FROM THE FRONTLINES

36 devotionals written by missionaries and national partners shining light in the world’s darkest corners
FROM THE FRONTLINES

36 devotionals written by missionaries and national partners shining light in the world’s darkest corners
To our ministry partners and worldwide workers who help make East-West’s work in the world’s spiritually darkest places possible.

We are thankful for your willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel.
FOREWORD

Today we are closer to Christ’s glorious return than ever before. The urgency of that truth is what spurs our frontline workers to daily take the gospel to nations and people groups where its saving message is unknown, unwelcome, and unmentionable.

They are the aroma of Christ among those far from God. And these missionaries and national partners are faithfully leveraging their various talents for the glory of their King—Jesus Christ. In doing so, they’re fulfilling the words of one of our faith’s forefathers, the Apostle Peter.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”  
-1 Peter 4:10-11

God is glorified, and His abundant grace is made known when we press into His power to steward the gifts He’s given us to advance His eternal Kingdom.

As you spend time with the Lord through the contents of this devotional booklet, my hope is that you are inspired to wield your God-given abilities for the sake of Christ and the glory of the Father in the world’s spiritually darkest places.

In Christ,

Kurt Nelson
President & CEO
THE ENEMY OF OUR HEARTS
from John Maisel, Founder and Chairman Emeritus

The day I received Jesus, I immediately sensed an internal presence leading me in a way of life that starkly contrasted how I previously lived. I was a new creation with the Holy Spirit living in me, but after a few weeks, my spiritual high faded, and I felt the battle for my heart start.

The call of every believer is to fight the good fight of faith—daily deepening in our relationship with Jesus. His ways are upside down to our natural tendencies. Upon belief, our whole way of thinking shifts to things above, and our actions reflect compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. And that’s a struggle against our flesh.

We’re called to lose our lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel, and we do that by seeking Christ’s will and following Him in all phases of life. We’re called to leverage where He’s placed us for His glory by taking the gospel public … changing lives as we lead others to finding Jesus as their Savior.

This is where joy comes into full maturity. Because, as Christians, losing our lives leads us to finding a life of significance and ultimate meaning.

Lord, life is found in You alone. Empower us with Your Spirit to be faithful to that call today. Amen.
To say the least, being a missionary is an interesting job. It is challenging to stand in front of people and try to get them to understand God’s call to make disciples. We are privileged to follow Jesus and freely invest all we are and all we have in His Kingdom, but not every believer understands the gift we’ve been given. When I focus on others’ responses to the call God has placed on my heart, I can become incredibly exhausted and discouraged.

In those moments, I take a step back from my situation. I spend time with God through His Word, prayer, worship, and I preach the gospel to myself … reminding myself of who God is and who He says I am. Then I repent and keep moving forward in the mission He’s given me.

It is my hope that no matter the situation you are in, you will do the same. What a gracious and merciful Lord we serve who binds us all together through the body He broke and the blood He shed on our behalf!

*Jesus, thank You for sacrificing Yourself so that we can know God and join in His global rescue mission. Open the eyes of all believers to participate in Your Great Commission. Amen.*
In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul was grieved by the number of people in Athens who worshiped false gods. His heart was torn apart by the things that hurt God’s heart.

East-West sent seven teams to Athens last year and discovered that not much has changed in 2,000 years. Muslims living in this historic city respond in similar ways to what Paul experienced—sneering, inquiry, and belief.

This passage encourages me greatly because I find comfort in knowing that no one fails when we’re sneered at for our faith. Paul witnessed a spectrum of responses when sharing the gospel … including sneers and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior. In my experience, many Muslims have wanted to hear the story again and many have believed. That is a major victory!

Father, help us continue to share our faith even when we’re sneered at, trusting that You will use our obedience to draw people into belief in the gospel. Amen.
THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP
from a missionary on our Evangelism Team

READ MATTHEW 16:24.

This year, I read *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer—a book that has greatly challenged my personal commitment to wholeheartedly follow Jesus every day.

In this book, Bonhoeffer states, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

In Matthew 16:24, Jesus lets His disciples know that following Him requires self-denial, cross-bearing, and loyal obedience. In self-denial, we understand we can’t save ourselves. Cross-bearing involves our willingness to suffer hardships and persecution to the point of death. And loyal obedience means submitting to the Lordship of Jesus every day.

I am ashamed to admit how often I fail at fully living out this call and living as the man of God I am supposed to be. Despite my shortcomings, Christ’s love lives in me, and I can confidently claim a life lived in faith that His grace covers all my sins.

*Jesus, thank You for saving us for eternity and sealing us with the Holy Spirit. Thank you for giving us Your Word so that we can live in obedience until You return or call us home. Amen.*
Even though I have been a follower of Jesus for over 40 years, I am still amazed that I can look at situations without factoring God into them. I become overwhelmed when I focus on the problem at hand. Why do I so easily forget that my God is active and wants to be involved in everything I do?

