do you spend quite a bit of your time talking to people about what the future could be like or what their future could be like and how do you go about doing that in a way that is aspirational.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:07:36] Yeah I guess it's mostly the staff that I work with. As part of the senior programs office you know I'm working with program managers, sector managers and trainers and people like that and I want them to know regardless of their position, you know they have the potential to be more with the talents and gifts that God has given them. And so I'll do different things some of them are very formal and intentional. Like I did a leadership little seminar on Fridays just for a few Fridays two groups at that time no more than 20 people be very intentional to talk about that to talk about how in leadership you first at the lead yourself and be responsible for your own actions and lead you. Before you can think about leading others. And what does that mean in a Liberian context. it means just because people say something doesn't mean you have to believe it. Whether it's an Ebola survivor or anything like that like don't let your past dictate who God wants you to be in the future. So there's lots of formal opportunities but then the informal opportunities just come you know when staff walk in the office and you start talking and you know

they have questions or anything like that. And just using those opportunities all the time to take the time for those relationships. Looking away from my computer when they're talking to me and get fully engaged and listening because I know that those will be the moments that I miss whenever I do leave Liberia.

Simon Barrington: [00:09:09] Now. Someone once said to me you know. All I need from you as a leader is your attention. I just need you to look me in the eyes and focus on me because actually nobody else does.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:09:20] Yeah very much especially nowadays with smartphones like that we're constantly holding conversations as we're scrolling down our phone and there's nothing more more rude and as leaders we need to be better examples.

Simon Barrington: [00:09:36] And what projects are you personally involved in at the moment Bev and what does your program look like and what what impact do you have in Liberia right now as Samaritan's Purse.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:09:47] Well we have a senior program manager Lisa who I think you know Simon and I'm the assistance programs manager and so I oversee anything that is funded by SP International Head Quarters or SP affiliate office. she oversees externals but everything still passes through Alisa. And so we have water sanitation projects, we have our active Fellowship's sports ministry projects, literacy. We also have our HIV AIDS program. We have I guess a big agricultural recovery Ebola recovery program and livelihoods. We have a Ebola widows protection program. We have a young girls protection program and we have our overall SGBV protection program. We have a couple health grants with UNICEF scaling up nutrition and another program that is linked with the Ministry of Health to build the capacity at the county level and we also have a couple of UNICEF grants actually one UNICEF Grant right now in protection and it's working with adolescent girls mostly but there are some adolescent boys there too.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:10:55] I'm just looking behind me at my Whiteboard with all our projects to make sure I haven't missed anything.

Simon Barrington: [00:10:59] Sounds like a huge wealth of projects you're engaged in. Which one of those really really excites you the most.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:11:07] The one that excites me the most is actually the one I missed ironically. It's what we call our SPICE program. It's our Samaritan's Purse integrated community empowerment programme and it's run by our Community Development facilitators or CDF's. I think maybe you might remember. And basically we have staff members, two staff members that oversee a cluster of communities anywhere between three to five communities and they live in one of those communities and they facilitate trainings and leadership training. We have trauma healing through the American Bible Society. Thi for Ebola or post-war trauma and we also do a discipleship and Evangelism course.

Simon Barrington: [00:11:47] What kind of change do you see happening in people through that program.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:11:53] I think the big thing is is leadership. Ironically. You know they know there are not a lot of good examples of leadership in Liberia. if I can say that and when they learn about leadership is actually about serving your people rather than people serving you. It just really just is a huge paradigm shift. That's been really exciting to hear some of the testimonials of leaders saying you know what I always thought you know my community should be doing everything for

