



THE MACEDONIAN CALL

RELENTLESS AND SURRENDERED FOR THE GOSPEL



DID YOU KNOW? Macedonia changed its name to North Macedonia in 2019 after a long dispute over use of the term “Macedonia” with its southern neighbor Greece.

The small, mountainous country of North Macedonia is nestled in the heart of the Balkans in Eastern Europe. In this little country is a great mixture of cultures, including Eastern European, Albanian, Turkish, and Roma. The lingering influence of the post-Soviet era and the Ottoman Empire still permeates society here. Walk down the streets during the fall, and you’re sure to smell the traditional roasted red pepper spread *ajvar* (*eye-vaar*), which people typically cook outside in large pots.

The spiritual climate of North Macedonia is also quite diverse. Although many people are nominal followers, the main religion is Eastern Orthodoxy, with young adults leaning more and more toward postmodern agnosticism. Around a third of the population identify as Muslim. Even though North Macedonia is one of the poorest countries in Europe, its people are rich in hospitality. A visit to a home in North Macedonia would not be complete

without a cup of strong Turkish coffee. The phrase that best captures the Macedonian culture is *ima vreme*, or “there’s time,” which epitomizes the culture’s relaxed pace.

THE WILLIAMS FAMILY

International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries have been serving in North Macedonia for more than two decades. One couple, Jeff and Amy Williams, have served in North Macedonia for more than 15 years. The Williamses, along with their children Maggie (age 12) and Kaleb (age 11), live in the capital city of Skopje (*SKOW-pee-uh*). Some of their work consists of humanitarian projects, but they spend most of their time sharing the gospel and starting Bible studies. “My husband and I work together a fair amount to reach out to whole families through various ways,” Amy said. “We are with the people, and we love the people God has called us to.”

Amy teaches character classes to children that include science experiments, Bible stories with a related craft, and a snack. At the suggestion of one of the Williamses' national partners, they started these classes, known as Kids of Integrity, a few years ago in an outreach center. The success of these classes has led to marriage retreats for the parents, along with marriage Bible studies and family camps.

"The moms especially are present when there is an event or class for the children. We try to have a topic for them to discuss that leads to spiritual conversations and sharing the gospel. A moms' club has developed out of the kids' classes," Amy said.

The Williamses' children also help with the character classes and family camps, and Kaleb said they could use even more help. "Sometimes I pray more people would come to work with us in North Macedonia," he said.

The Williamses consistently pray for more people to attend the Bible studies, understand the gospel, and be gathered into healthy churches. Maggie said for her "it is sad . . . to see when Macedonians follow traditions but they really don't know Jesus or have a relationship with Him." Having grown up in North Macedonia her whole life, Maggie's insight into the culture is spot on.

Amy said many people there "are so tied up in their religious traditions that they are blind to their need for a Savior."

One way the Williamses have been able to meet tangible and spiritual needs at the same time is through a seed project. The country of North Macedonia is composed of many small villages. At times, the family has been able to go door-to-door in these villages to pass out vegetable seed packages with an explanation of the parable of the sower. Besides providing food for villagers, this seed project opens the door for the Williamses and other IMB workers to meet people and share the gospel.

THE KIRKPATRICK FAMILY

Another couple, Kyle and Jackie Kirkpatrick, has served with the IMB in North Macedonia for more than 25 years. After many years of living in the capital, the Kirkpatricks relocated to a small town called Prilep (*PREE-lep*), where they have ministered to their fellow residents for the past several years. They have three grown children—Bekah, Josh, and Daniel—who also grew up in North Macedonia.

Kyle spends much of his time helping believers grow in their understanding of the Bible and teaching them how to share their faith. "I most enjoy teaching the Bible," he said. "It is great to see someone's eyes light up when they understand a truth about God or about all that Jesus has done for them."

Talking about Jesus or the Bible is not always a popular topic in this former socialist country. Most people would

rather talk about their desire to find a new job or discuss politics than enter into a conversation about Jesus. Even though religion is not a popular subject, the Kirkpatricks are quick to talk about Jesus and intentionally bring the gospel into every relationship possible.

"I have a fear of seeming foolish when I share the gospel," Kyle admits. "There are times people just laugh at the idea of Jesus dying 2,000 years ago and that making a difference in their lives today." To combat his fear, Kyle rests on God's Word, using verses like Romans 1:16 to remain relentless and unashamed in sharing the gospel's timeless truths.

Jackie spends her time visiting friends and neighbors or inviting them into her home. "I share the gospel with friends and show them what it means to truly believe the Bible and how to deal with various situations based on what the Bible teaches," she said. "Most [people] do not think the Bible has anything relevant to say for today's world."

She often takes the time to show people verses in the Bible so they can read it for themselves and hopefully become more comfortable interacting with Scripture. In a place like North Macedonia, people think engaging with God's Word is reserved for priests and other holy people. They don't realize they can read and understand the Bible for themselves.

Jackie also works with women in her church to encourage them to grow in their faith and invest in others. At times, she joins these women on visits to unbelievers, where they work together to bring conversations around to Jesus.

Another practical way the Kirkpatricks minister to people is through organizing English as a Foreign Language classes to improve people's job skills. They utilize volunteers to help teach these classes and to make connections with local kindergartens to build playground equipment. Missionaries need the parents' permission to share the gospel with children since outright evangelism to children is not allowed. But building a good reputation for helping the community in tangible ways can open doors and help people become more open to hearing the good news of Jesus.

