Active Generosity Podcast Episode 13 Anne

Monday 12 January, 17:00

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (00:00)

Today, I'm really pleased to welcome Anne Retsma, CEO of our charity partner, MED-Air, an international humanitarian organisation that to date has provided emergency relief to more than 53 million people in 43 crisis-affected countries. Since joining MED-Air in 2004, Anne has led programmes in Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and overseen operations in the Horn of Africa.

She became International Programs Director in 2019 and CEO in 2023. has extensive experience in humanitarian coordination and representation, including her current role as a principal in the Interagency Standing Committee, or IASC, which brings together the executive heads of 19 organizations and consortia to formulate policy.

set strategic priorities and mobilise resources in response to humanitarian crises. Anne, hello. Thank you so much for joining me today. Now, I know you're based in Switzerland and were born and raised in South Africa. You also travel extensively with your work. So I'm guessing you've seen generosity in action in all kinds of different cultural contexts. And that's where I'd love to start our conversation today. So

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:07)

you

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:20)

From your experience, how can generosity cut across different cultures to make a meaningful difference?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:27)

Thank you Ruth, thanks for the chance to join you and reflect on this topic together. Generosity is an expression of love and I think love says everything we want to say. It breaks down divides, it shows our care for each other, especially when we seek to be there for each other in our times of greatest need. That gives hope and it's a beautiful thing.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:46)

Let's get back to the start of your story. Your parents were missionaries based among the Zulu people, I believe. So how did your experience of growing up in that context impact your faith?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:48)

Hmm.

Mm.

My parents were missionaries amongst the Zulus and when I was about 11 years old, Fai Ching broke out in the area where we were living, they were working. And a number of the young Zulu men, one of the Zulu pastors who had spent a lot of time in our home and were very close to our family were killed. it got me personally interested in

what makes it possible for people to cope with suffering and trauma, and particularly children, why some children cope and some don't. And it gave me a desire to better understand how we can come alongside communities impacted by conflict. MED-ER is a great place to do that.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (02:38)

And your start there went on to ~ working as a social worker at the beginning of your career. You've also been a counsellor and then with MedAir for over 20 years, I believe. So what have been the primary drivers in your work? know, that childhood experience obviously fed in to your motivations, but...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (02:45)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (03:03)

Yeah. Can you speak a bit more about that?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (03:05)

I think to elaborate a bit on that childhood experience, had...

very early on the need to make sense of where God is in the midst of all the suffering. And the more I thought about it, the more I understood he's more grieved by it than I ever can be. And that...

I am safe with him for all eternity because of what he's done. He has dealt with my brokenness. I don't stand outside the brokenness of this world. When I'm honest with myself in my own relationships, I do things I wish I wouldn't and I need his grace and his forgiveness. And I'm safe with him and nothing can change that fact. so, yeah, I started out doing social work actually in London, in the boroughs of Lambeth and Brixton.

And then I joined MED-AIR about 21 years ago. And what I've really appreciated is being part of a group of people that zooms out to that bigger picture and says, what's God busy doing in this world? What's our role? We are not the savior. If we take two seconds to stop and think about it, we know that that's seriously out of our reach. But we...

We know that God is busy restoring this world to himself. He's busy reconciling this world to himself. And we have the privilege of joining him, of making ourselves available to him. we want to be signs of that restoration that he is bringing, point to the way things are meant to be, point to the value of human life. And we feel that as an organization, we do that in three ways. Firstly, by seeking to do good quality, life saving humanity.

and areas of crisis of disease outbreaks, disasters, by bringing healthcare and nutritional support for malnourished children, water provision in arid places, shelter in wintery conditions. And secondly, we actually...

realized that it's not just about what we do, but about how we do it. And it's in the context of relationships, in the spaces between us, that hope comes alive. And we...

We set the tone with our relationships with each other and that has a ripple effect out into the communities that we serve. And so we really want to take care and be intentional in every relationship that we have. And thirdly, we have had the conviction in our last revision of our vision.

as an organization that God is calling us to live with a generous spirit and not just generosity towards those who are in need in times of crisis, but generosity to those that join with us or that we join with, those that we partner with, that we don't just come to each other with an extractionist transactional attitude, but that we really consider how can we bless each other.

How can we be a blessing to others as they brush up against the suffering and brokenness of this world? And in those three ways, I think we really are pointing to the restoration that he is bringing and being signs of that restoration.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (05:46)

I love that Anne and it's ~ a challenging remit. I can imagine how easy it would be to just get overwhelmed by the scale of the problems and to be just leaning into your own strength, not just you as a CEO, but as a staff team. I love that. I love that picture that you paint of a community working together, you know, in a generous spirit.

to try to alleviate help. But it is challenging the work and I'm well aware that as a humanitarian NGO, I'm trying to help those in crisis in some of the hardest to reach places. I think that's sort of one of your things, isn't it? I'm guessing that Med-Air must have been really quite hard hit by both the funding cuts in the US and then the UK earlier in 2025. How have...

you and your supporters responded at this really difficult moment.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (06:38)

Mm-hmm.

Hmm.

We were hard hit. The first thing that was difficult was the uncertainty of not knowing whether funding would come through or not, seeing the general trend of reduced funding across government institutional funding for humanitarian response, particularly in the Western world. And we...

We are an emergency response NGO. We deal with crises all the time. We could see that we needed to move quickly. That the longer we took to make cuts, the more we would have to cut. So we were quite agile in assessing and reflecting and deciding that we had to draw down by 25%, which is hard. We reduced our global support office by 30 % actually.

aiming to not just cut at lower levels but really cut the support office more than the overall programming. I think it's right to do it that way around. But it's been a tough season. in the midst of this, in September we had our annual leadership conference and we prayed about what theme we should center that conference around and

ended up focusing on generosity and a season of scarcity and really reflecting on what do we believe about whether we should be living from a place of scarcity or a place of abundance.

In preparing for that, I'd been to South Sudan a few weeks earlier and been visiting a stabilization center, a hospital-level care for severely malnourished children with medical complications. And I had...

come out of that context with a ward full of babies and their mothers struggling to ~ keep their kids alive and went into the warehouse for all the nutrition supplies and had the team describe to me how in the coming year there's great concern that the supply pipelines will run out because during all the funding uncertainty that we've had as a sector, as a humanitarian sector in the last months,

we know that a lot of the production ground to a halt because they weren't being paid for supplies and supply orders weren't going in. And so we know that in the coming months there's likely to be a break in the supply pipeline. And so the team was sharing with me how they're trying to manage the stocks that we have carefully and have really been evaluating what we can do to supplement the supply line. And I stood there and looked at the warehouse and I thought,

What do God's storehouses look like? And it just made me think of Isaiah 40 where it says, you not know? Have you not heard? God is the creator of the universe. And he doesn't grow tired and weary. And he makes it possible for us not to grow tired and weary. And I thought, you know what? His storehouses are full. And if I remember that, it changes my attitude.

it changes my heart attitude in the face of this question of can we truly be generous? If I see scarcity, I struggle to be generous. But if I know his abundance, can in faith lean into the generosity that he has called us to.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:33)

That's such a powerful story. that picture of God's storehouses, which we know are abundant beyond our imaginings, we know that, but I can only imagine that, up close to very real need, very real like lack, it can just be so easy to kind of just like I referred to before, just to get overwhelmed by the scale.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (09:42)

Okay.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:56)

of problem and fall back on our own resources. that's, yeah, such an encouraging picture of that we can, we do and we can trust God's goodness, his faithfulness that he is Gyro God, the provider. And we have to go forward in faith and confidence for that, don't we? Now, I know that leading on from that kind of bigger picture, the Bible story of the feeding of the 5,000.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:09)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (10:20)

has had a special resonance for Med-Air of late. Can you expand more on that please, Anne? Yeah.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:23)

Mm.

