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MEDITATIONS
for
MISSIONS

“Chris Anderson writes, ‘Missions isn’t *a* ministry of the church—it’s *the* ministry of the church.’ If so, then every Christian should be vitally involved in missions. Some will devote their lives to full-time missionary endeavors, others will serve as pastors who teach about and encourage missions, and all should be ‘senders.’ Whatever your role in missions, this short book will give insight, biblical instruction, inspiring stories, and convincing reasons why every believer should want to dedicate their lives to the ministry Christ has given His church.”

—**Gary Gilley**, Assistant Pastor of Southern View Chapel, Springfield, Illinois

“With one exception, I have known each of the contributors to this volume for many years. They represent the finest missionary thinking and practice among conservative evangelicals today. I reference them regularly as exemplars to my students. My life work as a missiologist has been to increase their tribe.”

—**Mark Vowels**, Veteran Missionary and Missions Professor

“*More Gospel Meditations for Missions* is a timely and needed call to refocus our hearts on the transforming power of the gospel. Each reading gently but clearly draws the reader back to daily dependence on Christ, reminding us that missions is not driven by extraordinary people, but by ordinary believers faithfully submitting every part of their lives to Him. I was personally encouraged and motivated through these meditations, and I believe they will stir a renewed passion for gospel-centered living and global mission.”

—**Donna Bixby**, Missionary and International Director of Jonathan’s House,
Central African Republic

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Portions of Tim Keesee's articles first appeared in various issues of the 2020 volume of *TableTalk*.

Cover photo taken by Chris Anderson on the island of Yap while visiting missionaries in 2024.

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Introduction

In 2011, I wrote the following in the first volume of *Gospel Meditations for Missions*: “Missions isn’t an addendum that was stapled onto normal Christianity. It’s at the heart of Christianity because it’s at the heart of God Himself.” Fifteen years later, I’m more convinced of that principle than ever. Missions isn’t *a* ministry of the church—it’s *the* ministry of the church.

During those fifteen years, the trajectory of my life has continually moved toward missions. There’s been an irresistible pull—a Great-Commission gravity—that keeps tugging at me. From 2012 to 2021, I was privileged to pastor a missions-minded and missionary-sending church in Atlanta. I worked for a missions organization for several years. And now I’m full-time with Church Works Media as a Bible teacher and missions catalyst.

The missionaries who contributed to the first volume are all back. JD Crowley has continued his amazing linguistic and missions work in Cambodia despite a bout with cancer. World-traveler and missions-enthusiast Tim Keesee, the founder of Frontline Missions International, continues to engage his profound pen for the cause despite battling cancer twice in the last decade. David Hosaflook has taken contextualization to a Hudson Taylor level; he’s regularly tapped by the Albanian press as an expert on Albanian history. Now his ministry footprint is expanding beyond Albanian borders. Joe Tyrpak, my long-time friend and collaborator, continues to faithfully pastor in Ohio. He’s a model of biblical fidelity and missional fervency.

We are adding two new writers to this sequel. Philip Hunt is a pastor and educator in Kitwe, Zambia, and his visionary work at Central Africa Baptist University has reached all across the continent of Africa. I am glad to count Philip among my friends. Dan Anderson is the director of BGFM Global—and my brother. He’s a principled and effective leader, and he’s led BGFM Global into a stronger application of indigenous ministry principles than any mission I’ve seen. I admire him, though I prefer to keep that a secret.

As always, Abby Huffstutler has done a tremendous job editing, making us look smarter than we are. Thank you, Abby! And many thanks to Scott Ashmore who did the artistic layout for this book and continues to make himself invaluable to Church Works Media. Scott suggested that we let this book unfold thematically. To that end, the book addresses God’s heart for the nations (days 1–5), the call of missionaries (days 6–12), the gospel message (days 13–17), the local church (days 18–25), and the need for endurance (days 26–31).

The Lord has used the first *Gospel Meditations for Missions* devotional to teach Christians about missions and to thrust them toward the mission field. If this little book can do the same, we will rejoice yet again. As we write, we continually remember the Lord Jesus’ prayer request from Matthew 9:38: “Lord of the harvest, send forth laborers!” Grace.

Chris Anderson

“God So Loved the World”

The Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

Read John 3

“Salvation is from the Jews.” Jesus said so in John 4:22. The Jews had the Scriptures, the tabernacle and temple, and the priesthood. Most importantly, the Jews had the promise of the Messiah—a Son of David Who would be born in the city of David.

But the salvation which would come into the world through the Jews was intended for *all* nations. Way back in Genesis, we learn that Abraham’s Son—the Lord Jesus—would be a blessing to “all the nations of the earth” (18:18 and 22:18). The apostle John repeatedly emphasizes and celebrates the universality of the gospel—that it is for *the world*. Here’s a sampling of his descriptions of the universal offer and intent of the gospel.

“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). In John the Baptist’s classic announcement of Jesus as the Lamb of God, he tells us that Jesus came not only to remove the sins of believing Jews, but of *the believing world*. The term “world” clearly means *believers from all over the world*, not every person in the world. Those who don’t trust in Christ will not have their sins forgiven. But the gospel is good news for *everybody*, regardless of their ethnicity or geography.

“God so loved the world” (John 3:16–17). In what is very likely the most famous verse in all the Bible, we learn that God loves *the world* and will save “whoever believes,” regardless of their ethnicity. Jesus came to save the world—all who would believe—not to condemn them (John 3:17 and 12:47).

“This is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). Nobody was more hated in Jesus’ day than the Samaritans—half-breeds who had both Jews and Gentiles in their family tree. But when Jesus saves the Samaritan woman—and through her influence, many in that village—the now-believing Samaritans rejoice that Jesus is “the Savior of the world”—not just of the Jews, the respected, or the privileged. John makes the same point in the book of 1 John, telling us that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world (2:2) and that “the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (4:14; see also 4:9).

“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). Once again, we are told that Jesus came from heaven to save people from all over the world. He is the bread of God—the bread of life—for “anyone” who believes (6:51).

“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5). One of the famous “I am” statements of Jesus in the book of John is His claim to be Light. It’s a motif that fills the Old Testament and New Testament alike (Psalm 27:1; 1 John 1:5). Jesus is the Light of *the world*—the One Who entered the darkness to rescue people from all over the planet!

“I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also” (John 10:16). Jesus reveals Himself to be the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for His sheep (and apparently not for goats, by the way—John 10:11, 15, 17, 18). But in a statement that is underappreciated by most, Jesus explains that He has sheep who are not Jews. He offers salvation to all.

“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). John rehearses again and again that Jesus was sent into the world to save the world. And Jesus has sent us into the world as His deputies. We’re not only saved *out of* the world; we’re sent *into* the world. Are we going? Do we share Jesus’ heart for all humanity? Do we long to see a universal assembly worshiping the Lamb of God Who has taken away their sins? If so, let’s go!

Let the gospel infuse you with Jesus’ love for the lost from all over the world. —Chris

Whoever will drink of the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. (John 4:14)

Read John 4:1–42

“Dear Christians,” a young Muslim girl wrote from the distant nation of Uzbekistan in Central Asia, “please do not send me any more of your literature. My father has promised to kill me if you write me again.” She added to this sad note, though, a powerful postscript. “Here is the address of a friend. Write to her, and she will give your letter to me.”

This was one of the first letters I received in the early days of our mission, and I’ve never gotten over the real life-and-death issues at stake in the gospel’s advance. This brave girl was taking a Bible correspondence course when her father’s threats fell upon her, but her thirst to know the only One Who can satisfy was so intense that she was willing to risk everything to know Him. Thirst—deep, desperate thirst—is a painful thing. That’s why to me the most heartbreaking words Jesus uttered on the cross were words exhaled in agony: “I thirst” (John 19:28). The longing, life-and-death nature of thirst makes it a perfect descriptor for our need of God. There is Spirit-driven desperation in those who thirst to find the water of life. Even though the path to this spring is often filled with twists and turns and pitfalls, sovereign love is strong.

That was certainly the case with Yassin, a man in Morocco who was thirsting for something—or Someone—outside of the only religion he had ever known, Islam. In his search, Yassin pirated a copy of the Hollywood film *Son of God* to try to learn Who Jesus is. That led him to the Roman Catholic church in his city, but he never got past the door because the guards ran him off. A person leaving Islam isn’t something to be encouraged because it could mean trouble.

And so, this thirsty man went on searching until he stumbled onto a Christian radio broadcast, where he got patient, biblical answers to his questions. He then found a church, and this time he wasn’t cast out—instead, he was welcomed and spent many hours with a pastor, who is himself a trophy of grace from Islam. Together, they examined the Scriptures and the claims of Christ on this wanderer’s life. At last, Yassin tasted for the first time the cold, refreshing, life-giving, good news of the gospel and believed.

When someone in Morocco comes out of the prison house of Islam, where the darkness is deep and the bars are strong and the cost of escaping is great, it can only be a work of God. Like the Samaritan woman, this Moroccan man also was brought to a well where he drank deeply and was satisfied, for Jesus said: “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

So rejoice and join in the joy in heaven over Yassin, our newborn brother, and for all those who are being gathered from across all nations. For God’s life-giving invitation continues to reach the ends of the Earth.

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1)

Jesus said to them, ... “Whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:17)

Let the gospel’s saving, satisfying work give you fresh joy today. —Tim

Three Unchanging Foundational Principles for Modern Missions

That the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. (Romans 15:9)

Read Romans 15:8–24

The missionary work of the church reveals where we stand on one fundamental question: Are people without Christ worth saving? Today, an estimated 2.5 billion people—40% of the world's population—have never heard of Jesus Christ. This staggering reality about the needs of our world demands that faithful Christians understand three unchanging, foundational principles and make them part of our spiritual DNA.

The mission is unchanged. In Romans 15, Paul reminds us that Christ came not only to confirm God's promises to the Jews but also "that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (v. 9). This mission begins with God Himself doing the work of reconciling sinful human beings to Himself. It originates with the Father, is enacted through Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, carried out by the church, and received by the world. The mission of God remains constant: the verbal proclamation of the gospel that transforms hearts and creates worshipers from every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The power is unchanged. Writing to former pagans who once worshiped through temple prostitution and drunken revelry, Paul declares they are now "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another" (v. 14). This is the radical transforming power of the Holy Spirit. But the same power enables bold, courageous proclamation of the gospel today. From Jerusalem to Illyricum, covering 1,200 miles, Paul fulfilled his ministry through this unchanging power. And it was the same Holy Spirit at work Who transformed my friend Mohammed, a former Muslim scholar from Darfur who became a church planter in Sudan.

The method is unchanged. God's strategy has never varied: He uses people. Ordinary people like you and me. Paul made it his ambition to preach where Christ had not been named, laying foundations for reproducing churches that would reach further into unreached regions (vv. 20–21). God doesn't depend on better methods, more machinery, or increased funding. He looks for men and women who will represent Him in this world. The person is the plan.

Consider the unlikely servants God has used throughout history: Moses stuttered, David was too young, Abraham was too old, Timothy had ulcers, Peter was afraid of death, Paul was a murderer. Yet God chose "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise" and "what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

The church is not a cruise ship designed to transport us comfortably to heaven. It is a battleship storming the gates of hell to deliver those enslaved in bondage to sin and Satan. And there are huge groups of people who are still completely captive to sin and unreached—including 987 unreached people groups in Africa alone, representing 430 million people who have never heard the gospel!

So, we're back to where we started—considering our world's great need for Christ. In light of these three foundational principles from Romans 15, here are some key questions: Have you believed the gospel? Are you proclaiming it to others in the power of the Holy Spirit? Is it your ambition to be engaged in God's mission?

