

The Wrecked Sessions Session 2

A Welcome again to the Wrecked sessions with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub, and on today's show we're going to talk about a single word that creates profound change in our lives, and that word is commitment. So, let's get started by welcoming the author of *Wrecked*, Mr. Jeff Goins.

J Hey, hey.

A How are you doing, my friend?

J Good, how are you, Andy?

A I am pretty awesome. Thank you for asking. We're also, on today's show, joined by Alece Ronzino. So, welcome to the show Lece.

AR Hey, guys.

A Well, Jeff, would you mind telling us how you met Alece?

J Yeah, I met Alece, I think, a couple of years ago now. Maybe longer. We, I think, followed some of the same people on social media. So, I think we probably knew each other through Twitter or something like that. And Alece was working for a missionary organization at the time. She was the founder of it, actually. And we were just crossing paths in Atlanta. And she – we had been talking for a while about maybe collaborating or something on a project together, you know, for our respective missions outfits.

And we just got together, got to know each other. And started to explore that together. It ended up not working out for reasons that Alece will probably go into at some point. But, yeah, I mean that's how we got connected. And, then, eventually she moved to Nashville. And we just realized that we knew a lot of the same people. And kept running into each other and became friends just through that.

A So, somewhere in the midst of this, Alece, you went to Africa and specifically, where were you in Africa?

AR South Africa.

A South Africa. OK. And you were there for how long?

AR Thirteen years.

A OK. So, tell us when – let's just sort of the stats, and then we will get into the heart stuff, which is, when were you gone, and what were the, um, what was your main job while you were there?

AR Well, I moved to Africa when I was 19. I had gone on short-term trips for multiple summers prior to that. But, then, when I was 19, packed up and moved to South Africa initially thinking I'd go for at least a year, but knew that I wanted to be there long-term. And a year quickly grew to 13. And, so, I was there from 1998 until the end of 2010 and ended up starting and running a missions organization called Thrive Africa.

A So, I've always heard people – I have three little kids. And, Jeff, just had his first. And I've always heard people refer to kids. And they say, "It goes so fast." But you just said your one year turned into 13 really fast, which I'm fascinated by. So, can you tell us, first, when you said you were going to go for a year, and you're 19 year old, were your parents onboard with that? Or the people around you, "That's nice. It's a year." What was the, I guess, vibe or the encouragement you were getting about being gone for that long?

AR My parents were very supportive of my decision to go. I think it helped they had some advanced warning. The summer I turned 16 I had spent two months in Botswana, Africa, and that was my first time on the African continent. And I came home and immediately told my parents I was going back. Like they knew that that was, um, a huge part of me and a huge desire of mine. And, so, I think they had fair warning leading up to my decision to go. And at the time I had looked around for some mission's training opportunities. I really wanted to be able to learn about doing missions while actively doing it.

And the only options I was finding were like four-year degrees at Christian colleges. And, then, looking up the stats, the majority of mission's majors never end up overseas, because they have to pay off all their school debts. So, I wanted to avoid that. And I wanted to avoid sitting just in a classroom for four years and just keep going maybe on summer short-term trips. But I wanted a way to actively engage and put into practice what I was learning. And that was what spurred my decision to go for a year initially was, "Well, I can't find something like that. So, let me just go for a year."

A Right.

AR And kind of Forrest Gump my way through it and see what happens. I don't know that that was necessarily the wisest course of action, or even something I would recommend to other 19-year-olds today. But somehow my naivety mixed with faith ended up pretty good with God leading all that in Africa.

A Yeah, I don't, um, I don't think it's wise to be sitting over coffee and saying, "You know, you should just Forrest Gump it. You know, just—

AR Right.

A "Just start running."

AR An Aleceism for you.

A That is an Aleceism. Jeff, at what point did Alece's story find its way into the story, the pages of *Wrecked*, your book?

J Yeah, I don't know. Um, I was trying to think of when I made that decision. Maybe – maybe Alece can tell you. I know that when I first met her, I think she basically just told me this whole crazy story which I was a little bit envious of. Because, you know, when I was—

A Was the crazy, just clarify for me. The crazy story that at 19 she just goes?

