

Nomad Connect

A Learning Journey

By **SAMIRA OFFEREIGNS**

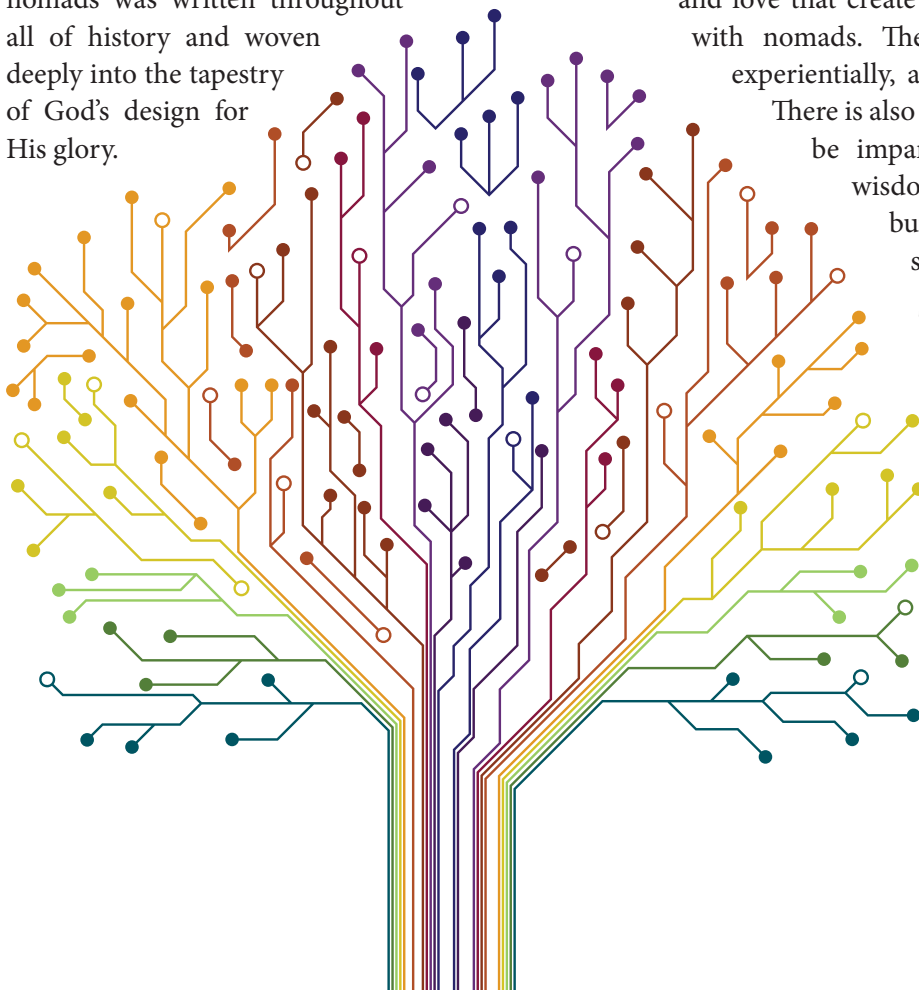
Samira Offereigns has been a part of the NPN leadership team since 2018. She has served among nomadic peoples in East Africa and in Central Asia.

Nomad Connect was born out of the dream of Malcolm Hunter, a man I highly admire. This was the man who first defined nomads for me and instilled in my heart a passion for nomadic peoples globally. His are the stories that make visible the hidden things, the peoples, and lands that are marginalized by modern society. His stories transport you not only to foreign lands fraught with adventure but also into the heart of God which is fraught with love and compassion. He taught me that God's heart for nomads was written throughout all of history and woven deeply into the tapestry of God's design for His glory.

Though Malcolm is no longer actively engaged in nomadic work, his heart remains passionately dedicated to nomads. To this end, he has turned his attention to the younger generations and ardently strives to raise up others with nomadic perspectives. He recognized that regular classroom instruction, seminary schools, or even missionary trainings could not adequately prepare people for nomadic work. These classes, designed and taught in sedentary ways, cannot infuse the unique challenges, differences, and love that create the complex beauty of working with nomads. These elements must be learned experientially, as people connect with nomads.

There is also a generational wisdom that must be imparted through mentorship. This wisdom is not contained in textbooks but is shared life on life, through stories and experiences.

Thus, a new learning experience was designed. In 2018, we called it Nomadic Truck Venture. In this venture, we loaded a large safari vehicle with mentors and students and traveled throughout Central Asia. Mentors shared missional strategies, cultural insights, and their personal stories and experiences of working with nomads. While this was an enriching experience for students, we found that the



long miles of travel kept students from being able to truly engage with nomads. Nomadic Peoples Network utilized this venture as a catalyst for an innovative process that helped redesign the program into what is now called Nomad Connect.

Learning takes place where our established frameworks of thinking are confronted by new information. The new information must struggle to find its place, to break down the old framework and create new structures of understanding. To do this well is to engage in a process, not to jump to conclusions. Nomad Connect's goal is to help students journey through this process: to move students from theory to experiential connection, from head knowledge to heart understanding. The purpose is not to create a methodology for nomadic ministry but rather to create a space for paradigm shifts of thinking: to confront personal limitations, wrestle with concepts, and seek God for His perspectives.

1 First Step: Online Course

The first step of this journey is to introduce new information, creating a base layer of knowledge from which they can build. This is done through an online, self-paced course that must be completed before going to the field. The course includes videos, reading materials, prayer guides, and student responses. It requires an engagement of time, energy, and prayer from the students. Nomad Connect is not an adventure-tourism activity, it's a sacrificial learning process.