Let the gospel and the plight of the unreached move you to pray, give, go, and send gospel workers to the mission fields of the world. —Philip

The Missions Passage *Par Excellence*

4

But they have not all obeyed the gospel.... I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have.... But I ask, did Israel not understand?... Of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." (Romans 10:16, 18, 19, 21)

Read Romans 10:14–21

In Romans 10:14–15—a popular missions text that I believe is misunderstood and misapplied—Paul lists five steps that are necessary for anyone to receive salvation:

1. Someone must be sent.
2. That person must preach the gospel.
3. Unbelievers must hear the gospel.
4. Unbelievers must believe the gospel.
5. Unbelievers must call on God.

Paul uses these steps to analyze where Israel failed as they rejected Jesus the Messiah. But Paul adds an additional piece in verse 19: understanding. *Did Israel understand?*

Israel understood and was actually jealous. Paul goes back to the Old Testament in his explanation of Israel's rejection. Quoting Deuteronomy 32:21, he says that God had already predicted Israel's jealousy of God's outreach to Gentiles: "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry" (Romans 10:19). Indeed, it wasn't because Israel *didn't* understand the prophets that they murdered them—it was because they understood them perfectly. It wasn't because the synagogue members in Nazareth *didn't* understand Jesus' words about God's love for the Gentiles that they tried to throw Him off a cliff—it was because they understood Him perfectly. It wasn't because the Sanhedrin *didn't* understand that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and the King of the Jews that they crucified Him—it was because they understood Him perfectly. Israel understood.

Israel failed to believe in Messiah. In Romans 10:16 Paul fingered the exact point of failure: "But they have not all *obeyed the gospel*. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'" If the point of Romans 10 and Isaiah 53:1 is that God saves people only through faith, then failure to obey God's command to believe is catastrophic for Israel. The suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53 is the Messiah that Israel understood but did not want to believe.

So, where does this leave Israel today? And where does it leave Gentiles? At the end of chapter 10, Paul lays it on the line for Israel, again quoting Isaiah: "But of Israel Isaiah says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people'" (v. 21). This just broke Paul's heart, and it should break ours—that God has extended salvation to His chosen people, and on the whole, as a nation, they have rejected Him, even though He sent preachers to them (steps 1 and 2), and even though they heard and understood Who He was (step 3).

And what of the hated Gentiles? "Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me'" (v. 20). Non-Jews are being offered God's salvation and are receiving it? Yes!

With verses 19 and 20, this stretch of Romans 10, expertly designed as a step-by-step vindication of God's offer of salvation to Israel, serves also as a missionary passage *par excellence*—because when God extends His gospel to *everyone*, now, all over the world, those who are "not a people" are becoming *the people of the living God* by the hundreds of millions. And Jews are believing their Messiah! Is God sending gospel workers? Yes! Are they going and preaching? Yes! Is the world hearing and understanding? Yes! And are the nations believing and calling on Jesus' name? Yes!

Let the good news of a sending and saving God encourage you to find your part in His plan for the nations. —JD

You Make God Famous by Telling God's Story

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (Matthew 6:9)

Read 3 John and Romans 11:33–36

God's fame—that is, His name, glory, honor, holiness, praise—is arguably the most important theme in the Bible. Christians are to leverage our lives “for the sake of the name” (3 John 7). But how do you make God famous?

How do you make anyone famous? Is Sylvester Herrera famous to you? No? Okay, he was born in Mexico. He was five-foot-nine. The father of seven. A silversmith who fought in World War II. He received the Medal of Honor. But those facts won't make him famous in your heart. I have to tell you his story.

On March 15, 1945, Herrera's platoon was ambushed while they were securing a road. They hit the ground, but Herrera got back up, charged the enemy position, and single-handedly captured eight enemy soldiers. And his day was just beginning. Farther down the road, they came under intense fire again. This time there was no place to take cover; they'd be slaughtered. With selfless courage Herrera jumped to his feet and started running across a minefield, directly toward the enemy position, his machine gun blazing and mines exploding around him. Suddenly a mine blew underneath his leg and shattered it below the knee. He got back up on his one good leg and the shattered stump of the other and kept going, gun still blazing. Then a mine exploded under his good leg, severing it below the knee. He fell to the ground but kept shooting, still drawing enemy fire away from his buddies. In the meantime, his fellow soldiers skirted the minefield and took the enemy position from the side.

On August 23, 1945, Sylvester Herrera received from President Truman the highest medal awarded by the United States, the Medal of Honor.

Now is Sylvester Herrera famous to you? We make someone famous by telling the fuller story that makes him remarkable, not by listing disconnected facts about him.

Here are some facts from another story: *Frodo is the Ringbearer. Hobbits are remarkable creatures. Aragorn is the true King. The ring must be destroyed. There is a powerful evil that opposes all that is good. Even good men can fall to the temptation of power.* Each of those facts is true to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. But if you've never read the book or seen the movie, those facts are meaningless.

So, here are some Bible facts: *God created all things. Our first parents rebelled, but God didn't abandon them to hell. He sent His own Son to be the Savior. Jesus lived a perfect life. He died for our sins and rose again. All who believe in Him have eternal life.*

I love those facts! I was saved by them. But can the facts without the full creation-to-Christ story grab the attention of people's hearts with the glory of God? Not likely. People might even misinterpret the facts, like the Khmer Buddhist who watched the *JESUS* Film (which unfortunately started in the middle of the Bible story) and concluded that Jesus must have committed an unbelievable number of sins in His former incarnation to deserve such a horrible death. He was correctly interpreting the cross according to his karmic worldview. That's making God *infamous*, not famous.

This is why D. A. Carson said, “The good news of salvation through Jesus Christ makes sense in the context of [the Bible's] story-line and in no other” (“The Biblical Gospel,” *For Such a Time as This*, pp. 80–81).

God is sovereign. He can save someone with just the facts from the story of redemption. He's done it many times. But if you want God to be *famous*—to be worshiped, adored, praised, and loved—you must tell His awesome story from beginning to end, just like He gave it to us in the Bible.

Let the creation-to-Christ gospel make God famous all over the world. —JD

Why Should You Serve God?

6

*That we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear... (Luke 1:74)*

Read Luke 1:1-75

I am really good at spotting wrong thinking in others. The errors of the Prosperity Gospel are quite evident to me, but I am often blind to similar misthinking that creeps into my own life. Here's an example: when answering the question of why I should serve God, I try to negotiate. I say things like, "I will serve God if He does something for me" (like saving a loved one from a terrible sickness or freeing us from debt or trouble). And then I'm shocked when some challenge confronts me, thinking that because I've been serving or sacrificing for God, He somehow owes me protection. Zechariah's prophetic song in the book of Luke makes it clear that the reason we serve God is tied not to what He *should* do for us, but to what He *has already* done.

Believers should serve God because He *visited* us. Zechariah's first words after months of being mute were a song of praise to God for His incredible actions on behalf of Israel and all of mankind. Specifically, he rejoices that God visited His people (Luke 1:68). The Greek word translated *visit* means to look upon in order to help. Ever since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, humans have been separated from our perfect and holy Creator. But Isaiah 7:14 speaks of God coming to us as one of us. He says a virgin would conceive and bear a son named "Immanuel" or "God with us"! And he later clarifies that God had to take the initiative because our sins had separated us from Him (Isaiah 59:2). When we were too spiritually dead to approach God, He took the initiative to visit us with the purpose of helping us.

Believers should serve God because He *redeemed* us. God visited us so that He might also redeem us (Luke 1:68). The word *redeem* appears throughout the Old and New Testaments, and in both Hebrew and Greek, the idea is to procure release by the payment of a ransom. The psalmist writes that the redemption of a soul is a price that is beyond payment, but that God Himself redeems people (Psalm 49:7-8, 15). In the New Testament, we are similarly told that perishable things like silver and gold could never pay our sin debt, but that the payment was made through the shed blood of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:18-19). What an incredible thought! We were separated from God and enslaved to sin because of our own sin debt, but Jesus paid the necessary price to redeem us—to buy back what was rightfully His. When I consider the payment Jesus made on my behalf, I cannot help but surrender to serve in any way God desires. In fact, this is why I surrendered to missions!

Believers should serve God because He *saved* us. In Luke 1, Zechariah goes on to say that God also saved His people. Zechariah refers to "a horn of salvation" (v. 69) and clearly states that God's purpose in visiting and redeeming is to save (v. 72). Then Zechariah describes that salvation as a demonstration of God's mercy (v. 72), a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham (vv. 72-73, Genesis 12:3), and a release from our enemies—all for one purpose: *so that we can serve Him* (v. 74).

Do not miss this incredible truth: God saved Israel so that Israel would serve Him. And God saves us for the same reason! The driving force behind missions is not the need of the lost, though they are indeed desperate. The driving force behind missions is the very purpose for which we were saved—serving our God. Paul summarizes this fact in Titus 2:14 when he says that Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are *zealous for good works*." Based upon what He has already accomplished for us—visiting us, redeeming us, and saving us—serving our Savior in His global mission is not optional.

Let the gospel remind you to serve God, for this is the reason He saved you. —Dan

Paul's Model of Missionary Sacrifice

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–33

I've heard people say that service to Jesus on the mission field is no sacrifice. I appreciate the sentiment. Christ has done so much for us that our service for Him is "reasonable"—not really sacrificial (Romans 12:2 KJV). Okay. But investing your life in missions *is* a sacrifice. And it's worth it, as missionary firebrand C. T. Studd said: "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him." Look at the sacrifices Paul regularly made for the glory of Jesus.

Paul was willing to sacrifice his own soul for the salvation of the lost (Romans 9:1–3). Romans 9:1–3 shows the depth of Paul's love for unbelieving Jews—the very people who regularly opposed him. Paul was filled with "sorrow and unceasing anguish" for his countrymen. Spurgeon writes, "The Lord Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem, and you will have to weep over sinners if they are to be saved through you." Paul's compassion for unsaved Jews went even further than tears, however. Paul—with God as his witness (v. 1)—said he would be willing to be accursed if it meant Jews would turn to Christ and be saved. He would take hell if it would get sinners to heaven. This seems hypothetical, and in one sense it is. Only Jesus could be damned on behalf of another, and He was. Paul's impossible wish—that he might suffer God's wrath so that the guilty might be pardoned—is precisely what the Lord Jesus did when He died for us on the cross. That's the gospel we share. But it's also a model for the compassion we should have for the unsaved. Do you share Paul's heart for the lost?

Paul was willing to sacrifice his own comfort for the salvation of the lost (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). If Paul was willing to sacrifice his own soul to reach the lost, it shouldn't surprise us that he was willing to give up his rights and comforts for the same purpose. In a classic passage on cultural contextualization, Paul explained that he would gladly give up legitimate liberties for the sake of his testimony, and ultimately for the sake of souls. He would accommodate Jewish eccentricities (v. 20), Gentile preferences (v. 21), and weak-brother consciences in order to "save some" (v. 22). Lest we miss his motivation, he summarizes it again at the paragraph's end: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (v. 23). The blessings of the gospel must be shared, not just enjoyed.

Paul was willing to sacrifice his own life for the salvation of the lost (Acts 20:24; 2 Corinthians 11:23–33). Paul's sacrifices for sinners went far beyond passing on pork chops or wine. He risked his own life for missionary ministry—again and again and again. He says in Acts 20:24 that he cared so much about unbelievers that he didn't value his life. He wasn't suicidal. He just valued gospel work more. He gave everything to win the lost. He turned aside from a respected and likely lucrative career to preach Christ to sinners. He endured beating after beating, imprisonment after imprisonment, shipwreck after shipwreck for gospel advance.

I'll never forget a conversation I had with a veteran missionary on an island in Indonesia. Making small talk, I asked if she enjoyed living in such a beautiful place. She smiled, then explained, "I don't love the beach, or the ocean, or constant sunshine, to be honest." Again—she lived on an island in the South Pacific. She had a fair complexion, so the constant sun was actually a sacrifice. And she went on to say that it was hard to miss family weddings, births, and funerals. It was a sacrifice. Then, through tears, she concluded: "But I love seeing someone who has never heard of Jesus come to know Him as her Savior. And it's worth it." Is it worth it to you?