J Yeah, I mean, she goes on a short-term mission trip. And, then, she makes a decision to go. And, then, she moves there and stays there, you know, for what, you know, is basically her 20s. You know,

which is very different from what most people in their 20s are doing. And I was, frankly, envious, I think, of that experience a little bit. Because when I was in college I felt this strong calling to be a missionary, and I thought that my story would look a little bit like Alece's. And, so, you know, I don't feel bad about that. I think that my story has turned out just fine. But when I heard her story I was like, "Man, people need to know that this is like a legitimate choice. They need to know that you can get wrecked and turn it into a lifestyle. You can have your heart broken by something broken in the world and really give your life to it." They need to know that this isn't something that, you know, is just in the storybooks but actually happens now.

So, yeah, at some point I was writing the book, and I realized about halfway through the book which is where Alece's story comes in that—

A It's Chapter 5, right?

J —it's not enough to be wrecked. You have to commit to something. You have to do something for more than two weeks, or two months. You have to make this experience a lifestyle in some form. And at that point I think I thought of Alece and just shot her an e-mail and asked her permission to use her story.

A So, Alece, let me ask you, when you tell people about, "Yeah, I was in Africa for 13 years," what do they say?

AR I think mixture of responses ranging from people being really surprised to hear that I moved there at 19. And, then, there's also this romanticized view of missionary work. So, that tends to be where the conversation goes, people's perspective of like, "Wow, that must have been amazing!" Like, "How incredible that you got to do something like that."

J Yeah.

AR Yes, it was amazing, and it was incredible. But I didn't sit around all day rocking orphan babies [laughing] as pictured.

A I had to mute my mike. I was laughing too hard.

AR [laughing] Yeah.

A Yeah.

AR Which is why when I started blogging from the mission field seven years ago, I called my blog *Grit and Glory, Mostly Grit* because of that. I wanted to shatter some of those like stereotypical romanticized views that people have that life on the mission field was just this glorious moment where people were coming, Jesus all the time. And like all these incredible miracles always happening.

A Yep.

AR It was like, "No, it's mostly grit." Like I sit behind a desk. I'm an office missionary. I go to the post office. Like I do Monday normal everyday things. I just do it in a different culture and a different environment. And, yes, in the midst of that I'm actively involved in helping to evangelize, and disciple, and whatever. But I'm still just a normal person.

A So, I want to dig into that a little bit. And, again, this is in Chapter 5 of *Wrecked*. And the title of that chapter is “From Wrecked to Committed,” and Jeff starts the chapter by talking about how lousy he is at commitment, which, you know, sounds really self-deprecating except most of us feel the exact same way. And I want to actually talk about this head on. I don’t want to talk around it. I want to talk about it head on with this idea of long-term commitment to being wrecked.

And, so, my first question to really dig into that is, did you plan – did you plan to stay that long? When you – what you told your parents, maybe what you told others, was a year. But did you really believe you were going to stay that long?

AR That’s a hard question to answer. Because I feel like it’s a “yes” and “no.” No, in the sense that I never foresaw the, I guess the growth and the depth of what I would be involved in. I never even set out to start a nonprofit or begin a ministry. And all of that ended up transpiring in a staff team of over 60. And like the amazing team that God put together, I never saw any of that. But I did want to be there longterm. I didn’t necessarily have a timeline in my head, or even really a clear picture of what that would look like. So, me and my two suitcases coming at least for a year, but hoped that somehow that it would lead to something longer. Yes. So, kind of a “yes” and “no” answer for you. It didn’t help probably.

A It absolutely helped. I mean – and here’s why it helped. Because – and maybe I’m maybe overthinking this. But how many answers are really true, “Yes, absolutely! And I had no doubts. And my faith was strong the entire time”? I mean—

AR Yeah.

A —it’s the reality of this. And this is why Jeff wrote the book about how it’s messy. And I’m going to read – this is from Page 92. It says, “Alece was wrecked by her first visit to Africa, but it was in the stain that the transformation took place. Change always happens when you come down from the clouds and deal with the messiness of life, when you turn a mission trip into a lifestyle, when you walk past someone who is poor, and in pain, and actually turn around. Real transformation happens when you commit.”