me but I need to be more engaged with my community and taking ownership of that community. A lots of times that's in a practical way of a leader or say one of the leader of the women's group saying we're going to do a clean up day on Saturday and cleaning up their village picking up garbage whatever it may be. It could be raising money and taking charge and building a community centre for themselves or a church with no S.P. resources given. It's all of themselves. And so it all depends on your leaders. But that program also too has turned into a program where families will come to the CDF's if they're having marriage problems or if their children are gone or if there is some sort of problem or tension or fight in the village. The CDF's have really become part of the reconciliation process bringing the parties together with the leadership of the village. But as an outsider with nothing to gain from either side to reconcile and restore a lot of relationships. Unbelievable amount of testimonies of families just saying that if it wasn't for the CDF's would have kept beating my wife. I would've still been an alcoholic. You know I would have left my children. But the CDF's have shown me something different. And that means they've showed me Jesus in some way.

Simon Barrington: [00:13:53] So it must be really inspiring to see our local community level and to see leaders stepping out to serve their communities and then seeing the kind of transformation that can happen through literacy programs and clean water coming and education coming to the village. You must get bouyed by that and encouraged by that.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:14:14] Yeah definitely. I mean there are some days that that's honestly what keeps me going. Unfortunately, sometimes I get stuck in the office reading through reports and budgets and you know what it's like sometimes. And. I know we'll just kind of go you know what I need to get back up to Foya or I need to get back to the field and just see or hear and sit with my staff and hear more testimonials and instead of jusy having to read them. And I think that's definitely a huge motivator.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:14:44] Yeah lets get really practical, Bev, you know on a day to day basis. How does your faith really impact what you're doing. You know lots of people say well I read my Bible I pray. But how does your faith, where does the rubber hit the road for you in terms of your faith really impacting your day to day actions and your day to day interactions with staff and the kind of work that you are doing.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:15:06] That's a good question. I think for me where the rubber meets the road is where's my identity ? And what are my motives ? I learnt a very very tough lesson during Ebola where I thought I knew where my identity was. I thought I knew my identity was in Christ. But when everything all of a sudden is taken from you and you don't know if you'll ever get it back. That's something that you never forget. And you don't learn from that then you're a fool. And I think for me since that time there's this incredible freedom to know that first and foremost and for all I care the only thing is is that I'm the daughter of the King. And so when I'm making decisions it's not an ego thing it's not trying to prove myself it's not putting false expectations on my staff it's letting them first and foremost know that their identity is in Christ. And when you understand that and are able to grasp that again it's a daily struggle sometimes there's an absolute freedom is serving because it's not about you and if everything was taken away it doesn't matter. Because that identity can never be taken away. I think that probably unfortunately and I regret that it took me you know what my first 15 years of being overseas to really get and an incredible crisis probably the worst crisis of my life to really have that right smack in front of my face and the Lord to say where where is your identity. Is it me or is it SP Liberia. And so I think for me that has completely shifted my thought process every day with every interaction.

Simon Barrington: [00:17:01] That's incredibly powerful. You talk about freedom in what way does freedom impact you every day.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:17:07] I think that freedom impacts me every day in a sense I don't have to worry that I'm making a decision or making a wrong decision. If I'm seeking God. If I'm collaborating with my staff and we make a decision to understand that that's not going to make or break me as an employee as a person. But my success isn't going to change my identity in Christ. My identify in Christ has been set. It was set at the cross and I deserve death and hell and was given life. Whether I'm successful in my job or not. Whether I make every right decision or every wrong decision. Whether. I fail or not does not change that identity. To be able to live in that freedom takes a lot of pressure and an extreme amount of pressure. Even in regards to my future. you know lots of people will ask, well what what are Bev and Kendall doing after Liberia. When are you leaving. Sometimes, you know people just ask that and I'm just like I'm I don't know. I'm fine with that. I mean I have some ideas, but I feel complete freedom where maybe in the past I'd be a litte bit more scared. You know this is where we've been for 13 years. Even though it's a hard country to live in it's become home. And you don't want to get too comfortable per se. At the same time you want to be able to adhere to the Holy Spirit and where God's leading you.