Let the gospel move you to sacrifice anything to see lost sinners saved. —Chris

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24)

Read Romans 7–8

Paul's basic point in Romans 7 is that God's law is really good even though it is powerless to save. It's like a PET scan machine, magnificently designed to reveal cancer, not to cure it. In the chapter, Paul reflects on his life prior to conversion—when he was “living in the flesh” (7:5). The law didn't make him, a conscientious law-keeper, right with God. Instead, it revealed his sin, inflamed his sin, and condemned him. But Jesus can do what the law can't—those who trust Him will be justified and liberated from sin's domination (7:25; 8:1–4).

Although Paul described his *pre-Christian* struggle to live out God's will, every *Christian* can still relate. Every. Day. That's because even though sin's dominion over a Christian's life has been crushed, sin still remains (6:6). It's like the stalk of poison ivy that for years grew within the siding at the corner of my house; even though I severed its root a few years ago, it's still sprouted every year since, and I've had to kill it each year. Similarly, those whom God's Spirit is leading must still “put to death the deeds of the body” every day (8:13–14). In fact, the old nature's remnants won't be fully eradicated until “the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us” (8:23 NLT).

So Christian, expect that you will often express with exasperation the verse that David Brainerd, the faithful missionary to Native Americans, most frequently quoted: “Wretched man that I am!” (Romans 7:24). That's normal for every believer who's not yet glorified. That's normal for every believer who doesn't yet love God with every bit of strength, mind, and heart. That's normal for every believer who still struggles to love others more than self.

In the final year of Brainerd's field work, he baptized thirty-eight Native American adult converts before he died of tuberculosis in 1747 at age twenty-nine. Over the three centuries since his passing, one of the most painful aspects of Brainerd's daily experience has also been one of the most helpful to believers who read his journals. In Brainerd's day, Christians called it *evangelical humiliation*. Renowned pastor Jonathan Edwards described Brainerd's exemplary evangelical humiliation:

[He lived with] a sense of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness.... How deeply affected was he almost continually with his great defects in religion; with... his ignorance, pride, deadness, unsteadiness, barrenness? He was not only affected with the remembrance of his former sinfulness, before his conversion, but with the sense of his present vileness and pollution.... He was apt to think other saints better than he; yea, to look on himself as the... least of saints. (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Vol. 7: The Life of David Brainerd*, pp. 506–07)

Evangelical humiliation is what a Christian who is “poor in spirit” looks like; it's what a Christian who's not “already perfect” sounds like; it's what a Christian who won't be satisfied until “I awake... with your likeness” feels like. (Read Matthew 5:3; Philippians 3:12; Psalm 17:15—precious passages that Brainerd loved, prayed, and preached).

Although Brainerd's example was far from perfect, you should learn from this young missionary's daily pursuit of evangelical humiliation. If you live in daily awareness of the Romans 7–8 fight against sin and of your own poverty of spirit, imperfection, and unlikeness to Christ, then you'll pray more, you'll seek to impress less, and you'll be more shocked over the amazing grace of God to save and use someone like you.

Let the gospel's mighty grace strengthen you to live with honesty about (but never despair over) your own insufficiency. —Joe

She Has Done a Beautiful Thing

She has done a beautiful thing. (Matthew 26:10)

Read Matthew 26:6–13; John 12:1–8

Just days before Gethsemane and Calvary, as Jesus dined with His followers, Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, came and broke open a costly flask of fragrant spikenard and poured it without reservation on the head of the Lord. In just a few days, His head would be torn with thorns, and the hair that now glistened with fragrant oil would soon be matted with blood and spit. Somehow, perhaps because she had been listening, Mary knew this too. To their shame, it was the disciples who shook their heads and said, “Why this waste?” Sometimes the strongest and most hurtful voices of opposition to lavish, loving, risk-taking abandon come from other Christians. But Jesus rebuked them, saying: “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me” (Matthew 26:10).

Whether reading stories of missionaries a century ago who were setting out for risky, unreached fields or counseling people today who are setting out for risky, unreached fields, I’ve encountered this same old sanctimonious objection. But when these lives are poured out through Calvary love, such acts of worship—whether done in obscurity or under derision—are beautiful in the sight of Jesus.

I once made a brief stop in Bahrain, a tiny island kingdom off the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. I wanted to track down the remnants of the ministry of one of my missionary heroes, Samuel Zwemer, who is known as the “Apostle to Islam” because of his pioneering gospel work to the Muslim world. I visited the hospital in Bahrain that he, his wife, and their team started in 1903—one of the first hospitals in Arabia. But there was something else I wanted to see, so I went to the Old Christian Cemetery, a dusty half-acre enclosed by a high wall. Buried there were sailors, soldiers, and diplomats who died in service in Bahrain, and crosses stood stark against the brown, barren ground. It’s a lonely spot. There were also many small graves of children, who were the most vulnerable to the epidemics that swept through the island with fearful unpredictability. Among them were the graves of Amy Katherina and Ruth Zwemer.

In July 1904, dysentery ravaged the community. Within the space of a week, the Zwemers buried their firstborn, a seven-year-old daughter named Amy Katherina, and their youngest daughter, three-year-old Ruth. Zwemer wrote little about this in his memoirs. However, years later he pulled back the curtain on their grief and showed the depths of their sorrow—and their worship—as they buried their precious ones. Zwemer said his wife Amy wrote their daughters’ epitaph, which said simply, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches.”

Just like Mary of Bethany, Amy of Bahrain’s tearful, worshipful act is a reminder that following our Cross-bearer—and all that requires—is ultimately only for an audience of One. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13 that love keeps no record of wrongs, and neither does love keep a record of acts of sacrifice and service and suffering. And yet we know the One we love never forgets His own. “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1). And because of such grace, Peter could say to Christians who had suffered loss for the sake of Christ, “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Let the gospel motivate you to beautiful acts of sacrificial love for the Lamb Who is worthy! —Tim

A Rich Legacy of Female Missionaries

10

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia... a seller of purple goods. (Acts 16:14)

Read Acts 16

Here's a stunning statistic: Half the people in the world are women. And roughly half the members of Christian churches are women as well. Insightful, right? And yet, some think of Great-Commission work as a primarily masculine endeavor. "Nobody wants to support a single female missionary," one lady told me. She was doing heroic and exhausting work in one of the world's hardest places, saving lives and souls through gospel-centered orphan care. But raising support was surprisingly difficult.

I understood my friend's reticence. I fear that conservative churches have taken the two prohibitions Scripture lays on women in ministry—no serving as pastors and no teaching men in a church setting—and expanded them in an unbiblical, unkind, and ineffective way. The truth is, the story of Christian missions in recent centuries boasts a vast number of godly women who have done exploits for the glory of Jesus. Mary Slessor. Betty Stam. Mary Moffat. Isobel Kuhn. Amy Carmichael. Gladys Aylward. Elisabeth Elliot. And thousands more who are unknown to us but precious to our Savior Who will not forget their labors of love (Hebrews 6:10).

God uses married women—like Priscilla—to advance the gospel (Acts 18–19). I sometimes make the mistake of referring to married women who live on the mission field as "missionary wives" rather than "missionaries." It's unintentional, but it's a slight. These ladies are doing remarkable work themselves. And most missionary men are able to carry out their invaluable work specifically because their wives share their burdens, their sacrifices, and their calling. Praise God for godly women who labor beside their husbands to see sinners all over the world come to Christ.

God uses businesswomen—like Lydia—to advance the gospel (Acts 16:14–15, 40). Lydia is one of my favorite New Testament characters. We don't know a lot about her. But we do know she met with other women, prayed, and worshiped God. We know she was an international business tycoon—an Asian marketing her work in Europe. And we know she hosted Paul and Silas in her home and helped support their ministry. Praise God for Christian women like Lydia.

God uses ministers of mercy—like Dorcas—to advance the gospel (Acts 9:36–41). Priscilla and Lydia were international entrepreneurs. The life of Tabitha (aka Dorcas) was much simpler. But God used her ministry of benevolence and kindness for His glory. As a crucial part of the church in Joppa, she served the Lord with her hands, generously making blankets and clothes for widows. She was a seamstress, not a preacher. But she loved others through her compassionate ministry.

There are others, of course. Acts 2—the very birth of the church—notably tells us that *all* believers are gifted by the Spirit for ministry, including "daughters" (not just sons) and "female servants" (not just male servants, and not just kings and prophets—Acts 2:17–18, quoting Joel 2:28–29). Our Bible clearly teaches that Christian women play a significant role in the Spirit's invincible work of multiplying Christ's church.

I once preached a sermon on God's use of women for gospel advance. My rough draft included this statement: "God created women with a brain, not just a uterus." I know, I know. I'm cringing too. My wife and four daughters wisely insisted that I use the word "womb." I might have added, "God has given women the *Scriptures*, the *Spirit*, and *gifts for ministry*." Motherhood is valuable! But conservative churches have too often undervalued the contributions of women in general, and women missionaries in particular. We should fix that. God has used women in missions for two millennia. And He'll use you, female friends. That's my prayer and my confident expectation!

Let the gospel move you to encourage godly women in their missionary work. —Chris

II Three Keys to Missions: Fasting, Fasting, Fasting

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.... And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

(Acts 13:2–3; 14:23)

Read Acts 13 and 14

Fasting is born of desperation. Like the desperate realization that you and your spouse have created an eternal soul that has to live somewhere forever and that you can do nothing to guarantee his or her salvation. Or like the desperate feeling that you're losing the battle against a besetting sin. Or like the feeling the church in Antioch had—the desperation of wanting so much to make God famous in a godless world, but not knowing where to start.

Fasting—skipping a meal for focused prayer—bookended Paul's first missionary journey.

First, the entire church at Antioch was “worshiping the Lord and fasting” (Acts 13:2). From the context it seems that they were desperate to know what their part was in making Jesus Christ famous among the nations. John Piper said, “Missions exists because worship doesn't” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 11). It wasn't enough for these Antiochian Christians to have a “powerful worship experience” themselves. They couldn't bear the reality that there were places not far from them where God was still unknown, unloved, and unworshiped. Discerning God's will for them concerning that reality is just the kind of thing fasting was made for. Has your church fasted together for God's direction about missions? Are you at that level of desperation yet that God be famous—that He be worshiped by more people in more places?

Second, after God answered their desperate plea by telling them to send two of their key leaders, things got even more desperate. “How do we do this? Where do we go? How do we pay for it? What if nobody listens?” I remember crying to God like this as an aspiring missionary: “O God, Kim and I can't change a single person's mind or heart in Cambodia.” With Moses we pled, “If you don't go with us, don't take us there” (Exodus 33:15). But again, desperation brings fasting—and then God provides direction. “Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:3). God answered the desperate fasting and prayer of the Antioch church, and His powerful presence went with Paul and Barnabas, first to Cyprus and then to the dark interior of pagan Pisidia.

Third, after powerful gospel advance in the face of furious persecution in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas “returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to [Pisidian] Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, *with prayer and fasting* they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:21–23). You'd be desperate, too, if you were Paul and Barnabas looking at these dear young church leaders who would suffer so much in the next months and years for preaching the gospel and guarding the flock. What else could you do but fast and pray?

One of the best things about missions is that it scares the self-reliance out of us. Sending churches are afraid they'll mess up. Missionaries feel like they're an inch from failure. And think how the tender pastors we train (and then leave) feel. If God doesn't show up, we're sunk. Fasting is not a stubborn child holding his breath until his parents give him what he wants. Fasting is a desperate child wanting more than anything that his Father's name be hallowed all over the world.

Let gospel fasting bookend your desperate journey to make God famous. —JD

Am I Urgently Witnessing for Christ?