So, Jeff, there is a lot of smaller opportunities for service. For instance, your trips to downtown Nashville.

J Uh-huh (yes).

A Why did you feel it was important to include Alece in your book when so many of the things we talked about were shorter?

J Uh-huh, yeah, because the point of getting wrecked is not about the experience. It’s not about the short-term deal. Now, the reason that I shared some of those stories about reaching out and finding my own Calcutta in Nashville, Tennessee is because I was living in the suburbs at the time. And a lot of times when I tell stories like Alece’s, or even share stories from my own life, people go, “Oh, I could never do that.” Right? Like this is something that we say to excuse ourselves from the guilt that we feel for not really fulfilling our callings.

And, so, I think the reason that I share short of short-term, easy, weekend experiences is so that anybody can do that. Anybody who is 16 years old, within reason, can probably do what Alece did. You know? Sure, it requires some commitment. It's a little bit scary. There's a cost to it. But, you know, somebody who's 46 and has a family like legitimately may not be able to do what Alece did when she went to Botswana for a summer.

But the whole point of those experiences is not the experience, it's what happens afterwards. And, so, Alece's life exemplifies that. You know? You don't commit to something – and I see this all the time when people have some sort of heart rending experience. They go, "I'm going to do this differently." That is not a commitment. A commitment is what Alece did when she got on the plane and left for a year. And that year turned into 13 years. And every time she had a hard choice in front of her, she decided to stay instead of to leave. That's commitment. Saying it is just cheap. Doing it is where the commitment actually happens.

So, I wanted to exemplify that in a pretty powerful story. That said, I love – I love Alece's story, because she'll tell you that she wasn't this über compassionate type person. This happened to her. This wasn't something she chose for herself. And what I like about her is, if you meet her even now, she's just a normal person. She doesn't give you that weird missionary vibe where you feel guilty for having two boxes of cereal at home.

AR That's good to hear.

A Yeah, because I've got like six. So, I would be really horrible. So, Alece, you are on the other side of Africa at this point, the other side of that part of your life, and I don't want to make this negative, but I don't know how to make it any other way. So, when people talk about your experience and say, "Oh, that must have been wonderful." It sort of sounds like it was a cruise. Like, "Oh, it's so good that you did that, but now there's this." And having read *Wrecked* and having the opportunity to talk to several people that are in the book, there seems to be a thread that – and basic idea of *Wrecked* – is that you are supposed to stay wrecked. You are supposed to – it is not a – "That was nice, and I did that, and now back to" feel whatever blank, you know?

AR Right.

A Now, back to. So, can you talk about how the, you know, you did this and now back to – I hope this makes sense. How is that – what does that really look like? Are you forever different? Obviously, it was a huge portion of your life. Do you feel like you need to be there? Are you still able to do and serve here in America? What makes it – let me ask a real specific, what makes it not just an isolated boxed-in experience? How does it carry itself out in your life now?

AR Well, I absolutely am different, uh, in so many different ways. But I think the way that it's not just this lovely little thing that I once did that's just kind of on the timeline of my life is that – I don't know, maybe some of it is Africa. She has a way of just getting in your bloodstream and truly wrecking you. And I might not call Africa home anymore at this point in my life, but she always will have my heart. Um, and the lessons that I learned from Africa and from her people are things that I carry with me in my everyday life. Like finding joy, choosing to find joy, in the small, simple things and being content with what you have, and taking care and being a good steward of what you have as little, or as great as it might be. All of those things that I learned.

I think, as a 19-year-old I headed out there thinking what I was going to do to help or change Africa. And in reality, I mean, I came back to the States being completely changed by the continent as opposed to the other way around.

A Jeff, do people reference Alece's section, or they are afraid to talk about it? Are they afraid – how do they view?

J Yeah, well, I mean I have heard people read Alece's section and tell me that it touched them in some way. Or some people go, "I'm so glad you included Alece's story. I love it." They are already familiar with her and her work. She has a pretty big blog following.

