



FOUNDED BY JOHN STOTT

Langham
PARTNERSHIP

3 Stories of Hope

Slavko's Testimony

My name is Slavko, and I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I want to share with you three stories, three stories about hope, and I'm very excited about them.

Hope comes to a war-torn heart

The first story of hope, which I want to share with you, is the story of my life. I was born in former Yugoslavia, which was a communist country. Both my parents were communists; they were atheists, and that's how they raised me and my sister. In school, I was taught that there is no God. I even got into some problems. I got involved with organized crime in my youth age, and my life was going downhill. It looked like there was no hope for me. But when things were bad, it got even worse.

At the beginning of the 1990s, war clouds came over my country. My parents had a mixed marriage. My father was one nationality, and my mother was a different nationality. And, the war was between those two nationalities. I was supposed to join one army— to pick one to join and to fight against half of my family. Against one of my parents. Against half of myself. I was really confused and desperate, and I didn't know what to do. If there was some foreign enemy, some third country attacking us, I would know. But in that situation, I was really desperate, and I did the best thing which I could do. I prayed for the first time in my life.

I was in my early twenties. I never prayed before that. My prayer was short and simple. "God, if you exist, please help me now and show me what to do." God answered that prayer. It took me a few years and a few more answered prayers to encounter Jesus face to face, to meet Him as my Savior, and the Lord to give my life into His hands. Then, hope came into my life. And then, I fell in love with the Word of God.

The product of that first prayer was that I left the country, and I was not there during the war and during the armed conflict. When I became a Christian, I started to feel I knew that people in my country, most of them, big majority, do not know the Lord. They don't read the Word of God, and God put it on my heart to return and to go back. The problem was that I committed to myself and to my wife that I would never return. You may wonder why. Let me move to the story of my country, and still that is story without much hope.

Hope needed for a region in turmoil

If you ask people in my country, they say there is no hope in Bosnia. They did surveys among students at universities. Eighty percent of them want to leave the country and to go to the West to a better life once they graduate. There is a very high rate of corruption. There is very strong nationalism which brought war into my country. People are not reconciled even twenty years past, and it's a very, very hard situation. Of course, we Christians, we know that there is hope for Bosnia, and the hope is Jesus Christ. Hope is the Word of God will be preached and proclaimed, and that the Word of God will bring transformation into my country. And, that's why I returned to Bosnia. I was resisting God's calling, but it was pretty clear. So, twenty years ago, my wife and me, we resigned at our jobs, we packed suitcases, and we went back to Bosnia to tell people about Jesus.

There are very, very few born again Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 0.02 percent, less than one thousand among three and a half million population. You may wonder why it is that way. The history of Bosnia is very hard. We are a part of the part of the world which is called Balkan. I don't know if you know what that word means. It's combined from two Turkish words, and one means blood, the other one means honey. It's a blend of honey and blood. When we don't have war, it's pretty good. It's nice. It's beautiful. People are warm, but the problem is every generation has at least one war. We were under the Ottomans for five hundred years when the Reformation started in 1517. We were already under the Ottomans, and the Reformation didn't penetrate Bosnia until the late nineteenth century. After that, we had fifty years of communism.

Before the war in 1992, there were less than one hundred, less than one hundred born again believers in all the country, and there were zero leaders, national leaders. Then through the war, there was a miracle, and people started to turn to Christ. Today, we have up to one thousand Christians. We have around twenty national leaders; I am one of them, but our problem is that we are all, all the national leaders, are first generation Christians.

When I returned to Bosnia in 1997, I returned to my home town, Mostar, and my pastor was the oldest and most mature Christian in the whole country. He was in his mid- thirties, and he didn't have any formal theological training. I was learning from him, and . . . I had convictions for preaching of the Word of God. I had passion and compassion for the people, but I didn't have skills.

I couldn't afford academic training, not just because of finances, but because of the need for workers. We started around twenty churches, started through the war, and there was no one to shepherd them. If it takes time to go to do some training, who would take care of the churches? I was thirty-five, and I was leading one of the most influential churches in Bosnia, and that was a big problem. That's where the third story [of hope] has to step in, and that is the story of Langham.

Hope comes through Langham—and you

God was not speaking to me and I was not sharing His message to the people I was supposed to shepherd. Then, I went to a Langham seminar, and somehow at that seminar my eyes really

opened, and God really touched my heart. I was convicted that I'm not doing a good job in preaching of God's Word. I was listening this afternoon to an interview with John Stott, and he was giving lessons to the preachers. And, he said that if the Word of God is preached, then the church is flourishing. And, if the Word of God is not preached, then the church is dying. I was convinced of my responsibility to bring His Word faithfully, clearly, and relevantly to the audience. And then when we do that, then His Word is bringing transformation.

That gathering and scattering was very important. Not just that I spent five days at that seminar, and I learned a lot. But, when I got back home, there were two of us from Sarajevo, and we immediately started a Preacher's Club. That was one of the best experiences in town. All—there were not many; there were only few, unfortunately—churches in Sarajevo and preachers joined the club. There was even one guy—he was traveling two hours in one direction because there was no Preacher's Club in his town. Sermons made or prepared at that club were sermons which were bringing transformation into our town and into our country. So, I really got a passion for clear biblical preaching. And, two years later in 2010, after we completed all three levels, we started Langham Preaching Seminars in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, probably two-thirds of pastors and preachers completed Langham seminars. They brought huge ... that brought huge change, not only into how they prepared the sermons, but also how they delivered them.

In our region, great things are happening. For example, just in Croatia, our neighboring country . . . Eighty people went through seminar level one. There are only five thousand believers in Croatia. Preacher's Clubs have been started in Croatia. What change that would bring! There is hope for Croatia. There is hope for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and thank you for being part of bringing that hope not just to my country, but to my region as well.

And you are part of something big. This story, the Langham story, that's God story. That's [something] much, much bigger. And we all have to be thankful to Him that we are part of that story. What we are investing in is something eternal. It's something that will not fade. There is hope. God bless you.