Simon Barrington: [00:18:35] It's incredibly powerful and resonate with it strongly and although I've not been through anything to the extent of crisis that yourself and Kendell have been through in dealing with Ebola. However it is my experience that leaders who face up to the dark nights of the soul who face up to failure and actually are able to come through that with a deep sense of identity a deeper sense of who they are in God do have a remarkable freedom to be themselves. And if only we didn't have to go through those experiences. Unfortunately we're slow learners

Simon Barrington: [00:19:14] Absolutely. Now tell me about the Ebola crisis and your involvement in it. How did you first become aware that there was a problem.

Simon Barrington: [00:19:23] We had heard in March of 2014 of some cases in Guinea. And then. there was a couple of cases that came over the border of Foya where. One of them actually reaching down here to Firestone. So you know we started doing a lot of awareness. Shifted our programming to emphasize Ebola awareness. Some of us, dependents and children were evacuated just for precaution.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:19:51] And so that's how I first became aware of it when we came back in May. Everything seemed to be cleared from Liberia. For May and the majority of June I believe it was June 11 that Dr. Brantly Kent, one of our good friends called Kendell and said I think I have an Ebola patient at ELWA. From there. Things just in every, in every way that spiralled down.

Simon Barrington: [00:20:15] And what was what was the worst moment during that crisis and how did it feel.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:20:21] I don't know if I can put into words how it felt because it was so like nothing I'd ever experienced before. There there's a lot of low points to the point where I just didn't even think about how much lower we could go or I could go. I think for me there's probably a few a couple low points. Unfortunately my job as a hygienist and lead hygienist was obviously overseeing the water supply, our chlorine solutions. Making sure the waste management was taken care of the burns of our equipment and suits that had to be been disposed of in a safe fashion making sure all the buckets had chlorine in them. But also a big part of that of course is dead body management which was not something that we usually do in wash of course and not being a medical person it's not like I've been around death very often. So I think probably one of my some of my lowest points were during those times were it was my job to prepare a body to safely to protect others protect myself. But I was the last person a person saw and I was a stranger in a suit. And you just you feel for the family, you feel for them. You can see the fear the hopelessness in their eyes. And I think

some of those images will always be burned into my mind and soul. I think probably on of the lowest also too was July 26th. Liberia Independence Day when I had to get up pretty early about five or six and Dr Nathalie McDermott and myself went and took a test for Nancy and then we went to Kent's place and got his final blood test his second one that would prove to be positive and then we headed up to the unit thinking it was gonna be a quiet day because of the holiday and it was still dark. And there was an Ambulance at the confirmed side and I was at the suspect side. And I think that morning all I did was move bodies. I'd go in for almost an hour and a half come out replenish with fluids, have a packet of M&M's, get clearance from a doctor or nurse to go back and go back and move more bodies more bodies are dying now you know. Decontaminate out and just kept going and going and going. And I remember walking out once and looking at our Deputy Country Director and Joni Byker, a close friend and just being so overwhelmed. Her and John Freyler werethere from Samaritan's Purse ministry co-ordinator. I just remember saying that it's like the gates of hell in there. And I just was numb. And then to end that day Kendell had called me as I was just getting cleaned up and come. And he said. I need you and Joni to come from the office. He had just gotten a textbook about Kent's ttatus that he had Ebola. And also Nancy. So. the three of us were together and the realisation then that Kendell and had to now go face our staff and SIM Staff. Our friends our family and tell them the most devastating news that our team has ever had to hear or ever will hear. And just being in that moment was I mean yeah my heart still beats through my chest when I think about it. It just seems very surreal now looking back. At the time it was surreal in the sense of I cannot believe this is happening and then that overwhelming hopelessness and fear started to set in. Like nothing I've experienced before and pray and vow I will never feel again of being stalked by a killer and knowing that I had to go back into the unit. Knowing that in my job I had been exposed to the Ebola virus every day hours upon hours every day really hit home.