My two favorite words in the Bible are, “But God.” It seems like every time I read of a difficult situation in Scripture, “But God” is strung in the passage. The characters involved could only see the problem and wasted time wringing their hands for a solution. How hard would it have been to factor in the God they worshiped?

Here are a few examples I’ve noticed recently:

- Joseph told his brothers in Egypt, “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20).
- The psalmist said, “My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:26).
- King Jehoshaphat was told, “The battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15).
- The Bible says, “They took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb but God raised him from the dead” (Acts 13:29-30).

My prayer is to become a person who does not say, “God is good, but I am in a terrible situation.” Instead, I want to say, “I am up a creek, but God is good and will work in and through this.” I may be in a lonely, hard place. I may not know what to do, but God does, and I will trust in that.

God, You are good. Increase our faith to believe that in all of our situations. Amen.
In less than 15 years, Paul could say that from Jerusalem to Ilyricum—a Roman province—there was no place left for him to go with the gospel, and he was on his way to Spain. That is an incredible thing.

This passage has challenged me to have a greater sense of urgency. I must press into the Word of God for effective church planting principles and leadership development in my ministry to the Diaspora populations in the United States. Daily, hundreds of people from all over the world move to our nation’s metro areas giving my team an incredible opportunity to make disciples in people groups who were previously inaccessible to missionaries.

God has given us the opportunity to leave no place left unreached, and I want to seize this moment in history for His glory.

_Father, thank You for bringing unreached peoples to our neighborhoods. Give us the strength and boldness to share Your gospel with them so there is no place left unreached. Amen._
This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. I’ve served with East-West for over 20 years and have seen it lived out in many lives. Through the personal risk and sacrifice of individuals, many people groups have been impacted and will be present to honor the King of kings for all eternity.

One particular story that comes to mind is that of Mr. Doley—a man martyred for his faith in South Asia. He was murdered while evangelizing an unreached people group, and the end of his life on this earth was the beginning of a gospel movement among those who took his life. A year later, his son baptized three new believers, and today there are thousands of house churches across this region.

God truly is in the business of bringing people from every nation to the feet of Jesus. It’s a privilege to be a part of a ministry willing to pursue this vision, even if it seems like we fail at times. This passage reminds me that all we need to do is obey our King—in opposition, persecution, and death—and we are assured that Jesus will write the last chapter.

Lord, thank You for humbling Yourself to the point of death for our sins. Fill us with courage to do the same if that’s Your will for our life. Amen.
As I read and reread this text innumerable times over the past several months, I became fixated on the following thoughts:

- We were chosen before the foundations of the world (Ephesians 1:4).
- We are chosen for a purpose, and that purpose is God's will (Ephesians 1:5).
- God revealed the mystery of His will (Ephesians 1:9).
- God’s will and why He chose us is “to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10).

God specifically chose you and me to work toward uniting all things in heaven and earth on His behalf. He desires to bring all things back to their original created order.

Before coming to faith, I was a dead man. When I met Jesus, I was revived, and His Spirit now lives in me. At this beautiful exchange, my driving purpose became apparent—I was chosen to redeem others to Him and to contribute to restoring His original, created order. And so are you.

What a great honor and privilege to be chosen ones!

> Father, reveal to us the ways You’ve designed and chosen us to unite all things in heaven and earth back to You. Amen.
GOD DELIGHTS IN YOU
from our Executive Vice-President of Field Ministries

I grew up believing that God was utterly and totally disgusted with me. I was keenly aware of my sin problem, and I knew that I was not holy like God. My parenting, my religious background, my performance nature, and my hyperactive conscience all worked together to reinforce God’s disgust with me.

In the towering generosity of God, I was shown the truth about grace, mercy, and forgiveness. I learned that God was eternally “for” me rather than disgusted with me, and I trusted Him for forgiveness. I did well for a time and then slowly drifted back into a performance mentality—once again living under the disgust of God. I never doubted that my eternal life was secure, but I also never doubted that God’s stance toward me was disgust. I was His son, but He had to be fed up with me.

In an additional act of God’s generosity and grace, I came to see God’s “today stance” toward me as being “for” me—He even delighted in me. These two passages declare God’s delight in His people. If the delight I have in my wife, my children, and my grandchildren were multiplied by 10,000 or more, you would have the delight of God toward you. He is clearly “for” you—today and for eternity.

God, we’re grateful to know You are for us to the point of delighting in us. Remind us today of this truth and allow us to walk freely in it. Amen.
GOD’S POWER
_from a missionary to Russia_

READ ROMANS 1:16, 1 CORINTHIANS 4:20,
1 THESSALONIANS 1:5, AND 2 TIMOTHY 1:7.