12

*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.
And he sent messengers ahead of him. (Luke 9:51–52a)*

Read Luke 9:18–10:2

The identity of Jesus Christ is a central message in all four of the Gospels. This is clearly the case in Luke 9, where Herod asked about Jesus' identity (v. 9), the crowds sought Him based on their assumptions concerning His identity (v. 11), and Jesus asked the twelve apostles directly about His identity (vv. 18–20). Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah, sent from God (v. 20). Then, for the first time, Jesus instructed the disciples that His identity was tied up in the cross—that He was the suffering Messiah of Isaiah 53 Who would be crushed for mankind's redemption (Isaiah 53:10). The events immediately following this declaration made it clear that Jesus' death on the cross was imminent—a fact which made the ministry of both Jesus and His disciples *urgent*.

The imminence of the cross required urgency in witnessing. As Jesus' death on the cross was approaching, He set His face to Jerusalem and did not run away from the plan that the Father had for His substitutionary death for you and for me (Isaiah 53:10; Luke 22:42). But as He embraced the Father's plan for the cross, Jesus also sought to reach people with the gospel. He sent messengers ahead to prepare people for His teaching (Luke 9:52). Then He sent out three dozen sets of men to get people ready to hear the gospel (Luke 10:1). The message was not changed, but His rapidly approaching death demanded urgency.

The imminence of Christ's return requires urgency in witnessing. Just as Jesus sent out His followers to share the good news earnestly, believers today should have this same attitude, knowing that Christ may return at any time. Truly, He has gone to prepare a place for us, and He has promised to come again, though we do not know when. Just like the disciples, we have reason for getting to work (John 9:4). Christ has appointed us to be His witnesses (Luke 10:1; Acts 1:8). Christ desires that people from "every town and place" hear the gospel (Luke 10:1; Matthew 28:19–20). And Christ could come back at any moment (John 14:3). Never in history have more people come to Christ through faith than we see today, but billions still have not heard the gospel. Jesus Himself said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). Will we stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30)?

The need for Christian laborers requires urgency in prayer. As a teen, I was challenged by my youth pastor to pray that God would send forth workers. I taped a small piece of paper to my wall with Luke 10:2 written on it. As I prayed daily through high school and on through college, God burdened *me* to surrender *my life* to Him. My new prayer was, "Whether by life or death, be glorified through me" (Philippians 1:20). I went to Bible college to prepare for life as a missionary, and I met a lovely, godly young lady who had also surrendered to God's call. We married and served together for thirteen years in Brazil, and now for another sixteen years in administration with BGFM Global. We've seen more answered prayers as our children have been called to Brazil, Uruguay, China, and locations in the United States. And our prayers for laborers continue because the world still needs the message of the gospel.

Will you witness with urgency? Will you pray with urgency? Will you join the work yourself?

Let the gospel stir you to urgent evangelism and prayer, whether at home or on the mission field. —Dan

The Quiet Work of the Gospel

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven. (Matthew 13:33)

Read Luke 8:4-15

In Matthew 13 in a pair of brief parables, Jesus underscores how His Kingdom is all about expansion. The tiny mustard seed becoming a great tree reminds us of the surprising growth of the gospel's work (vv. 31–32). Then Jesus reached into everyone's cupboard, so to speak, for an ingredient that illustrated another aspect of the work of the gospel:

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened." (v. 33)

The yeast folded into the batch of dough would gradually spread its fermenting influence, and the result would be delicious baked bread that would feed many. This parable speaks of the quiet, pervasive, beneath-the-surface, behind-the-scenes influence of the gospel.

Sometimes the impact of a word of witness, a gospel tract, or a passage of Scripture may take years to observe. Though the initial outcome may apparently be unsuccessful, the Spirit is at work in His appointed time and means. This was powerfully shown to me in the life of Ghafur, a Moroccan believer who came to faith out of Islam, but that journey was a long one indeed. At a house church gathering one night, he shared his story with me.

More than fifty years ago, Ghafur was a soldier sent to the Middle East during a time of war. One day, he met a man in the street who was desperately searching for food for his family. Ghafur knew where he could get some supplies, so he got the food and accompanied the man back to his home, where the wife said with joy and relief, "We prayed to God in the name of Jesus, and He has heard our prayers!" Over the years, Ghafur never forgot the kindness of these Christians—nor the fact that when they prayed in Jesus' name, they got answers.

Fifty years later, Ghafur was working as a security guard at a supermarket and saw a man waiting in the parking lot reading a book. "What are you reading?" Ghafur asked. "It's the New Testament," the man replied. "I heard of this book many years ago. Can I have one?" Ghafur asked. The man gave the book to him and asked him to read the gospel of Matthew. The next time they met, Ghafur told him that he had read the entire New Testament and wanted to know more. After coming to an understanding of the gospel, Ghafur, like the Christians he had met decades earlier, prayed in Jesus' name and got answers.

Jesus set His sovereign love on this man and made him new—and Ghafur told everyone. As a result, his family rejected him and his wife left him. During our prayer time, Ghafur praised God for his new Christian brothers and sisters. When the pastor asked for favorites during the singing, Ghafur's request went along with his testimony, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"—"no turning back." They have a verse of this song in Arabic that we don't have in English that goes, "If I'm put in chains, or go to prison, no turning back, no turning back."

Let the gospel's pervasive power build patient endurance as you speak for Christ.
—Tim

You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. (1 Thessalonians 1:9)

Read Isaiah 55:1–7

The message that “Jesus saves” isn’t particularly offensive. There are religions all over the world which are compatible with that concept. Hinduism has millions of gods and can easily afford another. Animism and ancestor worship reign in many developing nations, and adding Jesus to a host of spirits, ghosts, and practical pantheism isn’t a problem. But the message that “*only* Jesus saves” is definitely offensive around the globe, even in the pluralistic culture of the Western world. And yet, that’s the message of Scripture. Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). The one who rejects Jesus is already under God’s wrath (John 3:18, 36). Salvation is found in Jesus’ name and no other (Acts 4:12). The gospel of the Bible is exclusive: it demands that sinners turn from any other religious hope and embrace Jesus alone as their hope of salvation.

But surprisingly for many modern believers, it isn’t *faith* which guards the exclusivity of the Christian gospel. It’s *repentance*. If we haven’t called sinners to repentance, we haven’t presented the gospel accurately. Faith alone as the Bible defines it—enduring, repentant faith in Jesus alone—is the essential response to the gospel.

Isaiah called sinners to repent. One of the clearest calls to repentance in Scripture comes in Isaiah 55:7. The evangelical prophet didn’t merely call sinners to believe in Jehovah; he called on them to forsake false religion: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah describes conversion, which includes both faith and repentance. The two are inseparable. The sinner must turn from his own way (repentance) and turn to the Lord (faith). All true repentance is believing repentance. And all true faith is repenting faith. Apart from repentance, there is no “pardon,” Isaiah says. (See Hebrews 6:1.)

Jesus called sinners to repent. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus—like John the Baptist—called sinners to be repent in order to be saved (Matthew 3:2, 8, 11; 4:17; 11:20–21; 12:41; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10). And Jesus commanded us to preach that same message (Luke 24:47). Where there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness of sins.

Peter called sinners to repent. At the very start of the church era, Peter preached the gospel to lost sinners. In Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19, he insists that forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance. Sinners who don’t forsake their sins, their false religions, and their own way as they turn to Christ are still condemned. (See Acts 5:31; 8:22; 11:18, and 2 Peter 3:9.)

Paul called sinners to repent. Paul preached repentance (Acts 26:20) and wrote about repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). He preached at Mars Hill that God’s call to repentance is universal: God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). When he summarized his preaching ministry for the Ephesian elders, he noted that he called all sinners, regardless of their religious or ethnic background, to “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Perhaps most clearly, he writes in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 that the gospel requires sinners to “[turn] to God” (faith) and “from idols” (repentance).

We must call sinners to repent. If we are to get the gospel right, we need to get the gospel *response* right. Yes, sinners must believe. But true faith includes repentance. Sinners can’t add Jesus to their collection of idols, nor can they give a nod to Jesus as they gleefully pursue their sin. The doctrine of repentance calls sinners away from the syncretism (merging religions) that will leave them in their sins. Jesus alone saves. “*Repent and believe in the gospel*” (Mark 1:15)!

Let the gospel—which requires repentant faith—be the only gospel we preach. —Chris

“Snatching Them Out of the Fire”

Save others by snatching them out of the fire. (Jude 23)

Read Mark 9:43–48

I have a complicated history with hell. I’ve not been there, clearly. But my perception of it has changed during my lifetime. As a kid hell terrified me. It chased me to Jesus. My childhood church had a drive-in theater where we’d show evangelistic films each weekend, including *A Thief in the Night*, *A Distant Thunder*, and a particularly gruesome movie called *The Burning Hell*. This is bad theology, but I got saved every Friday and Saturday night!

After seminary, my thoughts on hell altered a bit. I never flirted with annihilationism or universalism. The Bible teaches the reality of hell (temporary) and the lake of fire (permanent) where there will be literal, conscious, eternal punishment for the lost away from the presence of God. But when preaching on hell, I occasionally added that I wished it weren’t so. That sounded compassionate, but it was actually gross arrogance—apologizing for something God has decreed as though I didn’t want His poor taste to reflect badly on *me*. Hell exists, and it should. Full stop.

As my approach to ministry grew more “sophisticated,” I began to look down on those who preached the gospel as a “fire escape.” My thinking was (and still is, to a degree) that the good news isn’t just a “get-out-of-hell-free” card, but the opportunity to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). That’s true. Jesus isn’t a means to an end—He is the *Prize* of salvation as well as its *Provider*.

But here’s the thing. Hell *is* a terrifying reality. Hell *is* motivating. Hell *is* used in Scripture to spur sinners to repent and to rouse Christians to share the gospel. Look at John’s use of it in John 3:16, 18, and 36 and in Revelation 20:10–15. More importantly, look at *Jesus’* frequent use of hell in evangelistic warnings throughout the gospels.

- “And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:43–48).
- “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).
- “Then [the Son of Man] will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels....’ And these will go away into eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:41, 46).

Jesus preached hell as a compelling reason to come to Him for salvation. It’s not the only reason, of course. But it’s a legitimate one. Frankly, if we’re more “sophisticated” about using hell to evangelize than Jesus was, one of us needs to change—and it’s not Jesus.

The imagery of Jude 23 is remarkably vivid. We are commanded to “save” people through the power of the gospel, “snatching them out of the fire.” Gospel work rescues people from hell. One of the missionaries sent out from our church was a firefighter in Georgia. He still *is*, in a sense, but he’s now devoting his life to rescuing people from a much more dangerous inferno. Hell is real. People are going there every day—many without so much as a warning. We dare not put the lake of fire out of our minds. It should, instead, awaken and animate us to greater, more urgent gospel work. “Snatch them out of the fire.”

Let the gospel compel you to warn the lost to flee the approaching wrath. —Chris

The Life-Giving Seed

16

The seed is the word of God. (Luke 8:11)

Read Luke 8:4-15

In the parable of the sower in Luke 8:4-8, Jesus told of four settings upon which the scattered seed fell: hard ground, stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground. The soil conditions were different, but the one constant was the seed. In explaining the parable to His disciples in verses 9-15, Jesus left no room for speculation about what the seed represented: “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (v. 11).

The apostle Peter also used seed as a metaphor in his first epistle when he wrote, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... and this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23, 25). Jesus, Who with a word called Lazarus from the grave, is through His everlasting, ever-living Word bringing new life to all who believe on Him—often in the most unexpected ways and unlikely places. Here is one such story.

In the early years of World War II, Nazi Germany invaded the little Baltic country of Estonia. Arpad was a young, fervent Estonian nationalist who joined the partisans in the forests to fight the Germans. After some months, he was captured and put in prison in Tallinn. Later, a captured Russian soldier who had parachuted behind German lines joined Arpad in his cell.