So, but I think it's sort of the typical like, uh, prototype of leaving everything behind and going and doing something crazy. Like, even when we're sort of speaking in generalities we say things like, "Well, I'm not telling you to like drop everything and move to Africa for the rest of your life." Well, that's exactly what Alece did. And, so, yeah, I think for some people it is intimidating because it's not that stereotype like she actually did it. Like this thing that we sort of put in our minds as like the ultimate picture of sacrifice and discomfort and whatever, she did. And, so, it's like the last thing that people want to talk about. They want to talk about how they can be radical in their own context.

But what I did hear, and probably the most refreshing or fulfilling piece of feedback that I've gotten so far from the book is from a missionary who spent I think about a decade in Africa, and, then, came back from that experience and felt off. For them life just happened, and they had some kids, and they moved to Oklahoma, and they are raising a bunch of kids there. And, actually, write just kind of a – I wrote a throwaway line at the end of the book saying something like, "It doesn't matter if you're in Africa, or living in Oklahoma raising five kids."

And this person – I may have mentioned this before – this person is raising five kids in Oklahoma. And, so, as soon as he read that he started crying. And it just touched him.

All that to say, I thought that was really cool. And I would be really interested in hearing Alece's thoughts on now that your back and somewhat unexpectedly, the ministry that she started is no longer in operation. So, some things happened that weren't ideal. But now that she's back from that, I would be interested in hearing like how are you dealing, Alece, with being back? And it's still kind of new. You spent in your adult life you spent more time outside of the country than in it.

AR Right.

J So, you know, I know that people who are reading the book, are probably listening to this, who have had that experience like that guy that's living in Oklahoma. And when he read that line, it encouraged him. He was where he needed to be. And I think you're where you need to be. But that's not to say it's not hard. So, I'd love to hear how you're dealing with the wrecking in this second season of life for you where it's a new kind of discomfort; not one that you would choose, but I think you're learning and growing through it.

AR Right. I think kind of at the root of the challenges and the transition I've experienced in the past few years has come down to identity. Like who am I if not a missionary, if not a wife, if not the leader of a nonprofit, if not any of these things? That you don't think that you find your identity in those things until they're gone. And, then, you're left trying to figure out who is left. Who are you? And I feel like

that's been kind of at the root of what I've been going through the past few years. And I know that I necessarily even have an answer to that. I still struggle trying to determine what my favorite things are.

Even just identifying small seemingly insignificant things that I would describe myself with, or define myself by, or being able to make a list of what I enjoy as me without thinking through the filter of what other people might want, or serving other people's needs, but just me. Like, who am I?

And I think that's kind of the crux of what I've been wrestling with and what I'll probably still be wrestling with for a while. But, yeah, it's definitely been a season of wrecking in a completely different fashion than what took me to Africa. But learning to trust and cling to the God who led me there being the same God who led me away from it all.

A That was really beautiful. I'm kind of stuck right now. Uh. So, Alece, I know that having read your story personally and many, many others have read this as Jeff knows how many thousands of the book has sold. And I'm curious, um, I'm making the assumption that this is the only place that someone has written about your story. Is that true? Other than your blog, have you been highlighted in other books, or?

AR No, no. This is the first.

A OK. So, assuming that this is the first time that you've had to, other than your site: <http://gritandglory.com>, what are your feelings about how people would receive your story? How do you want me to read it? How do you want others to see your story? What do you hope happens when they read it?

AR Well, what I hope doesn't happen is that people read it and immediately dismiss it because my story was so out there and out of the box from what they might ever pursue, or even feel called to do, that it just gets dismissed. Kind of what Jeff was saying that it – me telling my story wasn't about telling everybody they need to drop everything and move overseas. But just that reminder and that call to follow those nudges, and that gentle voice that you're hearing inside, or something that's leading you in a certain direction even if it's coming just in the form of a passion to follow after that, to like take heed to those scratchings on your heart, and to follow after it.

And, for me, I guess the thing I hope most people get as far as commitment goes is that I think in general as a generation and as a society we aren't willing to commit to something until we have all the details. We want full clarity. We want to know all the fine print. We want to know what we're signing up for in detail before we'll commit. And commitment doesn't work that way. We do ourselves a disservice by making ourselves believe at some point it will all make sense, enough for us to commit and give our lives to it.

