

Chaotic Roads

First Person Essay

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Honk! There is no onomatopoeia to communicate the various ear-piercing honks of love and hate that I hear daily while living in Sri Lanka. Every morning I face the chaos the roads of Asia evoke when I attempt to cross the street. We are commanded to go into the “highways and hedges and compel them to come in”, but I am finding that the road I am called to walk is often dangerous, and the path is filled with uncertainty. However, I am learning that to fulfill God’s purpose I must walk in community, focus on the eternal, and be filled with confidence.

It always brightens my morning when I see the mangy street dog thinking about darting haphazardly across the street, which would almost certainly lead to its death, but instead chooses to take the lifesaving yellow crosswalk. I love big city crosswalks. When people gather, waiting and walking together, I feel I am part of a crowd. I was born and raised in the fried chicken, finger lickin’, cotton pickin’, South—a region proud of its heritage of raising up leaders, such as, Billy Graham and T. D. Jakes, that have drawn some of the largest crowds in church history. Growing up in this environment, worshiping with thousands at Forward Conference every summer and celebrating weekly in a packed youth room, encouraged me in my faith. When I was twelve, my family moved to Sri Lanka to serve as missionaries. There were certain things about that move that I could anticipate. I knew that the latte standard would not be as advanced as my favorite Starbucks drink order - a caramel, soy milk, extra whip latte. However, there was no way I could know or understand what it would be like to be the only Christian in every classroom, lunch table, and birthday party for next four years. These feelings elicited two responses in me, a deep desire to build a community where there was none and a vivid reminder

to never take the community of God for granted. I recognize that we have been created to “spur one another on toward love and good deeds” and that Christian community helps to drive us on the road toward our purpose.

When I was younger, walking the streets of my hometown, I would see well-groomed dogs with rhinestone collars being followed by their attentive owners who would quickly bag up their waste so they could dispose of it properly. If I allowed my mind to wander, the worst thing that could happen to me was getting a piece of gum stuck on the bottom of my shoe. Oh, how the times have changed! The owners of the animals roaming the streets of Sri Lanka do not follow their pets — but ride them. There is no pooper-scooper large enough to scoop up an elephant’s hefty droppings. Now, if I am distracted when walking by a turquoise and grey batik saree draped in the window of a shop, I fear that I will step in a shin-high steamy pile of dung. I have begun to recognize that my generation can be easily distracted by the newest filter on Snapchat, the mimicking meme on Instagram, or the latest fan club tweet about Zach Efron. I do not want to look up from my phone in ten years and see that one in five people are still waiting to read a Bible in their language, that 65 million girls are still not able to attend school, and that there continues to be 6,701 people groups who are still living their lives without having had a single opportunity to hear of the spectacular love of our Savior. To assure that my sights are set on the eternal and my feet are focused on the road of righteousness, I must “fix [my] eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of [my] faith.”

Every culture has its crazy customs. In my part of Asia the drivers like to fill every inch of the narrow roads attempting to squeeze into spots that even an agile gymnast could not

manipulate. Endeavoring to cross the road in Sri Lanka is like playing a game of chicken, intensely staring into the eyes of the driver looking for moments of weakness. I have noticed that Sri Lankan pedestrians secure their position in this traffic crossing game by raising their arm as if the palm of their hand has the power to stop traffic. One day, while standing at a corner summoning the courage to cross, I watched as a pony-tailed schoolgirl with red ribbons and a white uniform dress raised her petite hand, no bigger than a kitten's paw, and stopped traffic with the confidence of a president. I realized then that I would get nowhere if I waited timidly on the sidelines. To survive the chaos of the Sri Lankan roads I would have to act like I knew I belonged, walk like I knew where I was going, and speak like I had something to say. You may think that one girl on an island in the middle of the Indian Ocean is too insignificant to be part of God's plan for the salvation of the world, but I am His. He has called me and He has given me words that will bring hope to the nations. While I am learning to maneuver the Sri Lankan roads like a Mario Kart champion, my true confidence rests in the knowledge that the "Spirit God [gives] us does not make us timid but gives us power, love, and self-discipline."

Three thousand blaring bus honks later and yet I still have not perfected my road crossing techniques. Sometimes the crosswalks still seem empty when I am crossing, and I forget that I am part of something bigger. When I hear the dinging signal of a new message, I often cannot resist a distracted glance at my phone, losing focus on the critical things ahead. There are still days when a disapproving glare from a driver will send me running back to the curb doubting my power to make a difference. However, I am determined to learn how to cross the chaotic roads ahead, as I "prepare the way of the Lord and make straight paths" for His coming.