

Breaking the yoke of oppression:

software development with Kingdom intent

Forsaking a lucrative career in software development and project management at a leading technology company, Karl Pritchard pursued a missionary calling to share his skills with students in East Africa. Whilst working in Uganda, he also became involved in the work of FiftyEight, a charity that seeks to identify and address human exploitation in global supply chains. This article is based on an interview with Karl, writes Peter Warburton.

Can compassionate software, that is, software bearing witness to the light of God's mercy and righteousness and written to be freely accessible to vulnerable and isolated individuals on their mobile phone, change the world? Karl Pritchard's answer is 'yes', and I am inclined to agree. By a circuitous and highly personal route, God prepared Karl to be a very particular kind of missionary – not a pastor, an evangelist or a medic – imparting his life skills and experience in a parched land and giving his time to the development of a mobile application that is transforming the lives of migrant workers and waging war on modern-day slavery.

Karl was not raised in a Christian home, although he had grandparents who were church founders. He recalls, as a 7-year-old, a reading card about missionaries which captured his imagination and made a lasting impression on him. Finding faith in his early twenties, he was strongly committed to workplace evangelism, gathering kindred souls and praying in God's Kingdom in his place of work.

Karl's early education and training launched his career in computer science, engineering and software development. His success was founded in a passionate commitment to delivering efficient and effective outcomes for the projects he managed at Xerox and Intel, his mastery of LEAN and AGILE methods culminating in the achievement of a Six-Sigma black belt. You may be wondering "how

does a ruthless ambition to create value, eliminate waste and duplication, squeeze the most out of a team/workforce and meet the tightest of deadlines and the most demanding of targets prepare someone for Christian ministry and mission?"

The burden of God's calling in Karl's life led him to quit a well-paying, satisfying job in his mid-forties to discover the Kingdom work that he was set apart to do. After a frustrating period of waiting, closed doors and rejected applications, he was accepted on to a Discipleship Training Course at Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. When he finished the course at the end of 2013, he was none the wiser in terms of his distinctive calling. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, he was approached through YWAM connections and invited to apply his project management skills in Uganda, as part of the Refactory Academy (<https://refactory.academy/about-us/>). This was a collaboration between YWAM, Clarke International University, Laboremus Uganda Ltd and Fontes Foundation.

After he was appointed professor of LEAN and AGILE at Clarke International University in Kampala, Uganda in 2014, he developed a course that would empower young Ugandans with state-of-the-art coding and programming skills. He devised a syllabus from scratch for a Certificate in Programming and taught two-thirds of the course himself. The course combined classroom learning with industrial placements. Graduates

enjoyed early success in finding worthwhile employment and today the Academy boasts a placement rate of 91%. Since 2019, Refactory has enjoyed funding support from NORAD, the Norwegian Relief Agency, and the Mastercard Foundation, among others. Today, in addition to the original Certificate, which provides a grounding in JavaScript and Python, there is a boot camp (software apprenticeship), a foundation course for school leavers, an AI course and a data science course. Refactory has trained over 620 software developers and impacted a further 1000 individuals through its outreach.

It was in Kampala, in 2018, that Karl encountered a small UK charity called FiftyEight (<https://fiftyeight.io/>), and joined them as a volunteer. FiftyEight was formed in 2014 by Quintin and Angela Lake, and named after the challenge to pursue justice and break the yoke of oppression in Isaiah 58. FiftyEight partners with businesses, academia, government and civil society to identify and address the exploitation of (mostly migrant) workers in supply chains, raising the bar for global working conditions. FiftyEight combines innovative legal research with technological solutions to address human exploitation, including child labour.

After volunteering at FiftyEight for more than a year, he began to question how much longer he could commit time to the organisation as he was short of paid work. But then, one afternoon in 2019, Karl was teaching a session at Clarke



International University in Kampala, when he noticed from the window of the university block what looked like a parade of young people, smartly dressed, with smiling faces, all heading along Kalungi Road, one the main thoroughfares of the city. He was curious to know where they were going and what was the occasion? He learnt that they were heading to a large job fair, that some major Middle Eastern employers were in town and were looking to hire hundreds of young people to work in their companies. These talented young men and women were eager to develop their skills, excited at the prospect of working in a rich country and hoping to earn good money that they would share with their families back home.

Working for FiftyEight, his eyes had been opened to the stark reality: in many cases, the young people lured by these exciting job offers discovered something very different on arrival in the foreign country. The job that they thought was theirs had already been filled. Others were put to menial tasks, rather than the professional roles that they had applied to do. Still others worked hard but for a pittance. They were told that their African qualifications were unacceptable, and they would need to re-certify. To do so, they must go into debt for the cost of the training course. Horror stories of organ harvesting and sexual exploitation circulated. Worst of all, some young men and women disappeared, feared

dead. There and then, Karl determined that he would continue to offer his time freely to FiftyEight; soon after he was offered an income!

In 2019, FiftyEight launched Just Good Work (<https://justgood.work/>), a mobile application for migrant workers travelling from Kenya to Qatar, prior to Qatar's hosting of the football World Cup in 2022. In 2022, Just Good Work received the backing of all major supermarkets as the primary worker rights information source for all seasonal workers entering the UK.

Using his software development skills, Karl has assisted FiftyEight in expanding its scope to 46 migrant worker routes, including Bangladesh to Malaysia's rag trade, tuna fishing, and Mexican workers in the US. As businesses take corporate social responsibility more seriously and many large international companies are subject to supply chain audits, they are keen to partner with FiftyEight as part of their process. Enabling isolated workers to understand their basic employment and human rights, and to report abuses, has triggered countless legal cases against exploitative employers. In extreme cases, exploited workers have been successfully extracted from dangerous situations and brought home.


Karl's journey brings to mind a book by Watchman Nee (Nee To-sheng of Foochow), the respected Chinese author, entitled *What shall this man*

do? Nee reminds us that the calling of God is a distinctive calling, that his commissioning is always personal. "It was the good pleasure of God", says the apostle Paul, "to reveal his Son in me." (Philippians 2:13) "When God commits to you or I a ministry, he does so not merely to occupy us in His service, but always to accomplish through each of us something definite toward the attaining of His goal. God's charge represents, and must always represent, a personal trust." "As the Lord of all operations, God retains the right to use particular forms of discipline or training, and sometimes the added test of suffering, as means to his end. For His goal is a ministry that is not merely common or general, but rather, one specially designed to the service of his people in a given hour."

Karl's story calls to mind two challenging biblical passages:

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ... If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." Isaiah 58:6, 9a-10.

"But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is the light that makes everything visible."

Ephesians 5:13-14a. 

1. A Six Sigma Black Belt is a highly skilled professional who leads and manages complex process improvement projects, applying Six Sigma methodologies and tools to drive significant organisational improvements. Lean Six Sigma uses a collaborative team effort to improve process performance by systematically removing operational waste and reducing process variation.



Peter Warburton is director of Economic Perspectives, an international macroeconomics and financial consultancy based in Luton, Bedfordshire. He is also the chair of the FiBQ Steering Group.