The paratrooper had initially been sent to a prison camp in Germany with other Russian soldiers before being sent to Tallinn to be executed as a spy. While in Germany, the Russian prisoners had been given copies of the Scripture by some bold German believers. And so, Arpad’s Russian cellmate brought the Bible with him. However, as a sincere, committed Communist, he had little interest in it. When the spy was taken out to be executed, one of his last acts was to give Arpad his Russian Bible. Arpad had nothing better to do in prison, so he read this book. The seed fell on good ground, and Arpad believed.

The Russians eventually captured Tallinn, and Arpad was released and fought the Nazis through the rest of the war. With the defeat of Germany, Arpad had the opportunity to go to the West to begin a new life there. However, as he thought and prayed about it, he felt God’s call to stay and serve Christ. Arpad became a pastor and was active in underground Bible printing and smuggling operations throughout the Soviet Union. He continued to sow the seed of God’s Word just as it had been sown in his life.

There is another constant in the parable of the sower: the sower himself. We, too, have a role in all of this by giving out the Word. The sower is marked by daily faithfulness and endurance in hard work. And while the sower knows that not every seed will bear fruit, his work is marked by hope in the God Who causes the seed to grow where He wills (1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 3:5-7).

Those German believers took risks, went to their enemies in prison, and gave them Bibles. They would never see the extent of the harvest that came from their bold sowing, but the Word did its work. Where are you sowing the life-giving seed?

Let the gospel’s powerful life-giving message make you a bold sower of the Word.

—Tim

Three Discipleship Truths for Successful Mission

Teach what accords with sound doctrine. (Titus 2:1)

Read Titus 2:1–15

Every believer seeks purpose in life—something meaningful to live for. Yet many settle for lesser purposes, such as raising a family, building a business, or simply making it to the weekend. Around AD 66, Paul wrote to his disciple Titus on the pagan island of Crete, to remind him that God’s mission isn’t for professional ministers only. Discipleship—helping one another to grow in godliness, leadership, and spiritual maturity—is the purpose and mission of every single Christian. Here are three vital truths to equip you for success in the mission of discipleship.

Discipleship works out the gospel in the context of depraved cultures. Paul instructs believers to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10). We are called to participate in our culture without conforming to it. Titus was working to establish a church in the very pagan context of Crete, the birthplace of the Greek gods, where Zeus’ deception was celebrated and violence was glorified. But the gospel shines brightest when lives are visibly transformed by grace—when the truth of Christ’s saving work has been believed. To fulfill God’s mission of discipleship, we can’t withdraw into holy huddles. We have to engage meaningfully with our communities while maintaining biblical values. The darker the night, the brighter the light.

Discipleship is designed to take place within the local church community. God’s plan involves more than vocational pastors. In Titus 2, we learn that all younger Christians can learn from the examples of the experienced ones. Older men are to be “sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, love, and steadfastness” (v. 2). Older women are to be “reverent in behavior” and “teach what is good” (v. 3). This discipleship happens through life-on-life relationships within the family of God, and is both verbal and practical—truth is as much *caught* as it is *taught*. Our responses to pain, disappointment, persecution, and failure are teaching moments for those watching us. Within the church, younger believers learn how to navigate life biblically by observing mature believers walk through difficulties with faith.

Discipleship flows through the channels of relationship. Paul’s instructions follow specific relational patterns: older men mentoring younger men and older women teaching younger women. To older men, Paul essentially says, “Don’t coast in your most influential years. Reject the culture that tells you to relax and throw your feet up. These are your best years. You’ve lived, suffered, failed, succeeded. Now use all your experience of leaning on God and the gospel to encourage other men.” To older women whose children have grown, he says, “Now is not the time to check out. Your years of experience position you to help younger mothers struggling to survive daily demands, and to teach women to be kind and pure.” Take initiative because truth transfers through relationships.

Discipleship is our mission, and it has the power to transform lives, naturally leading to the reproduction of thriving local churches. This transformation follows a pattern: faith leads to knowledge and results in godliness. Christian discipleship is helping others to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and... live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (v. 12) as we await “our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (v. 13).

How you live matters—to the gospel, to the mission, to your home, church, and city. These discipleship truths enable successful mission, a life purpose given to every believer. Go and make disciples!

Let the gospel be adorned by your life as you mentor others in the way of Christ.
—Philip

The Tenth Mark of a Healthy Church

18

What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)

Read Acts 20:1–6 and 2 Timothy 2:2

Count me among the many who owe a debt of gratitude to the 9Marks ministry. They have cultivated church health for nearly three decades through their books and conferences. With that said, I'd like to suggest a *tenth* mark of a healthy church. I don't seriously expect rebranding across the 9Marks catalog, and I thank God for their sending emphasis! I do believe that sending missionaries is an essential element of healthy church life. In his excellent book *Gaining by Losing*, J. D. Greear writes, "Jesus' measure of a church is not seating capacity, but sending capacity" (p. 16).

Sadly, that's not yet caught on, even (or especially) in most larger churches. American churches tend to determine success by attendance and giving trendlines that go *up*, not down. I joke that most churches resemble the Hotel California: "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave." But here's a thought: *What if success in ministry means that churches sometimes get smaller instead of larger?*

The apostle Paul (thanks in large part to the influence of Barnabas, I believe) was constantly training future leaders. We read about it in 2 Timothy 2:2, where he describes a leadership chain reaction to Timothy. But we also see it throughout Paul's ministry. He surrounded himself with Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke, and a host of men from the churches he planted across Asia Minor and Europe (Acts 20:4–5). Throughout Scripture and church history, leaders produce leaders. And healthy churches produce missionaries. Colleges and seminaries don't raise up leaders—churches do.

I'd like to suggest some quick tips for fellow pastors about cultivating a "sender" culture in the church. (And non-pastor readers, support your church leaders as they attempt to incorporate these practical ideas!)

- Preach on missions—like, *all the time*. I'm not suggesting that you abandon preaching through books of the Bible or artificially shoehorn missions into every text. But the concept of cross-cultural evangelism and discipleship is all over the place in the Bible. Emphasize it.
- Celebrate missionaries as normal, faithful believers. Honor them as modern heroes... but don't actually *call* them heroes. That just reinforces the unhelpful stereotype that missionaries are exceptional, making most church members feel inadequate for the work.
- Pray for laborers, from the pulpit. As a pastor, with an eye on Matthew 9:38, I prayed almost every week, "Lord, send out laborers *from this church*. Give us the joy of being part of Your work around the world." And with one family after another, God answered that prayer.
- Prioritize missions. Expose your assembly to missionaries in your services, both via visits and Zoom. Plan missions conferences. Share your pulpits. (Seriously, take a break, and allow the church to hear from a frontline worker.) Budget for mission trips and take the lead in promoting them.
- Start a leadership-training ministry. Our church invited those even remotely interested in ministry as a future possibility to come to once-a-month "Aspire" meetings (1 Timothy 3:1). We talked about how to prepare a Bible lesson, or interviewed a missionary, or read a book. We created a "greenhouse" for would-be gospel workers who eventually deployed, one by one.

D. A. Carson once told pastors that while people will forget most of what you say, they'll remember what you're most *passionate* about. That's true. So, be passionate about missions. It's contagious.

Let the gospel inspire you to send members rather than hoarding them. —Chris

It's Not Done Until You Have Pastors

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church... (Acts 14:23)

Read Acts 13 and 14

In Acts 13 and 14, Asian, African, and European Christians who had formed the first multicultural church in history sought God's will for how they could make God famous among the nations. God told them to send two of their best pastors.

Cyprus. Soon Paul, Barnabas, and their assistant John Mark, set sail for Cyprus where they preached the gospel from one end of the island to the other. Then they sailed due north to Perga on the southern coast of modern-day Turkey. There, at the maw of the dark interior of pagan Pisidia, John Mark bailed out.

Pisidian Antioch and Iconium. Paul and Barnabas walked three days north to the city of Pisidian Antioch, where, wonder of wonders, after preaching a powerful Moses-to-David-to-Christ message in the synagogue, both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles put their faith in Jesus the Messiah and a church was born! But enemies of the gospel drove Paul and Barnabas out of the city, so they walked one hundred miles east to Iconium where they experienced both gospel success and gospel persecution.

Lystra and Derbe. After narrowly escaping stoning in Iconium, they went to nearby Lystra. A language misunderstanding created a perfect storm—a local pagan priest leading a bedecked cow into the square to sacrifice to “Zeus” (Barnabas) and “Hermes” (Paul) who had just healed a crippled man! (Note to self: Learn the local language so you'll know if it's Zeus they're excited about, not Jesus.)

Some quick creation-to-Christ preaching by Paul sorted things out, and these pagans “turned to Christ from idols” (1 Thessalonians 1:9)! But eventually the mob in Lystra succeeded where Antioch and Iconium failed: They stoned Paul and left him for dead. Fortunately, God intervened, sparing Paul's life: “The disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe” (Acts 14:20). Derbe was one hundred miles east.

Back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. This brings us to one of the most shocking verses in the book of Acts: “When they had preached the gospel [in Derbe] and had made many disciples, *they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch*” (14:21).

Some tribal Christian ladies where I live, after reading this verse for the first time in their own language, said, “*What?! Go back to those murderous cities? Just days after you were almost stoned to death?*” And we might add, “When you're so close to home?” If you look at a map, by the time these men had made their way to Derbe, they were just a three- or four-day journey from Paul's hometown of Tarsus where friends could nurse his broken body back to health. Plus, another day on a ship and they'd be back to their sending church in Antioch! No one would fault them for doing that after what they had gone through. We might have even insisted on it.

The Priority: Pastors. So, what would motivate these missionaries to go back into the jaws of death instead of taking the shortcut home? The next three verses tell us:

“They returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had *appointed elders for them in every church*, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord.” (14:21–23)

The reason they refused the shortcut home was that the job wasn't finished. The new churches needed pastors. Training and appointing pastors is a key part of the missions enterprise—so essential that we should accept danger to make sure it happens.

Missionaries, let the gospel motivate you to do whatever it takes to equip and appoint shepherds for God's flock. —JD

It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

Read Acts 20:17–38

On average, Paul spent approximately 1–3 months with new church plants, a strikingly brief turnaround compared with today's missionary norms. Corinth and Ephesus are exceptions (18 months and 3 years, respectively), offering robust case studies for church planters. In his prison epistle to the Ephesians, Paul sends well-thought-out instructions designed for circulation. But in Acts 20 we experience a previous, more spontaneous Pauline engagement—a final farewell to the elders of what was arguably his most beloved and well-trained church. The moment is intimate. As they walk Paul to the port to send him off to great danger (vv. 22–24), we witness final words, tears, prayers, embraces, and kisses.

Insofar as this meeting was by invitation only (v. 17), it may feel a bit awkward to look on, but the Holy Spirit wants us in on this moment. Indeed, those who disciple and ordain church leaders should be *very* interested to learn what the apostle would say to such a well-trained church at such a time. Paul records no miracles here, significantly. But his pastoral advice about normal ministry is golden.

First, Paul reviewed his ministry among them (vv. 18–21). Paraphrased: *I've been humble. I've proved my sincerity with tears. I've paid the price. I've evangelized and disciplined, publicly and privately, to every people group here.* Later, he would also deny any covetous motives and assert how hard he had worked and how he had provided for himself and others (vv. 33–34). If we didn't know him better, this might sound anything *but* humble. He writes similarly in 2 Corinthians. Is Paul boasting, straying from what he would write in Galatians 6:14? It may seem *akin* to boasting, but it is, rather, a shepherding moment fully consistent with humility. He is warning the leaders against false teachers by urging them to ponder the model that he received from Jesus, that he has shown to them, and that they need to adopt themselves (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:1). (Missionaries, conduct your ministries so you can say these kinds of things when it's time for *your* ship to sail.)