But commitment in its truest sense is found in the ambiguity, in the unknown, in Abraham being called to leave where he was and God saying, "Go to the land I will show you." He had no idea what he was giving his life for when he said, "yes," and when he committed in obedience. And I think that's what it's like for all of us. If I had seen a spelled-out map of what my 13 years in Africa would have looked like, I would have said, "Hell, no."

Because if I knew the heartache I would go through, the financial difficulty of raising money for an organization, the fact that our property burned down, that my roof blew off my house, that just all of

the heartache, and pain, and challenges I would face, there was no way I would have committed. So, apply it to ourselves when we make ourselves try to believe that if we had all the answers, or knew exactly what we were committing to it would be easier to say yes. It would not.

So, just follow that scratching in your heart. Take that step. And commit in the unknown to the unknown. Because God's there and is going to walk you through it and meet you there in a way that you wouldn't have found if you waited for it all to be spelled out first.

A Jeff, I have some thoughts on that, but I want to ask you first. What are your thoughts on her comments about commitment?

J Well, I mean, well, you can see why I chose her story.

A Yeah.

J I love Alece's attitude. And I really like what she said about identity. I think that's essentially why you need to get wrecked is because – and why it's a life-long process. Thomas Merton said we basically have two selves. If the true self, which only we and God really knows, and we have the false self which is what we show everybody else, which is what we're good at, what we get applause for. It's part of us but, also, a little bit of us giving – putting our best face on. And Merton said that we – if we go through life living according to the false self, then we, ultimately, deceive ourselves. And it's just an unfulfilling way to live, and we begin to believe that we are what we do.

And as Alece has said, and learned, when life – when the storms of life kind of blow across your way, you find out that you are more than what you do. And I think we need to get wrecked because – because we need to shed that false self. And as Alece's story shows, that's a life-long journey. And, so, what I love is that you don't get to decide where you go or how you get wrecked. And all you can do is go along for the ride.

And, so, I love what Alece said about commitment. Because I think the call to get wrecked is essentially this call to commit to a way of life that's going to be uncomfortable, but also find your true self.

A You know, Alece, there is – I just recently read a book called *Choosing to Cheat* by Andy Stanley, and it's a book—

AR I love that book.

A Well, I'm glad you've read that. It got repackaged and rereleased and stuff. I'm not sure what the new one is called. But *Choosing to Cheat* is that book. But the reason I bring it up is that it helped me in 92 pages or whatever frame forever a part of my life. And *Wrecked* has done that for a lot of people. It's helped them frame forever, "How should I look at missions?" Like, "OK, I'll use this *Wrecked* frame now, OK?" And what you just said about commitment, I think, will – and only time will tell – but I think it helped – will forever help me frame what commitment truly is. And it was the part where you said where there is no commitment, real commitment, unless there is ambiguity. If there is no mystery, then it's not commitment. It's just a plan. It's just, get on the railroad track, and there you go.

And there is a real difference between a railroad track and a journey through the jungle. You know what I mean?

AR Right.

A So, I thank you for that. That's very well said. And you say it based on your experience not on a hypothesis. So.

AR Thanks Andy.

A Yeah. Well, that's all I had. Alece, is there anything else you wanted to mention before we – I do want to point folks to <http://gritandglory.com> where you are very actively writing, and you have a thriving community of readers there. So, I would encourage folks to head over there and join that family of readers. I see we have some overlaps in friends there. And, so, do head to <http://Gritandglory.com>. And especially pay attention to the sidebar. There are a lot of images there that I know will take readers to really some really rock-solid parts of who you are and what you've done. And that's a great way to connect with you.

So, Jeff, I'll let you have the last word. Then I'll close up.

J Well, thanks Alece. Thanks Andy. Again, I just want to underscore that you don't commit to something when you say you are going to do it. You commit to something like moving to Africa or being more involved in the world by doing what Alece did. You get on the plane.

A Alece, thank you.

AR Thanks guys. I appreciate it.

A Thanks for your time. Thank you for your story. And your story is not over. Let's all remember that. It's a process. So, we'll stay in touch over at <http://gritandglory.com> and, Jeff, thank you for including her in *Wrecked*. And, again, if you haven't picked up your copy, we encourage you to do so. So, thank you both for your time. And thanks, folks, for listening.

AR Thanks.

J My pleasure.