GOD IS WORKING IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The Williamses and Kirkpatricks see the Lord working in the lives of people in North Macedonia. After many years of sharing the gospel and ministering to a woman in the small town where they once lived, the Williamses witnessed her decision to follow Jesus. Now her father is a follower of Jesus, and other people have heard the gospel as well. The Kirkpatricks work with a baker named Alexander, who became a Christian about five years ago. The change Christ made in his life caused him to go from baking bread for

people to eat to sharing the Bread of Life with those around him. He gives generously to the poor and teaches in his local church, where the Kirkpatricks also attend.

SURRENDERED TO GOD'S CALL

God has used different people and circumstances to lead these two families to serve Christ overseas. Kyle Kirkpatrick grew up as a missionary kid in Kenya, where he helped his parents in different church plants. Jeff Williams grew up participating in Royal Ambassadors, his first exposure to missions. Both Jackie and Amy felt the Lord's calling to serve overseas while attending missions conferences in their college years. Jeff and Amy both worked for World Relief in the United States prior to serving in North Macedonia. Their experience with World Relief proved beneficial when refugees were passing through North Macedonia on their way to other European countries.

Complete surrender helps to keep the Kirkpatricks and Williamses relentless in serving Christ. This act of surrender has guided Amy to root her identity in who she is in Christ and not in what she can do for God. Meditating on Colossians 1:15-20 turns Jackie's focus to worshipping Jesus when she's tempted to put the focus on herself.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for the Kirkpatricks, the Williamses, and the country of North Macedonia. Join these families in praying for three women who are more open to studying the Bible with Amy. Lift up a combined effort with other Great

Commission Christians to use an online platform for sharing the gospel and making disciples. Pray God would strengthen and grow the churches in North Macedonia and establish new ones. The Kirkpatricks ask for prayer for several people who have professed faith in Christ but are afraid to be baptized because of what others might think. Pray God would raise up more men to share in preaching and teaching and for outreach opportunities at a small college in their town.

MAKE AN IMPACT

You impact countries like North Macedonia with the gospel when you give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (LMCO) and the Cooperative Program. Through your gifts to the LMCO, these two families can strengthen new believers in their faith, share the gospel with the lost, and minister to people in their homes or at the center where they host Kids of Integrity classes.

IMB workers are also finding creative ways to use their talents to support the spread of the gospel where they live. In late 2020, Amy wrote and illustrated a children's book, *Throwing Seeds*, which is based on the parable of the sower in Luke 8. The book is available for purchase on Amazon. All proceeds go to fund IMB gospel projects in North Macedonia and its neighbor, Albania. Read more about the specific project to reach every home in North Macedonia with the gospel at imb.org/give/project/reach-macedonia-every-city-town-and-village.

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**Name changed.*



The Balkans: The Macedonian Call

By Karen Pilgreen



FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

1. On a table, display items common to North Macedonia, such as: vanilla, cloves, sapphires, coffee, shrimp, and rice. Cut out eight pieces of paper in the shape of hearts. On four of the hearts, write the names of different cultural influences in North Macedonia: *Eastern European, Albanian, Turkish, and Roma*. On two of the hearts, write the Macedonian religious influences: *Eastern Orthodoxy, Agnosticism, and Islam*. On the last heart shape, write *ima vreme* (there's time). Attach the hearts to a bulletin board or wall.
2. Display a map of North Macedonia. Locate Skopje and Prilep, and draw a circle around each one. Write the name of the missionary family who ministers in each city. Using the first two paragraphs of the mission study, introduce North Macedonia to the group.
3. Split into two equal groups. The first group will review and

present details from the Williamses' family's story, including: how they answered God's call to missions, their ministry initiatives, and how their children help. The second group will review and present details from the Kirkpatrick family's story, including: how they answered God's call to missions, the practical ways Kyle and Jackie share the gospel, and how Kyle uses Romans 1:16 in his work.

4. Lead discussion on what it means to find our identity in who we *are* in Christ, and not in what we can *do* for Him.
5. Ask a volunteer to read Colossians 1:15–20. As a group, go through the passage verse by verse and discuss what each of these attributes of Christ means.
6. Make a list of the missionaries' prayer needs as found in the article. Discuss how your group can support North Macedonian ministries.



FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Find a map of North Macedonia and gather some of the Macedonian items listed in Step 1 of group study for display.
2. Give a short summary of the Williamses' and Kirkpatricks' stories and what they do in North Macedonia, especially focusing on their children. Ask: *What is an MK (missionary kid)?* Explain that MKs are also kid missionaries. Ask: *How can you be a kid missionary?*
3. Discuss what it means to find your identity in Christ. Read Colossians 1:15–20 and have each family member call out Christ's attributes as listed in these verses.
4. Read Romans 1:16. Guide family to memorize the verse. Define "relentless." Ask: *How can our family be relentless in sharing the gospel?* Plan a day for your family to volunteer with a local ministry.
5. Ask: *What can we do to help the missionaries in North Macedonia?*
6. Write down the Williamses' and Kirkpatricks' prayer requests and attach them to a prominent wall in your home. Pray together for each one, and use the list as a reminder to pray for these families every day.



FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. In a notebook or journal, write or tape pictures of the North Macedonian items listed in Step 1 of the group study. List the different cultures and religions within North Macedonia. Write down the names of the two missionary families.
2. Find a map of North Macedonia and circle Skopje and Prilep.
3. Read the mission study article, and write down what stands out to you about Jeff and Amy Williams and Kyle and Jackie Kirkpatrick. What do you see as important in their ministries?

4. Read Romans 1:16 in several translations, and write it in your notebook. Find and write down the definition of *relentless*. Consider the ways you could be relentless in your witness.
5. Read Colossians 1:15–20. Consider Christ's attributes listed here and why these verses help Amy Williams focus more on *who* Christ is and less on what she *does*.
6. Write the missionaries' prayer requests in your journal. Pray over them each day. Follow the link at the end of the article for more ways to support missions work in North Macedonia.