~ Actually

for that conference we chose to have that be the theme of our morning devotions and time and his word together because earlier this year

We felt God was preparing us for the moment when we actually were informed of some of that funding uncertainty turning into real funding cuts. And in the week leading up to that, was the week before Easter, we had a major donor event here in Switzerland ~ on a Thursday night. at the end of the event, one of the donors came up to me and said,

What I think you're living through here is a modern day feeding of the 5,000. The way that you are talking about how you engage with communities, come alongside them, really want to listen and join together in grappling with the crisis. And the way that you've engaged with us this evening, transparently sharing the struggle that you're having and allowing us to enter in and be part of that journey, God's going to multiply this. we do see that.

multiplying effect in the way that we're engaging with communities that when they feel drawn in and it's all hands on deck, we can do so much more together. And then the next morning we had a team devotion and...

Somebody who hadn't been at the event the night before, led on the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from the Gospel of John. And he emphasized how in the Gospel of John, Jesus deals with two disciples, Philip and Andrew. And Philip responds to Jesus' question of, you know, can we go ahead and care for these people who have come? He has compassion on them and he says, can we get them some food? And Philip says, Jesus, this is impossible. Philip just sees the impossible. And Andrew

here's Jesus question and brings a little boys packed lunch and he sees Jesus and he doesn't know how but he says I'm I know you Jesus and here's a boys packed lunch and we all know the story Jesus ended up multiplying it for five thousand men and their women and children and there's leftover just this extreme abundance and

During the course of that following week, we had seven times over a period of 10 days that we were reminded of the feeding of the 5,000. And in the middle of those seven times, we were informed that basically half of our funding for our Afghanistan country program was cut. And it was as though he was sandwiching that message and preparing us for it and reminding us of what he's capable of today still.

And that has just been a huge encouragement for us. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (12:48)

Yeah, I can only imagine when you get confirmation like that, sometimes it comes from maybe two or three different places, but to have like that many affirmations of that word for you and the team in that season in such a short time period and so pointly juxtaposed with the unfortunate news of the funding cut as well. Yeah, that's really, really incredible. And it's

Yeah, as you say, it starts with the boys pack lunch. We have to take our baby steps of faith, don't we, with what feels like very little in our hands in the face of the mountain of need in front of us. And yeah, just, yeah, I can only imagine, you know, again and again, the witness you must have to really powerful stories of generosity in Mede's work. So on that note, very difficult, I know, to pick out.

one or maybe two examples, but do you have a standout story from Medair's work of late that you can share with us?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (13:43)

It actually links into the story of the feeding of the 5,000. The day before we heard the news that a lot of humanitarian funding had suddenly become really uncertain in January, one of our staff's daughters here in Switzerland, one of our colleagues,

eight-year-old daughter Eleanor said to her mom in the morning before going to school, Mom, what do you do? And her mom said, well, we care for sick children and for children who don't have enough to eat.

And she said, well, how do you do that? And she said, well, it's all thanks to the gifts that people give, that people trust us with, that makes it possible for us to go to very difficult to reach places where children are really in need and to bring them the health care that they need and to come alongside their mothers and care for them. And Eleanor went to school that day and during the day her mental cogs were turning and at the end of the day she came home from school and she had made an envelope out of a piece of paper. She'd stapled it together and she put some stickers on it and she'd written,

for MED-AIR from Eleanor and she put all her pocket money inside, 12 francs. And news spread through the organization that she was actually really wanting her mom to give the envelope to me. And her mom said, Anne's very busy and I heard about it. I was like, bring this girl. I want to meet her. Who is this child who has given all her pocket money to MED-AIR? And the more we reflected on the story of the feeding of the 5,000,

realized Eleanor's 12 francs was our boys packed lunch. was that gift that we put before the Lord and we actually asked Eleanor to come and give the gift herself and we prayed together with her as a leadership team and it symbolized for us an extremely important principle that there is no small gift. It's about, generosity is about the attitude of the heart.

and we could see how Eleanor was being blessed in her giving and how she was blessing us in her giving and how that blessing spreads and multiplies. ~

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (15:39)

That's such a touching story. And I just love the

fact as well that Eleanor's this little girl. So generosity doesn't have to be a complicated intellectual affair. It's like you said, it's an affair of the heart. And yeah, it starts with a love for God and then being open to his promptings. yeah, that's wonderful, isn't it? That this little girl set such a powerful example to all of you at MED-ER, I can only imagine.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (15:48)

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:03)

What you've really painted there is a very moving picture actually of very real struggles, very real struggles and understanding that the parent lack of resource is going to have a very real impact on the ground where the need is felt, but notwithstanding, keeping going in faith and prayer, focusing in, leaning in on generosity and yeah.

having that encouragement from God to go forward in faith. So wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Now you, amazingly, because I'm sure you're ever so slightly busier as CEO of MedAir, but you also have this really important role with the Interagency Standing Committee,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:28)

Mm. Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:42)

Can you tell me bit more about how the ISC's work supports the international aid sector?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:47)

The IASC principles are a group that gathers in person a few times a year and then ad hoc as needed as per the major crises ~ evolution in the world. are...

really grappling at the moment with how to reset the whole humanitarian sector, looking at the architecture, at the coordination mechanisms, at the leadership structures, and how we can elevate the voices of those who are in crisis and needing support in...

times of intense difficulties, something that can happen to any of us. And we've been grappling with how do we get the balance right of the amount of money spent on coordination versus the amount of money that actually reaches people. And very conscious of the fact that we've seen such a significant reduction of funding in the sector.

Experts say probably about 40 % of humanitarian funding has just disappeared this year. It's not that there's a lack of money in the world. It's whether or not we are choosing a society to prioritize caring for the most vulnerable in our midst. And so we have been grappling with how do we maintain

enough visibility with enough data collection to understand where we should prioritize, where the most life

whether most lives are at risk in vulnerable, fragile contexts and how we make those decisions together. I was...

standing at the coffee machine in the break time in the beginning of February talking to one of the main leaders of the whole humanitarian sector and he said to me, we haven't lost the battle for compassion, have we? And I said, we haven't lost it because it's already been won. If you just stop and think about it and you visualize what does it look like for somebody to care for another person and to go above and beyond in their care for another, to show solidarity.

and come alongside them in their time of need to show generosity to them. It's beautiful. Any image that comes to your mind is a beautiful image. Selfishness on the other hand is ugly.

You know, the battle has already been won. The question is how do we turn the tide in a way and celebrate the beauty of generosity together and ~ allow that to gain more traction in our society again and to spur each other on in the hope that we have that comes from that.

I think there's real value in doing that. And I've actually found that being in those high-level discussions has given me hope because it's grappling, being stuck in a room with a bunch of heads of UN agencies and a couple of NGO representatives and really putting our heads together. How can we help ensure that those who need the help the most are getting it?

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (19:24)

And out of interest, Anne, coming back to MED-AIR, have you seen amongst your wonderful donor base, your supporters, have you seen, I suppose, first of all, an awareness of just how acute things are in your sector at moment, and then a kind of response, a kind of catching, if you like, of this vision of generosity of spirit?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (19:41)

Mm.

We really have. I, you know, we've come through this year. We have had to make some significant cuts, but we are actually doing okay. We're quite stable. I think we as organizations, with the help of those that join together with us, are able to adapt and stabilize. But it's the communities and the mothers.

individual mothers trying to help their children stay alive that are the ones that are suffering in the midst of these cuts and we have found that there are many people around us who are as concerned about that as we are and and so we've actually seen an increase in private giving this year which has been a huge encouragement to us and has helped help carry us through and what we're able to do for those communities. I think if we if we start to act like

some lives in this world don't have the same value as ours do, then...

then there's something really wrong. every time I stand in a nutrition clinic and hold one of those children in my arms, I'm confronted by the fact that if this child's life doesn't have value, then why does mine? What would be the argument for saying that mine does? And it really motivates me to keep going all out for the sake of those who, by no choosing of their own, are caught up in crises and...

and needing each other's support.