Next, Paul told them his plans (vv. 22–25): *I'm headed to Jerusalem; I'm going to suffer; but I've done the eternal math, and nothing is going to stop me. This isn't a retirement cruise. I have a marathon to finish.* (And we do, too.)

Paul begged them to shepherd well (vv. 28–31). For pastors, this is one of the most powerful exhortations in Scripture, paraphrased: *Take heed unto yourselves. Feed the flock. Remember to Whom they belong—and the crimson cost to purchase them. And beware of the coming wolves, both outside and inside of the church.*

Finally, Paul released them to God and reminded them of their gospel inheritance (v. 32). When faithful fathers leave, they remind their sons to rely on God alone and to look to the gospel for perpetual fuel to stay in the fight. God's grace in and through Paul was the same grace that would be working in and through these church leaders.

Textually—and, admittedly, this is speculation—it appears that verse 32 may have been the end of Paul's prepared remarks. It would have been a great conclusion. But the climactic high of our eternal inheritance seems to have triggered one of those “final, final” thoughts Paul needed to convey about life back down on Earth—a Pauline P.S. (Preachers are still known for extending sermons.) He reminds them of a profound teaching from Jesus: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (v. 35). This may seem random for the final goodbye, but giving is inseparable from the gospel. All recipients of the Savior's grace need to hear this.

Let gospel inflow always—always—result in gospel outflow. —David

The Declaration of Discipleship

We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? (Matthew 19:27)

Read Matthew 19:27–29

According to church history, in AD 203, a 22-year-old mother named Perpetua faced Roman authorities in Carthage. When asked to sacrifice to the emperor's gods, she refused. And when asked whether she was a Christian, she was sacrificed to wild beasts in the public arena. Her story illustrates a crucial truth: Being a true disciple of Jesus requires a declaration of our faith that may cost us everything. But that same testimony—telling the world that we are following Christ—will also *give* us everything.

Matthew 19 recounts Jesus' encounter with a rich, young ruler who wanted eternal life but refused to part with his possessions. Like many people today, he wanted "\$3 worth of gospel"—enough to make him happy but not enough to transform him. He wanted salvation as a comfortable addition to his life rather than an acceptance of Jesus as Lord of everything in his life. Here are the takeaways from that man's conversation with Jesus—descriptions of the Christian life that are all very relevant for us today.

To be a disciple, you must be willing to leave everything behind. Peter declares, "We have left everything and followed you" (v. 27). In Matthew 4, when Jesus had called Peter and his brother Andrew, they had "immediately left their [fishing] nets"—their source of income. Same thing with James and John: they "left the boat and their father"—their security and their family. And in Luke 14:26–27, Jesus states this even more starkly: unless we "hate" our own family and life in comparison to loving Him, and suffer (bear a cross) for Him, we are not qualified to be His disciples.

This is what His disciples are called to do: to be willing to abandon everything and embrace Jesus alone as their new "everything." Many people sacrifice family and home for careers, education, or military service. Shouldn't we be willing to leave everything to follow the King of kings?

To be a disciple, you must follow Jesus. Leaving everything isn't enough—a disciple has to follow, learn, and listen, with the intention of obeying completely without reservation. Jesus commanded His followers to "go public" with their faith through baptism (Matthew 28:19–20) as a picture of their spiritual reality—dead to sin, buried with Christ, and resurrected to new life (Romans 6:3–4). And baptism is just "Step One." For the rest of their lives, Christians follow Jesus by obeying His Word and walking in fellowship with Him and His people.

As a disciple, you will experience the Father's care in this life. Jesus promises that those who leave everything "will receive a hundredfold" (Matthew 19:29). We gain an overwhelming abundance of mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers in God's family. And our heavenly Father takes responsibility to meet our needs in this life.

As a disciple, you will experience eternal life forever. God's care extends beyond this life, too—the ultimate reward is that we "will inherit eternal life" (v. 29), defined in John 17:3 as knowing "the only true God, and Jesus Christ." The reward of a life as Jesus' follower isn't just an endless existence, but an intimate relationship with God that lasts forever.

True disciples realize that Jesus is of infinite value. He is worth our sacrifice of anything in this life we're tempted to hang onto. Ultimately, He is our reward. Don't be afraid to leave everything to follow Him.

Let the gospel and Christian discipleship motivate you to give up earthly things to follow and serve Christ. —Philip

God's Plan Includes All the Problems

22

There arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. (Acts 15:39)

Read Acts 15:36–40

Church work is messy work. Churches experience many problems. Some come from outside; some come from within. Jesus told His disciples to expect problems, the apostles wrote letters to churches that were experiencing problems, and Luke's God-breathed history of the early church doesn't gloss over problems. Persecutions that arise from outside the church hurt, but in my experience, conflicts that arise from within the church are more painful.

In Acts 5–6, Luke recorded how the infant church in Jerusalem, right outta the gate, had internal problems. They had two treacherously hypocritical members as well as infighting between ethnically diverse groups in the congregation. Those must've been difficult days to be part of that church. Yet, in the mysterious wisdom of God, those problems eventually purified the church, multiplied its leadership team, and strengthened its unity (5:1–11; 6:1–7). Despite the grievous problems—even because of them—the gospel kept advancing.

In Acts 15, Luke recorded another internal conflict between two exemplary leaders. This conflict tore in two the early church's first missionary team: "There arose a sharp disagreement" between Paul and Barnabas (v. 39). How awful! Paul and Barnabas had planted churches so successfully for a few years, especially in Galatia. (See Acts 13–14.) But these brothers argued over whether to include John Mark on their second church planting trip. Apparently, Paul couldn't bring himself to trust Mark because Mark had deserted them in the middle of the first trip (Acts 13:13). On the other hand, Barnabas, Mark's uncle, thought it crucial to give his nephew a second chance (vv. 37–38). I'm guessing this wasn't a case of right versus wrong. Both men were godly; both had a valid case. Yet they couldn't come to an agreement. Maybe both were a bit bullheaded in not acknowledging the validity of the other's perspective. In the end, "they separated from each other" (v. 39)! Let that sink in. Let it bring you to tears. Both men must've been devastated as their gospel-camaraderie ended.

Reminder: Missionary work is messy. Relational tensions are common. Yet, according to Luke's primary theme in Acts, God providentially uses internal conflict and division within the church to advance the gospel. In this case, God used even the separation of Paul and Barnabas to double the number of missionary teams (vv. 39–40). God will see to it that His church advances. The grand symphony that He's orchestrating includes notes of discord, but all of it is moving in the harmonized advancement of the message of His crucified, risen, and returning King.

As you experience the pain of internal church conflict, you may not ever see in your lifetime the way God is orchestrating it for good. In fact, you may live for decades with "mystery" (Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, ch. 13). You may never understand why God allowed it, but you must endure hardships with confidence that God is in control and that He is composing the church's history to include minor keys that will resolve in the major glory of His Son. Do not allow the disillusionment of pain to weaken your commitment to Christ's gospel or church.

If the book of Acts teaches you anything, it teaches you that Christ's church is invincible. Nothing—neither persecution from without nor problems from within—can stop its progress.

Let the gospel's certain advance encourage your perseverance through church problems, especially those that come from within. —Joe

The Mighty Union of Youth and Experience

You... younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility. (1 Peter 5:5)

Read 1 Peter 5:1-11

Throughout history, some of the people most passionate for gospel expansion have been committed, unyielding bulldogs. Unfortunately, even bulldogs can get stuck or sidetracked—especially as they age—mixing human pride with gospel zeal, mislabeling traditions as orthodoxy, mistaking their experience for an *ex-cathedra*-like authority, or allowing the weariness of ministry to broker a sleepy status quo.

In 1806, a group of American students took shelter under a haystack during a storm and pledged to take the gospel to the world. This “Haystack Prayer Meeting” evolved into a private missions society, and by 1810 some of the organizers, now seminary students, were committed to becoming missionaries. This was part of a great awakening. Their problem? There were no American sending agencies. They needed the backing of their denomination’s decision makers.

Some leaders acknowledged the students’ cause as worthy but dismissed their proposals as “premature, savoring of infatuation.” Even so, they invited the students to share their vision at the big annual meeting. It is hard to overstate the importance of the moment and what it would mean for world evangelization. What unfolded was far better than any episode of Shark Tank. Even though the students were raring to go, there was maturity and deference in their appeal: “We beg leave to state that our minds have been long impressed with the duty and importance of personally attempting a mission to the heathen.... Feeling our youth and inexperience, we look up to our fathers in the church, and respectfully solicit their advice, direction, and prayers.”

The elders were impressed with the students’ willingness to sacrifice themselves! One leader, moved to tears, said their passion made him feel small. Another called their appeal “a sound in the tops of the mulberry trees” (2 Samuel 5:24). But the mission effort was new, and these young people lacked experience. So, the elders put one of the students, Adoniram Judson, on a ship to London to see if the British might accept young Americans under the patronage of *their* missionary societies!

The Brits sent Adoniram back with a rejection letter marked by admiration, candor, and a hint of British cheekiness: They told the Americans it was time for them to launch their own mission board: “We entertain so favorable an opinion of our good friends in the United States that we cannot suppose they will permit the London Society to serve alone.” Translation: “Step up to the wicket, boys.”

All these events combined to create a mighty union of the elders and the youngers: the Americans formed a board of commissioners and ordained their first five missionaries. And no one could have imagined that the United States would eventually become the world’s largest sender of missionaries, still strong after more than 200 years.

This historic moment reveals something profound about missions: *Humility and mutual submission are not only evidences of a Spirit-filled life, but secret weapons.* Both generations leaned on and learned from one another as part of the battle strategy for the global uplift of Christ and His saving work (John 3:14–16, 30). Can we do the same? How the church deals with generational clashes and differences is both an indicator of our spiritual health and a harbinger of our future. We cannot ignore the differences. And we should do more than just tolerate or embrace them with some vague, ethereal kumbaya. We should weaponize them against the real enemy!

So, to the elders: *Invest in the whippersnappers*—they may be wiser than you realize. And to the youth: *Submissively solicit the direction of your elders*—there is more fight in them than you know.

Let the gospel obliterate the pride that paralyzes multigenerational work. —David

The Process of Gospel Advance

24

*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses
entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)*

Read 2 Timothy 2:1–7

Imagine a billion-dollar copper mine operating at full capacity with hundreds of workers bustling about, machinery running constantly, everyone exhausted from activity, yet after two years, zero copper production. Management would fire everyone because the purpose isn't busywork but production. Similarly, churches can be incredibly busy with committed, tired members involved in countless activities, but what's the objective of the church? To produce disciples!

Paul's final words to Timothy reveal the process of gospel advance through intentional discipleship. But before Timothy can fulfill his mission, Paul commands him to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1). This primarily refers to serving grace—the strength to accomplish the purpose for which Christ saved and called us.

The process of discipleship is personal. Paul outlines a clear progression: "What you have heard from me... entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (v. 2). This creates a chain reaction: Paul → Timothy → faithful men → others. In discipleship, truth is caught as much as it is taught. You cannot lecture disciples into existence—discipleship is intensely personal, life-on-life, and all-encompassing. It's like when two cars brush against each other in a parking lot, and the white paint from one transfers onto the black bumper of the other through close contact. That's discipleship: the rubbing off of one life onto another through personal contact, vulnerability, and transparency.

The process of discipleship is intentional. Paul deliberately chose Timothy during his missionary journeys, trained him personally, and then sent him to lead the challenging Ephesian ministry. Intentional discipleship requires both congregational training (where students choose to participate, teachers instruct, students listen and obey) and leadership training (where leaders choose students). Leadership training follows four stages: I lead, you observe → I lead, you help → You lead, I observe → You lead, I leave. The local church isn't a spectator sport. It is a forum for raising leaders who will make disciples among the nations. God won't ask how much you didn't know, but "What did you do with what I deposited into you?" Find people willing to make Jesus their supreme love, who trust God through trials, and who are willing to renounce all to follow Him.