Simon Barrington: [00:24:43] What were the people who kept you going during those darkest moments.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:24:47] I think our team we're an incredible team. I think we had MSF people who even though organizationally were probably very opposite in a lot of ways but I honestly believe that God orchestrated that those specific people from MSF be with us specific people here at SP Liberia and the DART team. There's a bond that we all have that is still very strong. It's very it's very sacred. And so I think we just had a we just had to tell each other. I remember one person saying every single day He still sits on the throne. And I had to believe that. I knew if I didn't believe you know everything in me didn't want to believe that. I was done. I knew I'd be done. In every sense of the way. And so I think you just there's something when crisis hits. And you can go shoulder to shoulder with people who are willing to fight on. You can see how just the unity and camaraderie in the military is so important because that's what it felt like. And so I think it's it's our team. It's the amount of people that were praying for us over the world including obviously yourself and the UK office and all of SP. Churches and family. Complete strangers I get e-mails from and it was just it was overwhelming it was unbelievably humbling. You just knew you had to keep fighting.

Simon Barrington: [00:26:21] And yet you chose after a time out of Liberia to actually go back and serve the people of Liberia. What what was going through your mind as you were making that decision to go back and serve and re-enter and engage in and you know now being back there since 2014 for the last two three years. What was going through your mind in that in that process.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:26:44] I think for me it was very hard for me to leave at the end of July. To leave our staff I felt I was betraying them to leave even Kent and Nancy even though they were going to be evacuated. And I'm so I'm laughing because Simon you know me I've a little bit of a stubborn streak and fighter in me . I just needed to get back into that ring. I will not let this defeat me. It's kind of how y ou feel at mile twenty five in the London marathon. Everything in you and

even people are telling telling you you're crazy but you're like I'm just going to finish this. You like I'm in a pinch. And. I think to because I knew that we'd been the worst of it. And God had been so faithful. I was still very much riding that faithfulness wave of confidence that it doesn't matter what happens. I mean this is where my identity and freedom started to really sprout and I needed to be convinced even more so. I knew that convincing would only come by returning and facing and facing it again. And I came back as team leader which was very overwhelming. I think it might have been the first female team leader as SP, I'm not sure. But I just I don't think I thought what that position as much as I thought about you know being back with my team. And helping them fight. I knew everyone our national staff had been fighting so hard. I wanted them to know that I personally had not abandoned them. I wanted to come back so that they would know I have you're back. We're in this together. Let's keep pushing.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:28:35] Every night and every morning I read Psalm 91 and Ephesians 6. Outloud. I was living by myself. The only thing I could touch was but I would literally read it out loud to convince myself. Every morning. Every night.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:28:52] That's incredibly powerful. And as you now kind of look forward to the future for Liberia and your hope for the Liberian people what would that be.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:29:05] I hope for the Liberia people would be for them to really like all of us through crisis when we are completely on our knees. Don't wait for a crisis to be on your knees and turn to God and ask for help for His guidance. He is there . If we would just submit ourselves to him. That's what he wants. And. That's then you can walk in that freedom to realize that potential that he is giving us to realize his will. And my prayer would be that the Liberian people would see that and that there eyes would be open to his goodness and his love. For all they've been through. And the resilience that they have. That they would do that not only would they be an incredible country full of potential but man what a revival. What a revival you could have. In this small little country of Liberia. And that's what I would like to see. more than anything.

Simon Barrington: [00:30:07] It's an incredible hope. Bev, thank you so much for joining us today on the podcast. Thank you for being so transparent and honest about everything you've been through. And thank you for inspiring us as well. Bev, thanks so much.

Bev Kauffeldt: [00:30:27] Thank you very much Simon.

[00:30:29] Thanks for listening. Each week we bring you informative encouraging and challenging interviews with leaders around the world on issues of character integrity and identity. You can subscribe on iTunes by searching for Forge Leadership podcast by visiting www.forge-leadership.com