And I know experientially that it can happen to any of us. I contracted cholera in South Sudan years ago. within hours, I went from being fit, able-bodied, reasonably young person to being on the brink of death. And if it weren't for my teammates who made sure that I got an immense amount of fluids in my system, I wouldn't have survived. And that can happen to any of us. It doesn't matter who we are. We need each other.

And when we show that, when we show that care for each other, is beautiful and it breaks down divides, as I was saying earlier. It brings hope.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:33)

It's very poignant listening to you Anne because I'm very aware that yes, you've many, many times in the last half of many years, you've been with MED-AIR, you've been in very, very raw situations, very poignant situations. It's the reality behind the TV screens, isn't it? Behind the news we see on it's, yeah, I'm feeling that conviction in my heart and I'm sure others listening as well as well, that it's too easy, isn't it, in our

Anne Reitsema - Medair (21:49)

Good.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:58)

relatively comfortable bubbles on our side of the world. And I say that with caution because obviously there's many in this country who are struggling. There's this need and lack here as well. So, I'm aware of that, and it's not some kind of competition, but yeah, we all stand before our maker, don't we? Needing to...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:10)

Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:21)

~ remember the truth of those words that just because we can't see it right in front of us that it doesn't mean it's not there and yeah, we need to pray about that and think about how we're going to respond in faith. I'd like to take a moment now and we've talked a lot about generosity, about what's been going on at MED-AIR and how generosity has actually been a real theme for this season that you're in. So just taking a step back.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:24)

Mm.

Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:46)

to the wider concept of biblical stewardship for a moment. How do you understand that? And how, for you, does that idea of stewarding well everything that we're given by our wonderful God, how, for you, does that connect with generosity?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:49)

Mm.

Mm-hmm.

Hmm. StairChip is about...

managing well that which has been entrusted to us, taking care of the good that we have been given. And I think it links to what I was just saying about recognizing that every life is made with value and that when we act from that reality, we are communicating something very meaningful in this world.

we're communicating a love and care to each other, we're also recognizing each other's dignity and allowing it to shine. I think stewardship, managing well that which has been entrusted to us, cannot be about just getting what we need.

having a self-focused.

it's inherently part of recognizing that...

If we all grab for ourselves, if we're all only focused on ourselves, none of us will have enough. But if we're all focused on the needs of each other and caring for each other, we will all be loved and cared for. So if we're all living ~ from a generous spirit and know in an experiential way that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

that I think will be stewardship at its most beautiful and its most powerful in our society today.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:12)

You've just quoted that well-known verse from Acts and we've talked about the story of the 5,000 and I think a couple of the times you've mentioned bits of the Bible. is there a particular verse or story on generosity that's your kind of go-to for when you're looking for inspiration in this area? Encouragement perhaps?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:32)

Hmm.

I struggle to pick one. I think I'm going to go with Isaiah 58. It's the passage that tells us the kind of fasting that is pleasing to God is when we're caring for the needs of others, the hungry, the poor, wanderers, those in need of shelter. And it says that when we do that wholeheartedly,

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:35)

Yeah, it's hard, right?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:54)

We will be like a well-watered garden. We will actually be this thriving, flourishing, luscious thing. We'll be having streams that never cease. We will be repairers and rebuilders of broken walls. We will make communities livable again. It's such beautiful imagery of what the consequences of our...

The passage actually says spending ourselves, not being spent, but spending ourselves. And it actually ends, verse 13 and 14, with the importance of Sabbath rest, of rhythms of rest, of taking delight in spending time in fellowship with God. So it's not working from a place of emptiness, but from a place of fullness and being able to pour out for each other. And it's interesting because that's been a motivational passage

mid-air for many years and I've often stopped reading just before that part and then I realized actually that's the golden nugget that we need to make sure that we spend ourselves on behalf of those in need but that we're not spent because we keep making sure that we fill back up our tank by having good rhythms of rest in times of fellowship.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:03)

And walking in step with God, right? You know, in the message version, Jesus says, doesn't he, you know, come, I'm paraphrasing, but you know, come walk with me in the easy rhythms of grace, you know, it's that bit about his yoke, not being too heavy, you know, that he's there walking alongside us, but yeah, we have to remember to do that, not lean into our own strength, but into his. So,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:06)

Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:27)

And this has been really thought provoking and felt like a very important conversation actually to be having because your area of work is focused on globally on such an area of need in the world and never more so than today, sadly with all that's going on. So I'd love to close by asking you, how can we be praying for you?

And in fact, the wider MedAir team at this point on both your personal journey of generosity, but also MedAir's.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:56)

Thank you. I think firstly that we wouldn't operate from a spirit of scarcity and out of fear in this season. Fear is never a good advisor, but that we really would.

function from an awareness of God's abundance and know that thriving and flourishing that Isaiah 58 describes, that we would find much joy in seeing the beauty of care for each other and be inspired by that and share it with others.

We seek to reach people and very hard to reach places and that's often because of conflict and insecurity. So always welcome prayer for the safety of our teams, that God would give us wisdom and when it's safe to move and when it isn't, that they would be protected. And really pray for...

For God to show us how and where he wants us to be able to continue to provide much needed life-saving assistance, healthcare, water, nutrition, and to do it to the best of our ability for his glory. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (27:57)

Thank you, Anne. Thank you for sharing those and we'll make sure to include those in our show notes. Well, thank you so much. That brings our conversation to close for today. So thank you. Your schedule, I'm sure, is very packed. So we really appreciate you taking the time to come on the Active Generosity podcast and to just share a little bit about your journey of generosity. And to our listeners, thank you as well for joining us. Please see the show notes for related links.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (28:02)

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Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (28:23)

and please keep sharing this podcast with others. And if you will take a moment to leave us a good review. Until next month, goodbye.

stop.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (00:00)

Today, I'm really pleased to welcome Anne Retsma, CEO of our charity partner, MED-Air, an international humanitarian organisation that to date has provided emergency relief to more than 53 million people in 43 crisis-affected countries. Since joining MED-Air in 2004, Anne has led

programmes in Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and overseen operations in the Horn of Africa.

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Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:07)

you

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:20)

From your experience, how can generosity cut across different cultures to make a meaningful difference?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:27)

Thank you Ruth, thanks for the chance to join you and reflect on this topic together. Generosity is an expression of love and I think love says everything we want to say. It breaks down divides, it shows our care for each other, especially when we seek to be there for each other in our times of greatest need. That gives hope and it's a beautiful thing.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:46)

Let's get back to the start of your story. Your parents were missionaries based among the Zulu people, I believe. So how did your experience of growing up in that context impact your faith?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:48)

Hmm.

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My parents were missionaries amongst the Zulus and when I was about 11 years old, Fai Ching broke out in the area where we were living, they were working. And a number of the young Zulu men, one of the Zulu pastors who had spent a lot of time in our home and were very close to our family were killed. it got me personally interested in

what makes it possible for people to cope with suffering and trauma, and particularly children, why some children cope and some don't. And it gave me a desire to better understand how we can come alongside communities impacted by conflict. MED-ER is a great place to do that.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (02:38)

And your start there went on to ~ working as a social worker at the beginning of your career. You've also been a counsellor and then with MedAir for over 20 years, I believe. So what have been the primary drivers in your work? know, that childhood experience obviously fed in to your motivations, but...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (02:45)

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Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (03:03)

Yeah. Can you speak a bit more about that?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (03:05)

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very early on the need to make sense of where God is in the midst of all the suffering. And the more I thought about it, the more I understood he's more grieved by it than I ever can be. And that...