The process of discipleship is commanded. The word "entrust" is imperative—a command not a suggestion. It means to deposit something of immeasurable value, like placing family treasures in a safety deposit box for future generations. Timothy must deposit the gospel treasure into faithful people, who will in turn deposit it into others. This is how the gospel is safeguarded across generations.

Beware of becoming a "Dead Sea Christian"—constantly taking in sermons, conferences, and biblical teaching year after year but never giving anything out. The Dead Sea receives life-giving water daily, but nothing lives in it because it never gives out. Spiritual life is renewed and refreshed as it flows through us to others.

Crucial questions demand answers: Are you a disciple? Has your life been radically transformed by faith in Jesus Christ? Are you making disciples? The Great Commission isn't a request but a command.

Let the gospel motivate you to embrace the challenge of making disciples, beginning where you are and extending to the nations. —Philip

Commending Them to God

I commend you to God and to the word of his grace. (Acts 20:32)

Read Acts 20:17–38

One of the most challenging issues missionaries struggle with is discerning when to leave their church plants, or—to use the somewhat paternalistic missionary jargon I grew up hearing—when to “turn the church over to the nationals.”

Questions of missionary praxis like this tend to be difficult because we do not find explicit answers in Scripture, at least not in the form of tidy bullet points. We find no Pauline texts that say, “When X, Y, and Z happen, the missionary may leave; however, if X and Z have happened, but not Y, especially if you can’t figure out why Y is not happening, then read what Luke and Peter say.” At times we may wish missions were this formulaic, but we work with complex people, follow a living Spirit, and operate in diverse cultures. Hence, the emergence of missiologists and their many books! Before consulting them, however, I recommend the following exercise.

Attempt to articulate your missionary questions as biblically as possible. Scriptural terminology helps us detect even small theological problems in our thinking. The enemy is subtle—he’s happy if we’re even slightly out of tune with the Spirit’s tuning fork. So, to the question of a ministry change, we might search for biblical instances of missionary transitions and focus on the words the Holy Spirit uses to describe that process. Based on Acts 14:21–23 and Acts 20:32, we might restate the question this way: “When is the right time to *commend a church to God*?” This adjustment in our wording reminds us about ownership: We aren’t turning over *our* churches to the *nationals*, but rather entrusting *God’s* churches to *God*. We were bought “with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18–19). The church has always been His, from start to finish—not first ours, then, on some magic transition day, the nationals’. This shift gets us intentionally surrendering all new churches to God from day one as a core mindset.

Even with a better phrased question, we still need a clear answer. As a young missionary I asked an elder missionary how to know when new church leaders would be “ready.” His answer seemed cryptic and vague: “Easy! They will let you know.” He refused to elaborate, recognizing the variety of ways this dynamic plays out all over the world. He was right, though. They did let me know (not realizing they were letting me know). *How* they did this was beautiful and simple: While tag-teaming through expositional preaching on 1 Corinthians, local leaders came to a different interpretation than mine on an issue. They argued good points convincingly from Scripture and maintained their position a little more forcefully than I expected.

Later that day, I did not weep out of bitterness that my “children in the faith” (1 Corinthians 4:15) had disagreed with my interpretation. I wept out of gratitude and humility to see them being more loyal to God’s Word than to me. And that’s how I knew they were ready to be “commended to God” in a more formal, Pauline way.

Years later, it dawned on me that arguably the two most significant texts on the inspiration and authority of Scripture were written in the context of the imminent departure of powerful apostolic personalities (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 4:6; 2 Peter 1:13–21). What was the parting shot of Paul and Peter to these churches? *Trust the Word! Be true to the Word!*

So, foreign missionaries, when you see “the nationals” stubbornly loyal and true to the Word, to the gospel of God, instead of to you—they’re ready!

Let the gospel claim the highest and unequivocal loyalties of future church leaders.

—David

A Liberating Fear for Gospel Workers

26

Have no fear of them. (Matthew 10:26)

Read Matthew 10:26–33

Jesus sends His disciples out “as sheep in the midst of wolves”, warning them of persecution, betrayal, and hatred (Matthew 10:16). Yet, three times in Matthew 10:26–33, He commands, “Fear not”—the most frequent command of Jesus during His earthly ministry! This isn’t naive optimism—it’s liberating truth. In this passage, He reveals how gospel workers can overcome paralyzing fears through a proper understanding of what—and Whom—we should truly fear.

Gospel workers are called to courageously proclaim God’s truth. Jesus commands His disciples to boldly declare what they’ve heard “in the dark” and proclaim it “on the housetops” (v. 27). We’re not to use deception like the world does—manipulating, lying to protect ourselves, telling people what they want to hear. Instead, we must tell them what they need to hear. We’re to be like doctors who care so deeply for patients that we’re willing to say the truth: “You have cancer, and here’s what we can do about it.” God has fully revealed His truth in His Word. The gospel stands on its own power, and we are told to proclaim that transformative power without fear.

Gospel workers can boldly trust in God’s sovereign care. What’s another reason we shouldn’t fear those who threaten us or our ministry? Because not even “two sparrows sold for a penny” fall to the ground “apart from your Father” (v. 29). If God is intimately involved with the most common, insignificant birds—worth practically nothing in the New Testament marketplace—how much more is He involved in our lives? “Even the hairs of your head are all numbered” (v. 30). The God Who placed planets into orbit knows exactly how many hair follicles are on your head at any given moment. You will not die one second before God ordains it. Those who oppose us work within God’s sovereign control. The fear of man is overcome by the fear of God—living in awe of His mighty and personal care.

Gospel workers will publicly identify themselves with God. Those who “acknowledge [Jesus] before men” will be acknowledged by Him “before [the] Father who is in heaven” (v. 32). To acknowledge means to confess or agree—agreeing with God that we’re sinners and that Jesus is our only salvation. Though hard times do test the genuineness of our faith, true Christians willingly identify with Christ anywhere and back it up with action, living by faith and not by fear. Conversely, this passage says those who deny Jesus—either verbally like Peter (Mark 14:66–72), or in actions that contradict their words—will not be acknowledged by Jesus.

The key idea emerges with clarity: *Fear God, not man*. When we fear God properly—practicing a reverential respect of His power to “destroy both soul and body in hell” (v. 28)—we’re liberated from fearing those who can kill only the body. For believers, “to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord,” so physical threats lose their power (2 Corinthians 5:8 KJV). This gives strength and boldness to those speaking the gospel in dangerous places.

But legitimate fear also requires two attributes: The object must be potent (actually threatening to our well-being) and present (here now). Most of our fears fail these tests. We fear the wrong things.

Jesus’ message is clear: Don’t look at people and fear. Look up in faith and trust the Lord.

Let your awe of God’s sovereign power overcome your fear of human threats so you can boldly proclaim the gospel from the housetops. —Philip

Greatly Loved

*O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong
and of good courage. (Daniel 10:19)*

Read Daniel 10

Daniel had been in Babylon for seventy years, he was probably in his eighties, and he was “mourning” when Jews were usually celebrating Passover (10:1–4; see Leviticus 23:5–6). You might think that, in this low season, God would give His faithful prophet a break, but the vision He gave Daniel (communicated by angels) promised “great conflict” ahead (10:1). God’s people would keep experiencing trouble. (Read the rest of the vision in chs. 11–12.) In the face of unrelenting hardship, how would Daniel, discouraged and weak as he was, endure? Answer: The same way that you, when you’re weak, will endure hardship—by believing what God has revealed to be true.

When you’re discouraged, you must believe that God loves you greatly. The angels didn’t tell Daniel that things would get better, but they reminded him (twice) that God “greatly loved” him (vv. 11, 19). If you’ve turned from your sin and fled to Jesus for refuge, then you’ve been forever united to Jesus, and God’s words to Daniel apply to you, too. You can boldly say, “God loves me.” You can go further and say, “God loves me just like He loved Daniel.” Christian, you can go even further and boast, “God loves me as much as He loves Jesus.” That’s not too audacious if you’re “in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).

When you’re weak, you must believe that you’re not alone in the battle. These angelic messengers added to Daniel’s stress when they told him that the situation in the world was a lot worse than he realized. Christian, try that message on for size: *Things right now are actually much worse than you know.* For Daniel, the problem wasn’t only that the returnees to Jerusalem were struggling. (Ezra 1–4 describes what was going on at the time.) It was that, beyond all the conflicts on Earth, angelic battles were raging!

There’s a lot God hasn’t revealed about spiritual warfare, and we should beware of speculating. But we should also beware of suppressing what the Bible says. Demoniac influence is powering all of the opposition to God in governments and false religions. The spiritual conflict is real, and the angelic battles raging in Daniel’s day haven’t petered out. Yet, Daniel was “strengthened” by the presence of the angel that commanded him, “Fear not” (Daniel 10:18–19). That terrifying angel reminded Daniel that Daniel was not alone in the battle, that the Lord has angelic battalions at His disposal, and that these mighty creatures are God’s servants—and our servants (Hebrews 1:14)!

Christian, you’re not alone in this battle. As you believe the gospel and tell it to others, you’re forever united to the King Whose birth was announced by angelic armies (Luke 2:9–14). He’s the One before Whom demons shuddered (Luke 4:33–35; 8:26–33). He’s the One Who could have called “an army of more than 70,000 angels” to keep Him from crucifixion (Matthew 26:53 NIV) but instead chose to die for your sin. He’s the One Who conquered death, ascended to heaven, and is now enthroned “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21; see also Revelation 4–5). Never fear! Just “stand firm” and keep believing the gospel which is your armor in this fight (Ephesians 6:14–17).

Christian life and ministry involve weariness in ongoing “times of war and great hardship” (Daniel 10:1 NLT). But God strengthens you by reminding you that He loves you greatly and that you’re not alone. “Walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Let the gospel of God’s love strengthen you to endure ongoing conflict. —Joe

Effective Prayer for Missions

28

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you. (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1–3; Acts 12:1–25

My family had the privilege of church planting in northeast Brazil for thirteen years. We loved the climate with year-round sun (except the rainy season)! We loved the fresh tropical fruits. We loved the people of Brazil and still do. What we did not love was the violence and danger. In the early 2000s our city had the dubious honor of being the second most dangerous city in the world for percentage of homicides. We did not see that side of Brazilian life—until we did! In one year, our home was burglarized two dozen times until we hired a guard to stay whenever we left home. We fled our house twice because of threats. We lost friends to violence, and we worried about kidnappings. Worst of all, we had a coworker shot in front of his congregation. So, why would we stay when confronted with that kind of hardship? We stayed because we had deep conviction that God had called us, we wanted to be faithful, we were seeing the life-changing impact of the gospel, and we trusted in a sovereign God.

Many of your church's missionaries face challenges like we faced. How should you pray for them? Scripture gives us an answer in the story of the apostle Paul. In 2 Thessalonians 3:1–3, this New Testament missionary asks for prayer in several specific areas.

Pray for the messenger to be faithful (v. 1). Paul begins by asking the church, “Pray for us.” Paul repeatedly asked for prayer for open doors and boldness to speak the truth (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:2–4; Ephesians 6:18–20). He himself offered a profound prayer for spiritual growth in those he served (Ephesians 3:14–21). But in this text, Paul requests prayer *for the messengers*: “Pray for us.” I’ve been a missionary for thirty years, and I cannot count how many missionaries I’ve seen leave because of spiritual problems in their own lives. Pray earnestly and specifically for the spiritual health of your missionaries—for their walk with God and their faithful service.

Pray for the message to be received (v. 1). Paul then asks that the church pray for the progress of the gospel—“that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.” Pray, he said, that others would respond to the Word of God as you have. We must remember here that the church in Thessalonica was praised for responding to the Word of God, first by turning from idol worship to worship of God, and then by enduring persecution with their eyes on Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 1:5–10). What a testimony! But here, Paul says to keep praying for this people group—that more would receive God’s life-changing Word. Pray the same for your missionary friends.