2 Second Step: "Base Camp"

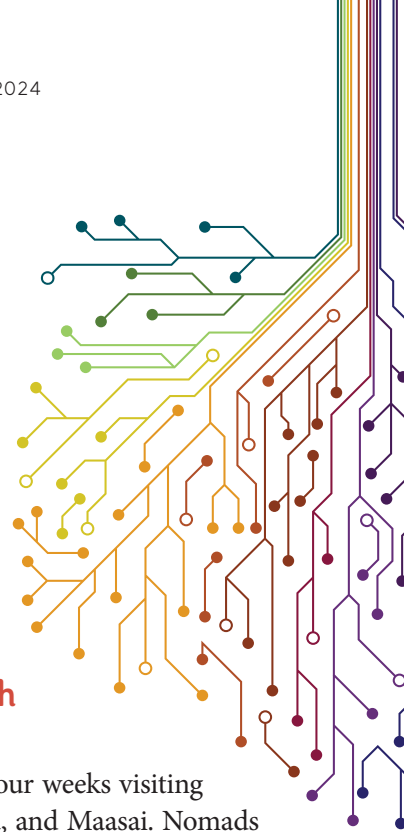
In June 2023, six students and three mentors from five different countries assembled in Kenya. Base Camp was a ramshackle assortment of cabins amongst acacia trees overlooking Lake Naivasha. A large table became our gathering point, a place where strangers began the journey of learning how to love one another as unto the Lord. Local mentors (believers from various Kenyan tribes) and the director of NPN joined us at the table to share their stories, perspectives, insights, and experiences with the students. These conversations were a rich input of


wisdom and discipleship. This was necessary preparation for nomadic connections and included cultural orientation, spiritual insight, and deepening understanding of nomads. Students were also taught about orality and Bible storytelling, and each prepared a story to share along the journey.

3 Third Step: Connecting with Nomads

We spent the next four weeks visiting nomadic tribes: Pokot, Turkana, and Maasai. Nomads are by nature hospitable but suspicious of outsiders. We were grateful for our hosts, local pastors, whom God used to bridge the gaps of language, culture, and trust. Through them, students engaged in observational participation, asking cultural questions and sharing daily life tasks. Students came with hearts eager to learn, and their humility opened the door to beautiful interactions. There is something powerful and significant in the exchange between human beings—sharing knowledge, celebrating differences, developing understanding, giving grace, and growing love. Our program was not focused on projects—doing things “for” the community—but rather based on learning, receiving from the community, which helped us grow in humility and love. This was a beautiful gift. Cultural exchange is a place of God's glory.

Traveling and living together, confronting discomfort, struggling through personality differences, and working together as a nomadic “clan” is challenging! It is something that cannot be learned in a classroom but is essential for developing godly character and equipping cross-cultural workers. As Sarah K, a participant said, “it confirmed to me how important team life is: unity and the general spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of every team member. The leaders took really good care of that.” As a mentor, I was impressed by the conscious decisions that were made to love one another, to confess and forgive





grievances, to extend grace, and to push forward with joy. We are only as strong as our weakest member, and at one point, we will all be that weakest member. The love that we shared as a team was translated to the communities around us and bore witness of God's enduring love.

Though Nomad Connect is not focused on evangelism, one of the purposes is to further Gospel impact in nomadic communities. Partnership with local pastors allowed us to learn from and come alongside them in support of church development. Engagement in prayer and spiritual warfare was an intricate part of our connection with nomads. In each location, God opened times for sharing testimonies, Bible stories, and engaging in spiritual conversations with people. Students grew in their ability to depend on God and to speak God's Word with courage. It was a time of deepening and testing faith in every heart.

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One significant moment came when a student, a Native American, recognized some of the similarities between his nomadic heritage and these nomadic peoples. Upon realizing this, he shared a testimony about his grandmother that resonated deeply in the hearts of the listeners. It was amazing to see God work in and through him as he shared this testimony. Nomads share "universal" characteristics but also are distinct, with specific cultural differences according to tribe. One of the purposes of visiting three nomadic groups is to discern what is universal nomadism and what is tribe-specific. Analyzing similarities and differences is an important part of the learning process, as is finding cultural bridges for connection

4 Fourth Step: Debrief

After four weeks of living in tents in nomadic contexts, we spent the last three days in the city. This was a time of worship, reflection, debrief, prayer, and shifting focuses forward. As Jill, a participant said, "this was a significant time for me because it gave me space, time, even permission, to process, put words to my emotions and spiritual experience. It was an appropriate and tangible way to release and fill in the void that would be left from my experiences with the team I had grown to love and appreciate."

Nomad Connect was an undertaking of great worth that required great work. There were moments, especially in the preparation, or in the days of sickness and exhaustion, when I wondered if this was a valid effort of time, money, and work...and the answer is a resounding "yes." The worth of this effort is measured in several directions: **the honor of God's name** that was exalted in every place we went, and in every participant's heart; **the equipping of God's people** via the development of faith and perspective shifts that happened along the journey; **the shared blessings** as God's glory was mutually experienced by participants and nomad communities; **the joy of fellowship** in loving one another, seeking God together, experiencing the corporate revelation of God in our lives; and **the joy of worshiping God in various flavors, languages, and colors** while being the church, encouraging the church, and watching God expand His church among nomads.

5 Fifth Step: Moving Forward

The dream of Nomad Connect is realized only in the continuing story. We have participated in the first fruits of this endeavor but pray that there will be multiplying fruits. We hope that Nomad Connect will continue to challenge people to consider the nomads, to align perspectives with God's heart, and to go the extra mile to connect with them. We pray that there will be future Nomad Connect programs that will continue to equip, envision, and empower followers of the Good Shepherd to shepherd nomads. For information about future Nomad Connect programs contact: info@npnet.net or nomadconnect@frontierventures.org. 