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him and nothing can change that fact. so, yeah, I started out doing social work actually in London, in the boroughs of Lambeth and Brixton.

And then I joined MED-AIR about 21 years ago. And what I've really appreciated is being part of a group of people that zooms out to that bigger picture and says, what's God busy doing in this world? What's our role? We are not the savior. If we take two seconds to stop and think about it, we know that that's seriously out of our reach. But we...

We know that God is busy restoring this world to himself. He's busy reconciling this world to himself. And we have the privilege of joining him, of making ourselves available to him. we want to be signs of that restoration that he is bringing, point to the way things are meant to be, point to the value of human life. And we feel that as an organization, we do that in three ways. Firstly, by seeking to do good quality, life saving humanity.

and areas of crisis of disease outbreaks, disasters, by bringing healthcare and nutritional support for malnourished children, water provision in arid places, shelter in wintery conditions. And secondly, we actually...

realized that it's not just about what we do, but about how we do it. And it's in the context of relationships, in the spaces between us, that hope comes alive. And we...

We set the tone with our relationships with each other and that has a ripple effect out into the communities that we serve. And so we really want to take care and be intentional in every relationship that we have. And thirdly, we have had the conviction in our last revision of our vision.

as an organization that God is calling us to live with a generous spirit and not just generosity towards those who are in need in times of crisis, but generosity to those that join with us or that we join with, those that we partner with, that we don't just come to each other with an extractionist transactional attitude, but that we really consider how can we bless each other.

How can we be a blessing to others as they brush up against the suffering and brokenness of this world? And in those three ways, I think we really are pointing to the restoration that he is bringing and being signs of that restoration.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (05:46)

I love that Anne and it's ~ a challenging remit. I can imagine how easy it would be to just get overwhelmed by the scale of the problems and to be just leaning into your own strength, not just

you as a CEO, but as a staff team. I love that. I love that picture that you paint of a community working together, you know, in a generous spirit.

to try to alleviate help. But it is challenging the work and I'm well aware that as a humanitarian NGO, I'm trying to help those in crisis in some of the hardest to reach places. I think that's sort of one of your things, isn't it? I'm guessing that Med-Air must have been really quite hard hit by both the funding cuts in the US and then the UK earlier in 2025. How have...

you and your supporters responded at this really difficult moment.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (06:38)

Mm-hmm.

Hmm.

We were hard hit. The first thing that was difficult was the uncertainty of not knowing whether funding would come through or not, seeing the general trend of reduced funding across government institutional funding for humanitarian response, particularly in the Western world. And we...

We are an emergency response NGO. We deal with crises all the time. We could see that we needed to move quickly. That the longer we took to make cuts, the more we would have to cut. So we were quite agile in assessing and reflecting and deciding that we had to draw down by 25%, which is hard. We reduced our global support office by 30 % actually.

aiming to not just cut at lower levels but really cut the support office more than the overall programming. I think it's right to do it that way around. But it's been a tough season. in the midst of this, in September we had our annual leadership conference and we prayed about what theme we should center that conference around and

ended up focusing on generosity and a season of scarcity and really reflecting on what do we believe about whether we should be living from a place of scarcity or a place of abundance.

In preparing for that, I'd been to South Sudan a few weeks earlier and been visiting a stabilization center, a hospital-level care for severely malnourished children with medical complications. And I had...

come out of that context with a ward full of babies and their mothers struggling to ~ keep their kids alive and went into the warehouse for all the nutrition supplies and had the team describe to me how in the coming year there's great concern that the supply pipelines will run out because during all the funding uncertainty that we've had as a sector, as a humanitarian sector in the last months,

we know that a lot of the production ground to a halt because they weren't being paid for supplies and supply orders weren't going in. And so we know that in the coming months there's likely to be a break in the supply pipeline. And so the team was sharing with me how they're trying to manage the stocks that we have carefully and have really been evaluating what we can do to supplement the supply line. And I stood there and looked at the warehouse and I thought,

What do God's storehouses look like? And it just made me think of Isaiah 40 where it says, you not know? Have you not heard? God is the creator of the universe. And he doesn't grow tired and weary. And he makes it possible for us not to grow tired and weary. And I thought, you know what? His storehouses are full. And if I remember that, it changes my attitude.

it changes my heart attitude in the face of this question of can we truly be generous? If I see scarcity, I struggle to be generous. But if I know his abundance, can in faith lean into the generosity that he has called us to.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:33)

That's such a powerful story. that picture of God's storehouses, which we know are abundant beyond our imaginings, we know that, but I can only imagine that, up close to very real need, very real like lack, it can just be so easy to kind of just like I referred to before, just to get overwhelmed by the scale.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (09:42)

Okay.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:56)

of problem and fall back on our own resources. that's, yeah, such an encouraging picture of that we can, we do and we can trust God's goodness, his faithfulness that he is Gyro God, the provider. And we have to go forward in faith and confidence for that, don't we? Now, I know that leading on from that kind of bigger picture, the Bible story of the feeding of the 5,000.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:09)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (10:20)

has had a special resonance for Med-Air of late. Can you expand more on that please, Anne? Yeah.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:23)

Mm.

~ Actually

for that conference we chose to have that be the theme of our morning devotions and time and his word together because earlier this year

We felt God was preparing us for the moment when we actually were informed of some of that funding uncertainty turning into real funding cuts. And in the week leading up to that, was the week before Easter, we had a major donor event here in Switzerland ~ on a Thursday night. at the end of the event, one of the donors came up to me and said,

What I think you're living through here is a modern day feeding of the 5,000. The way that you are talking about how you engage with communities, come alongside them, really want to listen and join together in grappling with the crisis. And the way that you've engaged with us this evening, transparently sharing the struggle that you're having and allowing us to enter in and be part of that journey, God's going to multiply this. we do see that.

multiplying effect in the way that we're engaging with communities that when they feel drawn in and it's all hands on deck, we can do so much more together. And then the next morning we had a team devotion and...

Somebody who hadn't been at the event the night before, led on the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from the Gospel of John. And he emphasized how in the Gospel of John, Jesus deals with two disciples, Philip and Andrew. And Philip responds to Jesus' question of, you know, can we go ahead and care for these people who have come? He has compassion on them and he says, can we get

them some food? And Philip says, Jesus, this is impossible. Philip just sees the impossible. And Andrew

here's Jesus question and brings a little boys packed lunch and he sees Jesus and he doesn't know how but he says I'm I know you Jesus and here's a boys packed lunch and we all know the story Jesus ended up multiplying it for five thousand men and their women and children and there's leftover just this extreme abundance and

During the course of that following week, we had seven times over a period of 10 days that we were reminded of the feeding of the 5,000. And in the middle of those seven times, we were informed that basically half of our funding for our Afghanistan country program was cut. And it was as though he was sandwiching that message and preparing us for it and reminding us of what he's capable of today still.

And that has just been a huge encouragement for us. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (12:48)

Yeah, I can only imagine when you get confirmation like that, sometimes it comes from maybe two or three different places, but to have like that many affirmations of that word for you and the team in that season in such a short time period and so pointly juxtaposed with the unfortunate news of the funding cut as well. Yeah, that's really, really incredible. And it's

Yeah, as you say, it starts with the boys pack lunch. We have to take our baby steps of faith, don't we, with what feels like very little in our hands in the face of the mountain of need in front of us. And yeah, just, yeah, I can only imagine, you know, again and again, the witness you must have to really powerful stories of generosity in Mede's work. So on that note, very difficult, I know, to pick out.

one or maybe two examples, but do you have a standout story from Medair's work of late that you can share with us?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (13:43)

It actually links into the story of the feeding of the 5,000. The day before we heard the news that a lot of humanitarian funding had suddenly become really uncertain in January, one of our staff's daughters here in Switzerland, one of our colleagues,

eight-year-old daughter Eleanor said to her mom in the morning before going to school, Mom, what do you do? And her mom said, well, we care for sick children and for children who don't have enough to eat.