If you are like me, you probably do your best in praying for others’ needs, healing, and opportunities to share the gospel. Like me, you probably don’t always see results that match how Jesus and the disciples ministered to people.

This bothers me, and I always wonder about that disconnect. Lately, I’ve noticed that one thing consistently accompanied Jesus and the early church as they prayed for and shared with people—power. God’s power that brought people to repentance and instant healing to their bodies. I see this all over the New Testament:

- “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes…” (Romans 1:16).
- “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” (1 Corinthians 4:20).
- “…because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).
- “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7).

The last verse really stands out to me. I consistently move in a spirit of love and self-discipline but am lacking in the spirit of power department. People are touched by my prayer and that I care enough to share the gospel with them, but I want to experience more. I want to see to them touched by God’s power!

_God, do whatever it takes to bring us to a place of humility, desperation, and seeking Your face so that we can see You move in power. Amen._
Psalm 23 may be one of the most well known portions of Scripture, but on a recent mission trip to Southeast Asia, I discovered a profound new meaning in its words … sometimes God has to make us lie down to give us physical, emotional, and spiritual rest.

I take multi-week trips four to five times a year to train believers in evangelism and church planting in unreached countries. My most recent travel plans included seven cities, four countries, and six trainings in only 19 days. I had no rest days built into my travel, and I hit a place of deep weariness and exhaustion. I was humbled and realized I had been foolish to be so aggressive.

But Jesus is a good shepherd and forced me to physically, emotionally, and mentally rest despite the schedule I’d prepared for myself. Through this, I’ve learned that Jesus—in His goodness—makes us lie down even when we actively work against rest.

Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd. Thank You for renewing us through rest even when we’re resistant. Amen.
A NEW IDENTITY

from a missionary on our Diaspora Team

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21.

This passage can teach us some foundational lessons in the Christian life. Paul helps us understand at least three basic things:

- Believers in Christ have become new creations.
- Jesus alone makes us new because He is the only One who can forgive our sins and restore our relationship with God.
- We’re made new to be God’s ambassadors. Just as He sent Jesus to reconcile us to Himself, we are sent to share the message of reconciliation with the world.

Christ’s reconciling work on the cross made us brand new creations, and He’s sending us into a world desperate for this message. The world needs to be reconciled with its Creator who sent, “Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

God, help us walk in our identity as Your ambassadors in a broken world. Use us to reconcile lost people to Yourself. Amen.
HOPE IN SUFFERING
from a missionary on our Equipping Team
READ HEBREWS 11:35-38.

I’m privileged to minister to persecuted pastors all over Africa and Asia. We often discuss what I call “The Ugly Forms of Persecution,” and surprisingly, this topic brings them hope and comfort.

The enemy can’t hurt Jesus, but in this passage we see several forms of persecution he uses to harm believers—hatred, verbal abuse, lies, humiliation, discrimination, threats, property damage, separation, physical harm, murder, desecration, and annihilation.

Believers have suffered greatly for their faith in Jesus Christ this past year. A couple of tragedies that made headlines include an Islamic extremist attack on churches in Niger. Within two days, seventy churches were burnt down. In Asia, an evangelical pastor was murdered, and another—by God’s grace—escaped a bomb detonation unscathed.

Today, as you reflect on God’s goodness and faithfulness, spend a minute in prayer interceding for the suffering Church around the world. Like you, Jesus and His angels are right there among them, caring for them and comforting them in the midst of their persecution. The forms of persecution are ugly, but hope in the midst of suffering is beautiful.

*God, we pray for Your protection over the persecuted Church. Give them boldness to stand firm in their confidence in the gospel no matter their circumstances. Amen.*
The Apostle Paul never ceases to speak boldly, and that character trait in this scripture unlocks three keys to an effective life and ministry.

1. **Work with the Lord**
   We are called to work with God. He is our ultimate partner. Life and ministry is the work of God’s supernatural power. If God does not work within and with us, our human effort is nothing.

2. **Use the marvelous grace we’ve received**
   Every believer has received marvelous grace from the Lord, and—according to Paul—this grace should be used effectively. We did not receive the grace of God in vain. All Christians are saved by grace and are empowered by it to live and serve well.

3. **Fruitful life and ministry starts now**
   Paul reminds the Corinthian believers that the time is now, not tomorrow. Many believers procrastinate when God gives them an assignment, but we are not guaranteed a tomorrow. We must use the mercy He gives us today to bear fruit.

   *God, awaken us from spiritual laziness
   and ignite a passion in us to work with You.
   Use us to bear fruit today. Amen.*
SPREADING TRUTH
from a missionary on our Mobilization Team
READ JOHN 4:1-42.

