

Trusting God for the Harvest

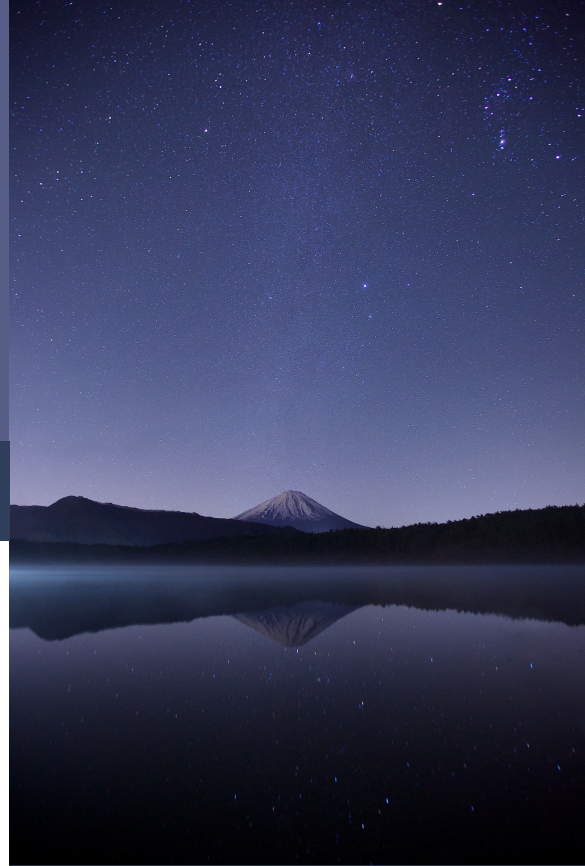
By Elizabeth Stalcup, Ph.D.

During my two-decade career as a scientist, I wanted to obey God's call to share the good news with my co-workers, a difficult task since most of my fellow scientists were atheists or, at best, agnostics. Many were shocked to discover that one of their "own" believed in the God of the Bible. But because they respected my position as a fellow researcher, most of my colleagues usually listened politely whenever I talked with them about my life in Christ.

One notable exception, however, I will never forget. I was touring the Cascade volcanoes with a group of about 40 volcanologists. The participants hailed from virtually every country that is home to active volcanoes — Italy, France, Japan, New Zealand, Russia, Great Britain and Iceland. For one week we snaked up and down mountain roads in rented minivans — from Lassen Peak in California to Crater Lake in Oregon.

One night in Oregon I sat across the table from Maurice and Katia, a French couple who were famous for filming breathtaking footage of erupting volcanoes. They circled the globe each year, traveling from one rumbling volcano to another. Their technique was simple but risky: edge as close as possible to the perilous volcano, then film the fiery show.

“My defense of my faith brought only derision;
had I failed in my effort to witness?”



During the meal our conversation turned to the subject of religion, and I mentioned that I was a Christian.

Maurice chuckled. “That’s impossible,” he said. “If you’re really a Christian, you would be working with the poor, like Mother Teresa, not studying volcanoes.”

Many years earlier, after much intense prayer, I had sensed God calling me to study volcanoes. That night in the restaurant when I shared that conviction of calling with Maurice, he snickered, then erupted into peals of laughter. Soon everyone at the table was leaning forward, listening intently to our heated conversation. While I earnestly tried to explain my faith in God, Maurice’s wide belly shook with mirth.

I was frustrated and humiliated. Maurice was laughing at everything I said. Then, to my utter horror, I burst into tears. I couldn’t believe I was crying in front of my colleagues!

Without thinking, I bolted from the table and rushed out the door of the restaurant. I took off down the road, crying so hard I could barely see. In my haste, I’d forgotten where we were. The restaurant was tucked away in the dense forest of southern Oregon. The closest sign of civilization was the hotel more than five miles down the road.

Twilight deepened into darkness as huge logging trucks sped past me, shaking the ground and drowning my cries. I marched down the road, railing at God.

I was trying to do what was right — share my faith in Jesus — and look what I got for it! I cried. Maurice’s condescending laughter was bad enough, but why did I burst out crying in front of my colleagues? I knew that some of the men in the group held low opinions of the women scientists. Now I felt I had made the situation worse, and I hadn’t done much for the gospel either.

After I had stomped down the road about half a mile, I began to calm down and finally stopped crying. *I’m not going back*, I determined. *I’ve made a complete fool of myself in front of everyone!* Besides, I was still furious with Maurice.

But I knew God wanted me to go back. I wouldn’t listen at first, but he was persistent. Eventually, I turned and headed back to the restaurant parking lot where a female colleague, who had become concerned when I did not return to the table, offered me a ride to our motel. I didn’t sleep much that night as feelings of shame and anger assailed me. I knew God had a purpose for my conflict with Maurice, but I couldn’t imagine what it was. I was so angry, but I wondered, *Is God calling me to pray for him?* Was I willing to forgive him and pray for him?

The next morning, I sheepishly forced myself to face my colleagues at breakfast. Later I found Maurice and tried to apologize. He shook his head, Katia standing at his side. “No, no,” he said, “I was wrong. Please accept my apology.”

We chatted a bit, then hugged, and hopped into the vans to continue our journey.

Every night for two years I prayed for Maurice and Katia, asking God to show them how much he loved them, how good and kind he was. But I never saw them again. Just two years after our encounter in Oregon, they were swept away while filming a fiery pyroclastic flow at a volcano in Japan. Their bodies were never found, buried in the hot, gas-filled ash.

My heart broke when I read about their deaths. After praying for them for so long, God had given me a love that was far greater than the anger I had once felt. But I had no assurance that Maurice or Katia ever came to a place of understanding the price God had paid on the cross to save them—and all of us. *How could I deal with the grief?* I wondered.

I wanted to know if they had given their lives to God. Had they cried out to God when

they saw that pyroclastic flow headed their way? I asked God to speak to my heart and give me some reassurance as to their fate, but he never did. Finally, after weeks of wrestling with God, I knew that I had to let go of my anguish and trust him. He was in control. I had to believe that he had a divine purpose for my conflict with Maurice two years before and that he had worked through my prayers. My job had been to share my faith when the opportunity arose, and I did. The responsibility for Maurice and Katia's decision did not rest with me; I had to trust God to do his part.

Who knows what joys may await me in heaven? Perhaps I was a part of God's plan to bring Maurice and Katia to Jesus. I still hope they made that choice. It's a burden I've had to lay at his feet.



Elizabeth Moll Stalcup, Ph.D. is the founder and executive director of Healing Center International, a non-profit that seeks to foster healing, maturing community throughout the DC metro area and beyond. She studied at University of California in San Diego and Santa Cruz, as well as the University of Bergen in Norway. She earned a M.S. from UC Santa Cruz and a Ph.D. from Stanford University in geology. Her dream is to see centers of healthy healing community spring up around the world. She is married to Sam Stalcup and has five adult children, including two well-loved sons-in-law and two granddaughters, Anika and Pema.