And she said, well, how do you do that? And she said, well, it's all thanks to the gifts that people give, that people trust us with, that makes it possible for us to go to very difficult to reach places where children are really in need and to bring them the health care that they need and to come alongside their mothers and care for them. And Eleanor went to school that day and during the day her mental cogs were turning and at the end of the day she came home from school and she had made an envelope out of a piece of paper. She'd stapled it together and she put some stickers on it and she'd written,

for MED-AIR from Eleanor and she put all her pocket money inside, 12 francs. And news spread through the organization that she was actually really wanting her mom to give the envelope to me. And her mom said, Anne's very busy and I heard about it. I was like, bring this girl. I want to meet her. Who is this child who has given all her pocket money to MED-AIR? And the more we reflected on the story of the feeding of the 5,000,

realized Eleanor's 12 francs was our boys packed lunch. was that gift that we put before the Lord and we actually asked Eleanor to come and give the gift herself and we prayed together with her as a leadership team and it symbolized for us an extremely important principle that there is no small gift. It's about, generosity is about the attitude of the heart.

and we could see how Eleanor was being blessed in her giving and how she was blessing us in her giving and how that blessing spreads and multiplies. ~

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (15:39)

That's such a touching story. And I just love the

fact as well that Eleanor's this little girl. So generosity doesn't have to be a complicated intellectual affair. It's like you said, it's an affair of the heart. And yeah, it starts with a love for God and then being open to his promptings. yeah, that's wonderful, isn't it? That this little girl set such a powerful example to all of you at MED-ER, I can only imagine.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (15:48)

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:03)

What you've really painted there is a very moving picture actually of very real struggles, very real struggles and understanding that the parent lack of resource is going to have a very real impact on

the ground where the need is felt, but notwithstanding, keeping going in faith and prayer, focusing in, leaning in on generosity and yeah.

having that encouragement from God to go forward in faith. So wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Now you, amazingly, because I'm sure you're ever so slightly busier as CEO of MedAir, but you also have this really important role with the Interagency Standing Committee,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:28)

Mm. Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:42)

Can you tell me bit more about how the ISC's work supports the international aid sector?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:47)

The IASC principles are a group that gathers in person a few times a year and then ad hoc as needed as per the major crises ~ evolution in the world. are...

really grappling at the moment with how to reset the whole humanitarian sector, looking at the architecture, at the coordination mechanisms, at the leadership structures, and how we can elevate the voices of those who are in crisis and needing support in...

times of intense difficulties, something that can happen to any of us. And we've been grappling with how do we get the balance right of the amount of money spent on coordination versus the amount of money that actually reaches people. And very conscious of the fact that we've seen such a significant reduction of funding in the sector.

Experts say probably about 40 % of humanitarian funding has just disappeared this year. It's not that there's a lack of money in the world. It's whether or not we are choosing a society to prioritize caring for the most vulnerable in our midst. And so we have been grappling with how do we maintain enough visibility with enough data collection to understand where we should prioritize, where the most life

whether most lives are at risk in vulnerable, fragile contexts and how we make those decisions together. I was...

standing at the coffee machine in the break time in the beginning of February talking to one of the main leaders of the whole humanitarian sector and he said to me, we haven't lost the battle for compassion, have we? And I said, we haven't lost it because it's already been won. If you just stop and think about it and you visualize what does it look like for somebody to care for another person and to go above and beyond in their care for another, to show solidarity.

and come alongside them in their time of need to show generosity to them. It's beautiful. Any image that comes to your mind is a beautiful image. Selfishness on the other hand is ugly.

You know, the battle has already been won. The question is how do we turn the tide in a way and celebrate the beauty of generosity together and ~ allow that to gain more traction in our society again and to spur each other on in the hope that we have that comes from that.

I think there's real value in doing that. And I've actually found that being in those high-level discussions has given me hope because it's grappling, being stuck in a room with a bunch of heads of UN agencies and a couple of NGO representatives and really putting our heads together. How can we help ensure that those who need the help the most are getting it?

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (19:24)

And out of interest, Anne, coming back to MED-AIR, have you seen amongst your wonderful donor base, your supporters, have you seen, I suppose, first of all, an awareness of just how acute things are in your sector at moment, and then a kind of response, a kind of catching, if you like, of this vision of generosity of spirit?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (19:41)

Mm.

We really have. I, you know, we've come through this year. We have had to make some significant cuts, but we are actually doing okay. We're quite stable. I think we as organizations, with the help of those that join together with us, are able to adapt and stabilize. But it's the communities and the mothers.

individual mothers trying to help their children stay alive that are the ones that are suffering in the midst of these cuts and we have found that there are many people around us who are as concerned about that as we are and and so we've actually seen an increase in private giving this year which has been a huge encouragement to us and has helped help carry us through and what we're able to do for those communities. I think if we if we start to act like

some lives in this world don't have the same value as ours do, then...

then there's something really wrong. every time I stand in a nutrition clinic and hold one of those children in my arms, I'm confronted by the fact that if this child's life doesn't have value, then why does mine? What would be the argument for saying that mine does? And it really motivates me to keep going all out for the sake of those who, by no choosing of their own, are caught up in crises and...

and needing each other's support.

And I know experientially that it can happen to any of us. I contracted cholera in South Sudan years ago. within hours, I went from being fit, able-bodied, reasonably young person to being on the brink of death. And if it weren't for my teammates who made sure that I got an immense amount of fluids in my system, I wouldn't have survived. And that can happen to any of us. It doesn't matter who we are. We need each other.

And when we show that, when we show that care for each other, is beautiful and it breaks down divides, as I was saying earlier. It brings hope.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:33)

It's very poignant listening to you Anne because I'm very aware that yes, you've many, many times in the last half of many years, you've been with MED-AIR, you've been in very, very raw situations, very poignant situations. It's the reality behind the TV screens, isn't it? Behind the news we see on it's, yeah, I'm feeling that conviction in my heart and I'm sure others listening as well as well, that it's too easy, isn't it, in our

Anne Reitsema - Medair (21:49)

Good.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:58)

relatively comfortable bubbles on our side of the world. And I say that with caution because obviously there's many in this country who are struggling. There's this need and lack here as well. So, I'm aware of that, and it's not some kind of competition, but yeah, we all stand before our maker, don't we? Needing to...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:10)

Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:21)

~ remember the truth of those words that just because we can't see it right in front of us that it doesn't mean it's not there and yeah, we need to pray about that and think about how we're going to respond in faith. I'd like to take a moment now and we've talked a lot about generosity, about what's been going on at MED-AIR and how generosity has actually been a real theme for this season that you're in. So just taking a step back.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:24)

Mm.

Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:46)

to the wider concept of biblical stewardship for a moment. How do you understand that? And how, for you, does that idea of stewarding well everything that we're given by our wonderful God, how, for you, does that connect with generosity?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:49)

Mm.

Mm-hmm.

Hmm. StairChip is about...

managing well that which has been entrusted to us, taking care of the good that we have been given. And I think it links to what I was just saying about recognizing that every life is made with value and that when we act from that reality, we are communicating something very meaningful in this world.

we're communicating a love and care to each other, we're also recognizing each other's dignity and allowing it to shine. I think stewardship, managing well that which has been entrusted to us, cannot be about just getting what we need.

having a self-focused.

it's inherently part of recognizing that...

If we all grab for ourselves, if we're all only focused on ourselves, none of us will have enough. But if we're all focused on the needs of each other and caring for each other, we will all be loved and cared for. So if we're all living ~ from a generous spirit and know in an experiential way that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

that I think will be stewardship at its most beautiful and its most powerful in our society today.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:12)

You've just quoted that well-known verse from Acts and we've talked about the story of the 5,000 and I think a couple of the times you've mentioned bits of the Bible. is there a particular verse or story on generosity that's your kind of go-to for when you're looking for inspiration in this area? Encouragement perhaps?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:32)

Hmm.

