



LOOKING PAST THE LANDMARKS

CROWNOVER FAMILY SEEKS TO REVITALIZE THE CHURCH IN NORTH GERMANY.



For many, Europe is a tourist destination—a place to travel for a couple weeks' vacation, then return home with memories of good food and pictures of famous landmarks. But for Arc and Rachel Crowover and their four children, Uriah, Noa, Hananiah, and Malachi, it is home. For eight years, the Crownovers have served as church planters in Germany, first in Hamburg, now in Bremen.

The key in their ministry, the Crownovers said, is getting people to look beyond Germany's landmarks and tourist attractions to see the lostness in the area.

"If you were to come to Bremen as a tourist, you would see a beautiful city with great culture and atmosphere," Arc said. "But if you were to stay and live among the people, you would learn their values and see how different they are."

In North Germany, only 1 out of 100 people are Christians. Atheism is the most predominant religious affiliation.

"We were told the lostness statistics for North Germany, but the experience was the only thing that could make it sink in," Arc said.

THE CROWNOVERS' WORK BEGINS

Before moving to North Germany, Arc and Rachel met while studying at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Both participated in short-term missions, Arc through trips with his church and Rachel through a six-month trip to East Asia. For Arc, God's leading to North Germany became clear when he attended missions week at Southwestern. He spoke with Cevin, the team leader at the time for North Germany, who informed him about the lostness in Germany.

"I left that conversation thinking, *If there is something we can do, we have to go and help*," Arc said.

While God used Cevin in Arc's life to draw him to North Germany, Rachel's missions journey began with

serving in East Asia for six months. She and Arc were dating at the time, and as their relationship grew, so did Rachel's heart for missions. During her time in East Asia, Rachel began to see the benefit of doing missions as a couple. She participated in an "English Corner" where she and her roommate shared the gospel with both men and women.

"Before this experience, I was very confident that I could remain single and be a missionary on my own," Rachel said. "Yet there were simply moments where I wished a guy could spend time with these lost men we came in contact with."

Eventually Arc and Rachel married and God led them to North Germany to begin their work as church planters.

The Crownovers first lived in Hamburg, the second-largest city in Germany. Nearly two million people call the city home. During the beginning of their ministry there, the Crownovers focused on learning the language and using hobbies like rock climbing and board games to build relationships with others.

"We learned that if you want to do ministry or outreach, get a hobby," Arc said. "There is nothing like a shared passion that can bring people together and allow you the opportunity to share the gospel."

CHURCH PLANTING IN DAS VIERTEL

The Crownovers moved to Bremen in March 2019 after serving in Hamburg for more than three-and-a-half years.

The city center of Bremen is home to nearly 600,000 people. The Crownovers planted a church in an area of the city called *Das Viertel*, which means "the quarter."

Das Viertel is known for being the center of the arts in Bremen—a place with theaters, art museums, dance classes, and locally owned shops. Arc said it is a neighborhood where people pride themselves in forward thinking and accepting all lifestyles.

To plant the church, Arc and Rachel worked with a national partner to ensure long-term growth. The church began as a Bible study and grew to a house church. Now the church meets once a week in a music school.

Those who call the church in Das Viertel home are young professionals, college students, and young families. In addition to Bremen locals, some church members come from Brazil, the United States, Korea, and South Africa.

In addition to church planting, Arc and Rachel focus on sharing the gospel with friends and training existing churches to share the gospel effectively and intentionally.

The church plant has sparked opportunities for gospel conversations with people the Crownovers meet in their day-to-day activities. For instance, Arc saw God change the life of Patric, a man he met on a train one day.

"He was interested in what I do and wanted to visit our church when we had one," Arc said. "So a year later when we started the church plant, I invited him and he came. Four months later, he became a Christian, went home, and shared the gospel with his wife. She, too, became a believer."

Through the church plant, Arc also met Andre, who wanted to become more active in sharing his faith.

"We have been doing discipleship together for over a year now, and he is becoming more and more bold with sharing the gospel," Arc said.

CHALLENGES THAT LEAD TO STEPS TOWARD JESUS

Whether through church planting, evangelism or discipleship, the Crownovers' goal in all their work is to revitalize the church in North Germany. With that goal comes obstacles both in church planting and in their personal lives.

One challenge is the state of the church at large in Germany. Many churches are closing faster than new ones can be planted due to financial struggles. And the growing population poses its own challenges.

"The new neighborhood where we have decided to focus our efforts could have 50 new churches built there, and that still wouldn't be enough to reach the population," Arc said.

Sometimes it's the people they are trying to reach or the local church leaders who make church planting difficult.

"The people here feel they are doing just fine without Jesus. Local church leaders can be very wary of us thinking we want to come in and tell them how things should be done," Rachel said. "Missions requires a lot of patience for learning the language and gaining the trust of locals."