Pray that people will not resist the messenger or the message (v. 2). Paul’s third request is a prayer for protection from “wicked and evil men.” (Sounds like Brazil!) He acknowledges that such men do not have faith, but he apparently is praying that they will come to Christ. What an attitude to have toward our enemies! Like Paul, ministers of the gospel should follow our Lord’s example: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Pray because God is faithful (v. 3). Paul closes this instruction with a reminder that prayer to a powerful and faithful God makes a difference. Your missionaries are on the front lines. They are in harm’s way, both physically and spiritually. They need your prayers, and God faithfully answers prayer.

Let the gospel inspire you to pray for the messenger, the message, and the lost. —Dan

Ecclesiastes for Missionaries

Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. (Ecclesiastes 12:13 NKJV)

Read Ecclesiastes 3

If you're in ministry, you need Ecclesiastes more than most. You're prone to build your life's significance on really good sand—on your accomplishments in ministry rather than your relationship with God (Luke 10:20). Ecclesiastes strips you of delusions, painfully reminding you that your legacy won't leave a lasting impact on the world (ch. 1). But after Solomon tears you down, he builds you up: Your life is significant because it's part of the beautiful, albeit inscrutable plan of God. (See ch. 3, especially v. 11.) So be reconciled to God through Christ and live every day in the fear of God (12:13). (See 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–13; 11:9.) Here's the surprisingly simple outline of what “a day in the life of a God-fearer” should look like:

Enjoy God's gift of daylight. “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all” (11:7–8). Life is such a precious gift; start every morning with joy in your Creator, singing, “Wake up, my soul!... I will awaken the dawn with my song to God” (Psalm 57:8).

Enjoy God's gifts while getting ready for the day. Do you obey the command in Ecclesiastes 9:8? As you shower, put on clean clothes, and use skin lotion or beard oil, don't think you're entitled to these delights; receive them with thanks to God (1 Timothy 6:17).

Enjoy God's gifts of food and drink. Eat and drink with thankfulness (Ecclesiastes 2:24–25; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7). Before every meal, bless God for what you're about to receive (Matthew 14:19; 26:26; 1 Timothy 4:1–5), and as you eat and drink, glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Enjoy God's gift of prayer. Days are filled with trials—infuriating injustice (Ecclesiastes 4:1–3; 8:12–14), politics (8:2–5; 10:4, 6, 13, 16, 20), and aging (12:2–7). Each trial is an opportunity to humble yourself before God and cast your anxieties on Him (7:13–14; 1 Peter 5:6–7; Psalm 55:22). Prayer is an effective way to “remove vexation from your heart” (Ecclesiastes 11:10). “O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer” (J. M. Scriven).

Enjoy God's gift of His Word. If you fear God, you'll listen to Him more than you talk to Him (5:1–7). Those in Christian ministry must especially beware: You can be dehydrated yourself, even as you serve the water of God's Word to others. Slow down and drink the water of life.

Enjoy God's gift of work. Work diligently (11:1–7), but don't idolize work (4:7–8), and don't work for accumulation (2:18–23; 4:4). Instead, rejoice every day that God gives you the ability to work (2:24–26; 3:22; 5:18–20; 8:15), and work heartily *for Him* (9:10; Colossians 3:23).

Enjoy God's gifts of friendship and marriage. Good friends are great gifts from God; they multiply your productivity and protect you from yourself and others (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12). Invest in them. And if God has blessed you with marriage, then “enjoy” it “all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you” (9:9 CSB).

Enjoy God's gifts as you reflect on today and plan tomorrow. Because God orders every event of your day, good and bad (3:1–8), acknowledge His sovereignty over all that happened today and over all that you plan to accomplish tomorrow (James 4:15). Significance in life is found in God, in thanking Him for all He gives and trusting Him in all He ordains. If you anchor your life's significance in God, then you're free—free from “the success syndrome” and free to live life, easy or hard, as God gives it (Ecclesiastes 3:12–13).

Let the gospel anchor your life's significance in God. —Joe

Through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4)

Read Hebrews 11

When athletes lose, they often say, “We left it all out on the field.” I’ve tried using that cliché, but it never seemed to sweeten the bitterness of defeat. The athletes of God, however—running and fighting for the gospel’s sake (1 Corinthians 9:23–26)—have a unique perspective on victory and defeat because we already know the outcome. God wins. In Him, we win, too. *But first we die.*

On the day God calls us home, we’d like to say, “I left it all out on the field,” but we know it won’t be completely truthful to proclaim our 100% commitment. Already, we notice waste in our management of the resources entrusted to us. We know we could be speaking more boldly, serving more willingly, sacrificing more meaningfully, and sinning less frequently. Feeling this weight is more a sign of life than a cause for guilt, but if there be any remorse as we leave this life, it may be that we will no longer be gospel heralds. Christians “love to tell the story...of Jesus and His love.” But when we die, our ministry on Earth will be over. Or will it?

I pondered this while researching nineteenth-century missionaries who served in the Ottoman Empire, which spread from North Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. Both the British & Foreign Bible Society and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions expended enormous resources to translate the Bible, evangelize, plant churches, and establish schools, orphanages, and hospitals. The results, in terms of recorded conversions, were not spectacular, especially among Muslims. Secular historians often refer to their efforts in terms of failure. Even the missionaries admitted discouragement.

In Istanbul today, there is an old Protestant cemetery, a walled-off garden of Scripture-etched stones, a place of meditation amid minarets and high-rise apartments. One step inside the cemetery silences the cacophony of traffic, construction, and calls to Islamic prayer. Birds sing, leaves rustle, pinecones fall—and the slabs speak. “Almost Fifty Years of Eminent Missionary Service in Turkey,” says one gravestone. Another marks a Bible translator’s sixty-nine years of service with the words “I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15). Nearby, a baby’s marker: “Surrendered to Him Who Gave His Only Begotten Son for Us.” Another stone, in the shape of an open Bible: “I am the resurrection and the life.” When I visited, the place felt more holy than haunted, and it seemed a choir of missionary ghosts was singing to me: “Is He worthy? HE IS!”

Did these missionaries “leave it *all* on the field”? Did they die without any regrets? Probably not. Their memoirs testify that, like us, they often felt invincible after times in prayer but were set back abruptly when their mortality collided with their immortality. Though they had gospel-transformed minds, they did not yet have transformed bodies. The more they loved their Savior, the more they wanted to do for Him, but the less they felt they were accomplishing. On important Kingdom business, they struggled with very un-Kingdomy things like dysentery, depression, defeats, discouragement, and eventually death. They did not live or serve or die perfectly, but they lived and served and died with faith in the One Who did.

These Christian workers are like Abel, whose faith is *still* speaking to us (Hebrews 11:4). God can use a dead Abel or a dead missionary or a dead you or me as He sees fit. When we are dead, our lives may yet speak. Then again, why wait?

Let the gospel consume you today so you can still be speaking after you die. —David

Worship the Lord, “All the Earth”

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! (Psalm 100:1)

Read Psalm 100

For the English-speaking world, there’s no more historic call to worship than Psalm 100. In 1561, William Kethe’s poetic version of Psalm 100 was published in London. It begins,

All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with fear, his praise forth tell.
Come ye before him and rejoice.

At that time, Kethe’s poem was paired with a tune composed by the French composer, Louis Bourgeois. And even though the tune is more commonly paired today with the words, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” it goes by the name “Old Hundredth” for a reason. What majestic music, inviting God’s people to worship Him with singing!

Sing with wonder that God summons you to draw near to Him. God commands His people to draw near to Him (vv. 2, 4). Such commands are full of redeeming grace, calling you to experience the nearness of God that humanity lost in Eden. Of course, when this psalm was originally sung by Hebrews some 3,000 years ago, the people were invited to enter the literal “gates” of Jerusalem and the literal “courts” of the Temple. Yet that glorious ancient structure served as only a temporary picture of the once-for-all way to approach God. When Jesus died for sinners, the Temple curtain was torn in two, and the physical Temple was rendered obsolete (John 4:21–26; Mark 15:38). So, rebels can now approach their holy Maker through repentant faith in His crucified and risen Messiah, and every follower of Christ can fulfill the purpose of human existence—“to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). Christian, sing!

Sing with delight that you forever belong to God—all because of Jesus. At the structural heart of Psalm 100 is the precious expression, “We are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3). If you’ve repented of sin and trusted Jesus to save you from sin, you belong forever to your covenant-keeping Shepherd! Pastor James Montgomery Boice personally understood Psalm 100’s power to produce unshakable joy in the face of death. In April 2000, he was diagnosed with cancer that took his life two months later. But a few years earlier, he had treasured Psalm 100, and it sustained his joy to the end: “Regardless of what may happen to us, we are still his. Troubles will inevitably come. But it is no matter. We are his. Sickness may come. We are his.... Suppose death should come into our immediate family. We are still his, and we will always be his” (*Psalms: Volume 2*, pp. 813–14). Because Christ has brought you into God’s fold, you can be continually joyful. Christian, sing!

Sing with longing for all peoples on Earth to share your delight in God. Although the singers of Psalm 100 are God’s sheep, the intended audience is “all the earth!” (v. 1). So this call to worship drums for the church the rhythm of God’s missionary heart-beat. The Lord’s desire has always been for “all the nations of the earth [to] be blessed” (Genesis 22:17–18) and for “a great multitude...from all tribes and peoples and languages” to worship Him in His presence (Revelation 7:9–17). So if you sincerely sing this call to worship, you will yearn for the gospel’s advance to “all people that on earth do dwell” (Kethe). Christian, sing!

Let the gospel be your song of continual delight, resounding to “all the earth.” —Joe

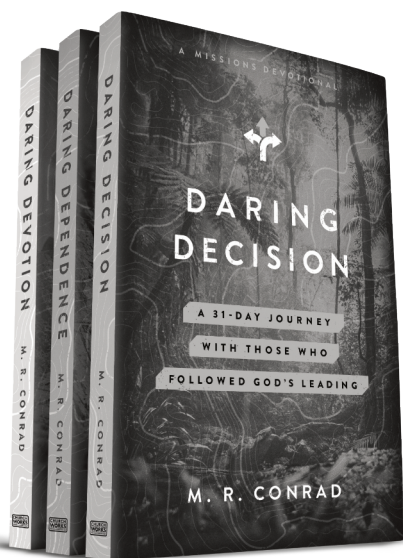
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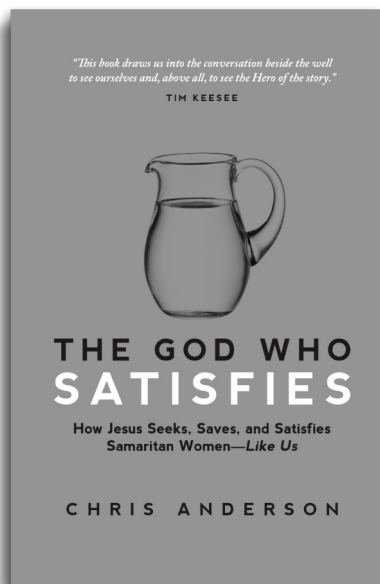
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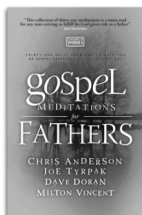
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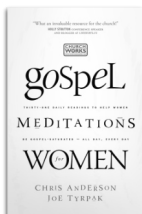
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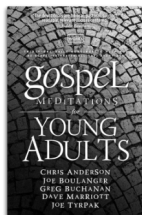
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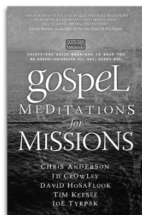
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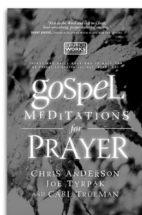
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