I struggle to pick one. I think I'm going to go with Isaiah 58. It's the passage that tells us the kind of fasting that is pleasing to God is when we're caring for the needs of others, the hungry, the poor, wanderers, those in need of shelter. And it says that when we do that wholeheartedly,

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:35)

Yeah, it's hard, right?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:54)

We will be like a well-watered garden. We will actually be this thriving, flourishing, luscious thing. We'll be having streams that never cease. We will be repairers and rebuilders of broken walls. We will make communities livable again. It's such beautiful imagery of what the consequences of our...

The passage actually says spending ourselves, not being spent, but spending ourselves. And it actually ends, verse 13 and 14, with the importance of Sabbath rest, of rhythms of rest, of taking delight in spending time in fellowship with God. So it's not working from a place of emptiness, but from a place of fullness and being able to pour out for each other. And it's interesting because that's been a motivational passage

mid-air for many years and I've often stopped reading just before that part and then I realized actually that's the golden nugget that we need to make sure that we spend ourselves on behalf of those in need but that we're not spent because we keep making sure that we fill back up our tank by having good rhythms of rest in times of fellowship.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:03)

And walking in step with God, right? You know, in the message version, Jesus says, doesn't he, you know, come, I'm paraphrasing, but you know, come walk with me in the easy rhythms of grace, you know, it's that bit about his yoke, not being too heavy, you know, that he's there walking alongside us, but yeah, we have to remember to do that, not lean into our own strength, but into his. So,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:06)

Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:27)

And this has been really thought provoking and felt like a very important conversation actually to be having because your area of work is focused on globally on such an area of need in the world and never more so than today, sadly with all that's going on. So I'd love to close by asking you, how can we be praying for you?

And in fact, the wider MedAir team at this point on both your personal journey of generosity, but also MedAir's.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:56)

Thank you. I think firstly that we wouldn't operate from a spirit of scarcity and out of fear in this season. Fear is never a good advisor, but that we really would.

function from an awareness of God's abundance and know that thriving and flourishing that Isaiah 58 describes, that we would find much joy in seeing the beauty of care for each other and be inspired by that and share it with others.

We seek to reach people and very hard to reach places and that's often because of conflict and insecurity. So always welcome prayer for the safety of our teams, that God would give us wisdom and when it's safe to move and when it isn't, that they would be protected. And really pray for...

For God to show us how and where he wants us to be able to continue to provide much needed life-saving assistance, healthcare, water, nutrition, and to do it to the best of our ability for his glory. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (27:57)

Thank you, Anne. Thank you for sharing those and we'll make sure to include those in our show notes. Well, thank you so much. That brings our conversation to close for today. So thank you. Your schedule, I'm sure, is very packed. So we really appreciate you taking the time to come on the Active Generosity podcast and to just share a little bit about your journey of generosity. And to our listeners, thank you as well for joining us. Please see the show notes for related links.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (28:02)

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Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (28:23)

and please keep sharing this podcast with others. And if you will take a moment to leave us a good review. Until next month, goodbye.

stop.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (00:00)

Today, I'm really pleased to welcome Anne Reitsema, CEO of our charity partner, MED-Air, an international humanitarian organisation that to date has provided emergency relief to more than 53 million people in 43 crisis-affected countries. Since joining MED-Air in 2004, Anne has led programmes in Zimbabwe, Angola, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, and overseen operations in the Horn of Africa.

She became International Programmes Director in 2019 and CEO in 2023. has extensive experience in humanitarian coordination and representation, including her current role as a principal in the Interagency Standing Committee, or IASC, which brings together the executive heads of 19 organizations and consortia to formulate policy.

set strategic priorities and mobilise resources in response to humanitarian crises. Anne, hello. Thank you so much for joining me today. Now, I know you're based in Switzerland and were born and raised in South Africa. You also travel extensively with your work. So I'm guessing you've seen generosity in action in all kinds of different cultural contexts. And that's where I'd love to start our conversation today. So

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:07)

you

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:20)

From your experience, how can generosity cut across different cultures to make a meaningful difference?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:27)

Thank you Ruth, thanks for the chance to join you and reflect on this topic together. Generosity is an expression of love and I think love says everything we want to say. It breaks down divides, it shows our care for each other, especially when we seek to be there for each other in our times of greatest need. That gives hope and it's a beautiful thing.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (01:46)

Let's get back to the start of your story. Your parents were missionaries based among the Zulu people, I believe. So how did your experience of growing up in that context impact your faith?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (01:48)

Hmm.

Mm.

My parents were missionaries amongst the Zulus and when I was about 11 years old, Fai Ching broke out in the area where we were living, they were working. And a number of the young Zulu men, one of the Zulu pastors who had spent a lot of time in our home and were very close to our family were killed. it got me personally interested in

what makes it possible for people to cope with suffering and trauma, and particularly children, why some children cope and some don't. And it gave me a desire to better understand how we can come alongside communities impacted by conflict. MED-ER is a great place to do that.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (02:38)

And your start there went on to ~ working as a social worker at the beginning of your career. You've also been a counsellor and then with MedAir for over 20 years, I believe. So what have been the primary drivers in your work? know, that childhood experience obviously fed in to your motivations, but...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (02:45)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (03:03)

Yeah. Can you speak a bit more about that?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (03:05)

I think to elaborate a bit on that childhood experience, had...

very early on the need to make sense of where God is in the midst of all the suffering. And the more I thought about it, the more I understood he's more grieved by it than I ever can be. And that...

I am safe with him for all eternity because of what he's done. He has dealt with my brokenness. I don't stand outside the brokenness of this world. When I'm honest with myself in my own relationships, I do things I wish I wouldn't and I need his grace and his forgiveness. And I'm safe with him and nothing can change that fact. so, yeah, I started out doing social work actually in London, in the boroughs of Lambeth and Brixton.

And then I joined MED-AIR about 21 years ago. And what I've really appreciated is being part of a group of people that zooms out to that bigger picture and says, what's God busy doing in this world? What's our role? We are not the savior. If we take two seconds to stop and think about it, we know that that's seriously out of our reach. But we...

We know that God is busy restoring this world to himself. He's busy reconciling this world to himself. And we have the privilege of joining him, of making ourselves available to him. we want to be signs of that restoration that he is bringing, point to the way things are meant to be, point to the value of human life. And we feel that as an organization, we do that in three ways. Firstly, by seeking to do good quality, life saving humanity.

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Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (05:46)

I love that Anne and it's ~ a challenging remit. I can imagine how easy it would be to just get overwhelmed by the scale of the problems and to be just leaning into your own strength, not just you as a CEO, but as a staff team. I love that. I love that picture that you paint of a community working together, you know, in a generous spirit.

to try to alleviate help. But it is challenging the work and I'm well aware that as a humanitarian NGO, I'm trying to help those in crisis in some of the hardest to reach places. I think that's sort of one of your things, isn't it? I'm guessing that Med-Air must have been really quite hard hit by both the funding cuts in the US and then the UK earlier in 2025. How have...

you and your supporters responded at this really difficult moment.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (06:38)

Mm-hmm.

Hmm.

We were hard hit. The first thing that was difficult was the uncertainty of not knowing whether funding would come through or not, seeing the general trend of reduced funding across government institutional funding for humanitarian response, particularly in the Western world. And we...