Another challenge in the Crownovers' ministry is surrendering control of all that happens to God.

"In our Christian lives, it is so important to remember we are sent to share the gospel with those we come into contact with," Arc said. "But the hardest part of evangelism for me is that their belief isn't in my control. I often have to remind myself that I can pray for people, [and] I can share the gospel with them, but only God can change their hearts."

This challenge is evident to Arc in his relationship with his friend Stephan. Stephan is an atheist with whom Arc meets weekly to play board games. Often their conversation ends up centering on Arc's faith. Arc said he doubted Stephan would ever become a believer because of how set in his views Stephan was.

But God caught Arc by surprise one day when he was leaving Stephan's house, and Stephan said he'd pray for Arc for a medical procedure he was having.

“He said he still does not believe, but he would try out prayer by praying for me,” Arc said.

Relationships like this one illustrate what Arc said is the hardest part of evangelism—the reality that whether or not the person with whom he’s sharing believes is out of his control.

“I have learned and am learning to let go of my preferred timeline, to be willing to have as many conversations and [as much] patience as it takes,” he said.

In learning to sacrifice his control and his timeline for seeing people come to faith, Arc has found joy. He said that to him, both the small and big moments of ministry are worth it and deserve to be celebrated.

“The joy for me comes simply when I see our friends here take steps closer to Jesus. It’s the whole reason we came here, to see people saved by Jesus,” Arc said. “But we have learned to celebrate the baby steps as well. We celebrate when our friends are curious and ask more questions about our beliefs.”

“We worship God in prayer and song as a family both when we see God do big things and when we are seeing little to no progress.”

Like many missionary families, the Crownovers have sacrificed a stable life in the United States in response to their calling to the missions field. They’ve had to trust God to provide for their family in North Germany and to equip them for their work.

In this season of their lives, Arc and Rachel’s work is simply to obey God. “More than anything, we have grown in this through our time serving in Germany,” Arc said. “God asks us to go in obedience and share the gospel, but He is the one who changes hearts. Jesus is the one who saves, not Arc and Rachel; we are simply messengers.”

PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for Arc and Rachel and their children as they continue to serve in North Germany through evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. Pray for wisdom as they seek partners to help plant another church in a new neighborhood. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with their friends and neighbors.

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Germany: Looking Past the Landmarks



FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

BEFORE THE SESSION: Create a display of board games, books on Germany, or a map of Germany for group members to look at as they enter the room.

1. Ask participants to share what they might see on a visit to Germany. Talk about the lostness of the people in North Germany as described by Arc in the article.
2. Explain how the Crownovers use board games to reach people with the gospel.
3. Discuss the benefit of doing missions as a couple as Rachel shared in the section, "The Crownovers' Work Begins."
4. Share some of the challenges Arc and Rachel face in their ministry with the group and discuss ways to help the Crownover family as well as other missionaries.
5. Ask group members to take turns reading the following verses and discuss how these Scriptures can provide daily encouragement to the Crownovers:
 - Galatians 5:13
 - Philippians 4:19
 - Psalm 37:3
 - Psalm 37:5
 - Psalm 37:34a
6. Share the Crownovers' prayer requests and take time to pray for them, their ministry, and the people of North Germany.



FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Gather the family for a German-inspired meal (Bratwurst or hotdogs and sauerkraut, etc). Afterwards, read or watch a video of *The Bremen Town Musicians*, a famous German fairy tale, or play a favorite board game.
2. Say: *We are beginning with a fairy tale about the town in Germany where the Crownover family lives. Alternative: We are playing a game like one the Crownover family in Germany uses to share the gospel.*
3. Read Philippians 4:19 aloud. Say: *This is an important Bible verse to pray over missionaries like the Crownovers. Then, ask family members to share what they think is the message of this verse.*
4. Discuss the way Arc and Rachel Crownover play games and use other hobbies to share Jesus with others. Ask: *How can you use your hobby to tell others about Jesus?*
5. Arrange a time to invite another family or two to play board games or to participate in a hobby. Provide a simple meal during this gathering, maybe even a German one.
6. End your family study time by praying for the Crownovers and the needs they shared in the article.



FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Take a few moments to search the internet for images of Germany's famous landmarks and the towns of Hamburg and Bremen.
2. Read about the Crownovers and their ministry in Germany. Notice the way they build relationships with others.
3. Read Psalm 37. Write down verses from this passage that encourage you just as they might encourage the Crownovers.
4. Consider ways you could help or encourage the Crownovers and other missionary families in their ministry.
5. Consider hosting a game night in your home with neighborhood friends and acquaintances. Provide refreshments and use this opportunity to build relationships and teach others about Christ and His work in your life.
6. Pray Arc and Rachel Crownover would be encouraged in their work, and that God would give them the wisdom they're seeking.