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In preparing for that, I'd been to South Sudan a few weeks earlier and been visiting a stabilization center, a hospital-level care for severely malnourished children with medical complications. And I had...

come out of that context with a ward full of babies and their mothers struggling to ~ keep their kids alive and went into the warehouse for all the nutrition supplies and had the team describe to me how in the coming year there's great concern that the supply pipelines will run out because during all the funding uncertainty that we've had as a sector, as a humanitarian sector in the last months,

we know that a lot of the production ground to a halt because they weren't being paid for supplies and supply orders weren't going in. And so we know that in the coming months there's likely to be a break in the supply pipeline. And so the team was sharing with me how they're trying to manage the stocks that we have carefully and have really been evaluating what we can do to supplement the supply line. And I stood there and looked at the warehouse and I thought,

What do God's storehouses look like? And it just made me think of Isaiah 40 where it says, you not know? Have you not heard? God is the creator of the universe. And he doesn't grow tired and weary. And he makes it possible for us not to grow tired and weary. And I thought, you know what? His storehouses are full. And if I remember that, it changes my attitude.

it changes my heart attitude in the face of this question of can we truly be generous? If I see scarcity, I struggle to be generous. But if I know his abundance, can in faith lean into the generosity that he has called us to.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:33)

That's such a powerful story. that picture of God's storehouses, which we know are abundant beyond our imaginings, we know that, but I can only imagine that, up close to very real need, very real like lack, it can just be so easy to kind of just like I referred to before, just to get overwhelmed by the scale.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (09:42)

Okay.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (09:56)

of problem and fall back on our own resources. that's, yeah, such an encouraging picture of that we can, we do and we can trust God's goodness, his faithfulness that he is Gyro God, the provider. And we have to go forward in faith and confidence for that, don't we? Now, I know that leading on from that kind of bigger picture, the Bible story of the feeding of the 5,000.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:09)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (10:20)

has had a special resonance for Med-Air of late. Can you expand more on that please, Anne? Yeah.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (10:23)

Mm.

~ Actually

for that conference we chose to have that be the theme of our morning devotions and time and his word together because earlier this year

We felt God was preparing us for the moment when we actually were informed of some of that funding uncertainty turning into real funding cuts. And in the week leading up to that, was the week before Easter, we had a major donor event here in Switzerland ~ on a Thursday night. at the end of the event, one of the donors came up to me and said,

What I think you're living through here is a modern day feeding of the 5,000. The way that you are talking about how you engage with communities, come alongside them, really want to listen and join together in grappling with the crisis. And the way that you've engaged with us this evening, transparently sharing the struggle that you're having and allowing us to enter in and be part of that journey, God's going to multiply this. we do see that.

multiplying effect in the way that we're engaging with communities that when they feel drawn in and it's all hands on deck, we can do so much more together. And then the next morning we had a team devotion and...

Somebody who hadn't been at the event the night before, led on the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from the Gospel of John. And he emphasized how in the Gospel of John, Jesus deals with two disciples, Philip and Andrew. And Philip responds to Jesus' question of, you know, can we go ahead and care for these people who have come? He has compassion on them and he says, can we get them some food? And Philip says, Jesus, this is impossible. Philip just sees the impossible. And Andrew

here's Jesus question and brings a little boys packed lunch and he sees Jesus and he doesn't know how but he says I'm I know you Jesus and here's a boys packed lunch and we all know the story Jesus ended up multiplying it for five thousand men and their women and children and there's leftover just this extreme abundance and

During the course of that following week, we had seven times over a period of 10 days that we were reminded of the feeding of the 5,000. And in the middle of those seven times, we were informed that basically half of our funding for our Afghanistan country program was cut. And it was as though

he was sandwiching that message and preparing us for it and reminding us of what he's capable of today still.

And that has just been a huge encouragement for us. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (12:48)

Yeah, I can only imagine when you get confirmation like that, sometimes it comes from maybe two or three different places, but to have like that many affirmations of that word for you and the team in that season in such a short time period and so pointly juxtaposed with the unfortunate news of the funding cut as well. Yeah, that's really, really incredible. And it's

Yeah, as you say, it starts with the boys pack lunch. We have to take our baby steps of faith, don't we, with what feels like very little in our hands in the face of the mountain of need in front of us. And yeah, just, yeah, I can only imagine, you know, again and again, the witness you must have to really powerful stories of generosity in Mede's work. So on that note, very difficult, I know, to pick out.

one or maybe two examples, but do you have a standout story from Medair's work of late that you can share with us?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (13:43)

It actually links into the story of the feeding of the 5,000. The day before we heard the news that a lot of humanitarian funding had suddenly become really uncertain in January, one of our staff's daughters here in Switzerland, one of our colleagues,

eight-year-old daughter Eleanor said to her mom in the morning before going to school, Mom, what do you do? And her mom said, well, we care for sick children and for children who don't have enough to eat.

And she said, well, how do you do that? And she said, well, it's all thanks to the gifts that people give, that people trust us with, that makes it possible for us to go to very difficult to reach places where children are really in need and to bring them the health care that they need and to come alongside their mothers and care for them. And Eleanor went to school that day and during the day her mental cogs were turning and at the end of the day she came home from school and she had made an envelope out of a piece of paper. She'd stapled it together and she put some stickers on it and she'd written,

for MED-AIR from Eleanor and she put all her pocket money inside, 12 francs. And news spread through the organization that she was actually really wanting her mom to give the envelope to me.

And her mom said, Anne's very busy and I heard about it. I was like, bring this girl. I want to meet her. Who is this child who has given all her pocket money to MED-AIR? And the more we reflected on the story of the feeding of the 5,000,

realized Eleanor's 12 francs was our boys packed lunch. was that gift that we put before the Lord and we actually asked Eleanor to come and give the gift herself and we prayed together with her as a leadership team and it symbolized for us an extremely important principle that there is no small gift. It's about, generosity is about the attitude of the heart.

and we could see how Eleanor was being blessed in her giving and how she was blessing us in her giving and how that blessing spreads and multiplies. ~

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (15:39)

That's such a touching story. And I just love the

fact as well that Eleanor's this little girl. So generosity doesn't have to be a complicated intellectual affair. It's like you said, it's an affair of the heart. And yeah, it starts with a love for God and then being open to his promptings. yeah, that's wonderful, isn't it? That this little girl set such a powerful example to all of you at MED-ER, I can only imagine.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (15:48)

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:03)

What you've really painted there is a very moving picture actually of very real struggles, very real struggles and understanding that the parent lack of resource is going to have a very real impact on the ground where the need is felt, but notwithstanding, keeping going in faith and prayer, focusing in, leaning in on generosity and yeah.

having that encouragement from God to go forward in faith. So wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Now you, amazingly, because I'm sure you're ever so slightly busier as CEO of MedAir, but you also have this really important role with the Interagency Standing Committee,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:28)

Mm. Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (16:42)

Can you tell me bit more about how the ISC's work supports the international aid sector?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (16:47)

The IASC principles are a group that gathers in person a few times a year and then ad hoc as needed as per the major crises ~ evolution in the world. are...

really grappling at the moment with how to reset the whole humanitarian sector, looking at the architecture, at the coordination mechanisms, at the leadership structures, and how we can elevate the voices of those who are in crisis and needing support in...

times of intense difficulties, something that can happen to any of us. And we've been grappling with how do we get the balance right of the amount of money spent on coordination versus the amount of money that actually reaches people. And very conscious of the fact that we've seen such a significant reduction of funding in the sector.

Experts say probably about 40 % of humanitarian funding has just disappeared this year. It's not that there's a lack of money in the world. It's whether or not we are choosing a society to prioritize caring for the most vulnerable in our midst. And so we have been grappling with how do we maintain enough visibility with enough data collection to understand where we should prioritize, where the most life

whether most lives are at risk in vulnerable, fragile contexts and how we make those decisions together. I was...

standing at the coffee machine in the break time in the beginning of February talking to one of the main leaders of the whole humanitarian sector and he said to me, we haven't lost the battle for compassion, have we? And I said, we haven't lost it because it's already been won. If you just stop and think about it and you visualize what does it look like for somebody to care for another person and to go above and beyond in their care for another, to show solidarity.

and come alongside them in their time of need to show generosity to them. It's beautiful. Any image that comes to your mind is a beautiful image. Selfishness on the other hand is ugly.

You know, the battle has already been won. The question is how do we turn the tide in a way and celebrate the beauty of generosity together and ~ allow that to gain more traction in our society again and to spur each other on in the hope that we have that comes from that.

I think there's real value in doing that. And I've actually found that being in those high-level discussions has given me hope because it's grappling, being stuck in a room with a bunch of heads of UN agencies and a couple of NGO representatives and really putting our heads together. How can we help ensure that those who need the help the most are getting it?

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (19:24)

And out of interest, Anne, coming back to MED-AIR, have you seen amongst your wonderful donor base, your supporters, have you seen, I suppose, first of all, an awareness of just how acute things are in your sector at moment, and then a kind of response, a kind of catching, if you like, of this vision of generosity of spirit?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (19:41)

Mm.

We really have. I, you know, we've come through this year. We have had to make some significant cuts, but we are actually doing okay. We're quite stable. I think we as organizations, with the help of those that join together with us, are able to adapt and stabilize. But it's the communities and the mothers.

individual mothers trying to help their children stay alive that are the ones that are suffering in the midst of these cuts and we have found that there are many people around us who are as concerned about that as we are and and so we've actually seen an increase in private giving this year which has been a huge encouragement to us and has helped help carry us through and what we're able to do for those communities. I think if we if we start to act like

some lives in this world don't have the same value as ours do, then...

then there's something really wrong. every time I stand in a nutrition clinic and hold one of those children in my arms, I'm confronted by the fact that if this child's life doesn't have value, then why does mine? What would be the argument for saying that mine does? And it really motivates me to keep going all out for the sake of those who, by no choosing of their own, are caught up in crises and...

and needing each other's support.

And I know experientially that it can happen to any of us. I contracted cholera in South Sudan years ago. within hours, I went from being fit, able-bodied, reasonably young person to being on the brink of death. And if it weren't for my teammates who made sure that I got an immense amount of fluids in my system, I wouldn't have survived. And that can happen to any of us. It doesn't matter who we are. We need each other.

And when we show that, when we show that care for each other, is beautiful and it breaks down divides, as I was saying earlier. It brings hope.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:33)

It's very poignant listening to you Anne because I'm very aware that yes, you've many, many times in the last half of many years, you've been with MED-AIR, you've been in very, very raw situations, very poignant situations. It's the reality behind the TV screens, isn't it? Behind the news we see on it's, yeah, I'm feeling that conviction in my heart and I'm sure others listening as well as well, that it's too easy, isn't it, in our

Anne Reitsema - Medair (21:49)

Good.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (21:58)

relatively comfortable bubbles on our side of the world. And I say that with caution because obviously there's many in this country who are struggling. There's this need and lack here as well. So, I'm aware of that, and it's not some kind of competition, but yeah, we all stand before our maker, don't we? Needing to...

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:10)

Mm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:21)

~ remember the truth of those words that just because we can't see it right in front of us that it doesn't mean it's not there and yeah, we need to pray about that and think about how we're going to respond in faith. I'd like to take a moment now and we've talked a lot about generosity, about what's been going on at MED-AIR and how generosity has actually been a real theme for this season that you're in. So just taking a step back.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:24)

Mm.

Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (22:46)

to the wider concept of biblical stewardship for a moment. How do you understand that? And how, for you, does that idea of stewarding well everything that we're given by our wonderful God, how, for you, does that connect with generosity?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (22:49)

Mm.

Mm-hmm.

Hmm. StairChip is about...

managing well that which has been entrusted to us, taking care of the good that we have been given. And I think it links to what I was just saying about recognizing that every life is made with value and that when we act from that reality, we are communicating something very meaningful in this world.

we're communicating a love and care to each other, we're also recognizing each other's dignity and allowing it to shine. I think stewardship, managing well that which has been entrusted to us, cannot be about just getting what we need.

having a self-focused.

it's inherently part of recognizing that...

If we all grab for ourselves, if we're all only focused on ourselves, none of us will have enough. But if we're all focused on the needs of each other and caring for each other, we will all be loved and cared for. So if we're all living ~ from a generous spirit and know in an experiential way that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

that I think will be stewardship at its most beautiful and its most powerful in our society today.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:12)

You've just quoted that well-known verse from Acts and we've talked about the story of the 5,000 and I think a couple of the times you've mentioned bits of the Bible. is there a particular verse or story on generosity that's your kind of go-to for when you're looking for inspiration in this area? Encouragement perhaps?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:32)

Hmm.

I struggle to pick one. I think I'm going to go with Isaiah 58. It's the passage that tells us the kind of fasting that is pleasing to God is when we're caring for the needs of others, the hungry, the poor, wanderers, those in need of shelter. And it says that when we do that wholeheartedly,

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (24:35)

Yeah, it's hard, right?

Anne Reitsema - Medair (24:54)

We will be like a well-watered garden. We will actually be this thriving, flourishing, luscious thing. We'll be having streams that never cease. We will be repairers and rebuilders of broken walls. We will make communities livable again. It's such beautiful imagery of what the consequences of our...

The passage actually says spending ourselves, not being spent, but spending ourselves. And it actually ends, verse 13 and 14, with the importance of Sabbath rest, of rhythms of rest, of taking delight in spending time in fellowship with God. So it's not working from a place of emptiness, but from a place of fullness and being able to pour out for each other. And it's interesting because that's been a motivational passage

mid-air for many years and I've often stopped reading just before that part and then I realized actually that's the golden nugget that we need to make sure that we spend ourselves on behalf of those in need but that we're not spent because we keep making sure that we fill back up our tank by having good rhythms of rest in times of fellowship.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:03)

And walking in step with God, right? You know, in the message version, Jesus says, doesn't he, you know, come, I'm paraphrasing, but you know, come walk with me in the easy rhythms of grace, you know, it's that bit about his yoke, not being too heavy, you know, that he's there walking alongside us, but yeah, we have to remember to do that, not lean into our own strength, but into his. So,

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:06)

Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (26:27)

And this has been really thought provoking and felt like a very important conversation actually to be having because your area of work is focused on globally on such an area of need in the world and never more so than today, sadly with all that's going on. So I'd love to close by asking you, how can we be praying for you?

And in fact, the wider MedAir team at this point on both your personal journey of generosity, but also MedAir's.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (26:56)

Thank you. I think firstly that we wouldn't operate from a spirit of scarcity and out of fear in this season. Fear is never a good advisor, but that we really would.

function from an awareness of God's abundance and know that thriving and flourishing that Isaiah 58 describes, that we would find much joy in seeing the beauty of care for each other and be inspired by that and share it with others.

We seek to reach people and very hard to reach places and that's often because of conflict and insecurity. So always welcome prayer for the safety of our teams, that God would give us wisdom and when it's safe to move and when it isn't, that they would be protected. And really pray for...

For God to show us how and where he wants us to be able to continue to provide much needed life-saving assistance, healthcare, water, nutrition, and to do it to the best of our ability for his glory. Yeah.

Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (27:57)

Thank you, Anne. Thank you for sharing those and we'll make sure to include those in our show notes. Well, thank you so much. That brings our conversation to close for today. So thank you. Your schedule, I'm sure, is very packed. So we really appreciate you taking the time to come on the Active Generosity podcast and to just share a little bit about your journey of generosity. And to our listeners, thank you as well for joining us. Please see the show notes for related links.

Anne Reitsema - Medair (28:02)

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Ruth Jackson, Stewardship (28:23)

and please keep sharing this podcast with others. And if you will take a moment to leave us a good review. Until next month, goodbye.

stop.