In the evangelism world, this story is used to reveal keys truths about sharing the gospel and our stories, including ...

1. You may evangelize to a person from a different culture. Jesus was a Jew and the woman was a Samaritan.
2. We need to step out of our comfort zone. Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink was like a Confederate aristocrat taking a drink from a slave’s cup.
3. Jesus moves from general things—asking for water—to spiritual things—speaking about the Living Water (v. 7-10).
4. A non-believer’s response to spiritual conversation may be confusion or pride, much like the religious pride in the Samaritan woman (v. 12).
5. When Jesus speaks truth, His words begin to melt the ice and open the spiritual door (v. 16-19).
6. We’re called to be bold in proclaiming Jesus is the Messiah—the only way to salvation, forgiveness, and heaven (v. 26).
7. When the Samaritan woman heard real truth, it led her to tell others (v. 39). When we tell the truth, it will spread!
8. Stay focused when distractions try to pull you away from the conversation. Notice how the disciples returned at the same time Jesus was sharing a key truth (v. 27).
9. Many people will believe in Jesus through your testimony (v. 39).
10. Others will believe through Christ’s words in the Bible (v. 41).

We often shy away from evangelism and discipleship for fear or inadequacy. But God has given us this story to remind us that the call to make disciples of all nations doesn’t have to be difficult.

God, thank You for breathing this story into life so that we can be confident in the power of Your truth and our testimonies. Amen.
I’ve responded to God with, “Here I am, send me.” As a new field worker, I have a lot to learn, and today I wanted to share a few of the lessons God is writing on my heart as I begin my ministry abroad.

- When you hear the Holy Spirit speak clearly, it’s best to obey—quickly and completely.
- Step out in faith. We need to get out of the boat and walk!
- God gladly takes and uses small portions of obedience when we step out in faith.
- God multiplies our faith and obedience for His glory and purpose.
- God is the author of multiplying and exponentially growing what He desires—including the timeline and how it happens.
- His math may not make sense to us, but it adds up every time.

Another way to look at these truths is picturing God as the composer, musician, and orchestra director of life. I’m learning that when I am willing to be His instrument—no matter how finely or roughly tuned—something marvelous will happen. I have no idea where God is taking me, but each day I take another step away from the boat.

When the whole Church jumps into God’s equation of multiplication, we can expect a concert for the ages with eternal results. His will is always played out, and we’re so blessed to play a small part in His plans.

Father, we’re thankful that Your plans prevail and that You use the smallest measure of faith and obedience for Your glory. Amen.
This verse further increased my awe of the Lord’s glory. It’s truly incredible to dwell on the fact that Jesus—as He revealed Himself to be in the gospels—is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact representation of God’s nature.

I hear of God’s glory often these days. Throughout Scripture, I see that God is about His glory. He created the world for His glory. He created people to live for His glory. He brought salvation to a rebellious, sinful people through the death and resurrection of His Son for the sake of His glory. He has commissioned us to go and preach the gospel among the nations for His glory.

It’s difficult to grasp what His glory really is, but this passage opens my eyes to see that the glory of God—His character, His Lordship, His wonder—is tangible in the life of Jesus. From this understanding, I’ve learned that my life’s purpose to glorify God is ultimately realized in my daily pursuit of Jesus as the radiance of this glory. By His grace, may I follow the One who sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**God, thank You for sending Jesus to reveal Your glory and goodness to the world. Amen.**
FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

from a missionary to Central Asia

READ PSALM 139:14.

She was depressed and seemed to be slipping into a dark place. Nonetheless, when we met she asked, “How are you?”

I answered, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made, and I know it right well!”

She wasn’t expecting that answer—the surprise was plain on her face.

“And so are you,” I added. “Fearfully and wonderfully made! I know it.”

“I wish,” she answered.

“But it’s true. God loves you … you are wonderful,” I responded.

A small smile crept into her face.

The next day I saw her again and said, “You are fearfully and wonderfully made.”

She sighed, “Oh I want to believe it.”

I replied, “Believe it because it’s true.”

“I think I will,” she said as she slowly smiled.

Father, thank You for fearfully and wonderfully making us in Your image. Give us the faith to believe that truth today. Amen.
Often we believe we must minister according to patterns laid out for us by others. We read books on ministry and admire those who are able, but then look at our own resources and decide ministry is for those who have special abilities.

When I went to the mission field in obedience to God’s call, I had no idea what I would be doing. I am an extreme introvert. I do not have administrative skills. I get bored easily. And I avoid large groups of people. If God had told me, “I want you to teach English as a foreign language,” I would not have been excited about it. It is a good thing He sprang it on me as He did. I am teaching EFL, and it’s nothing like what I imagined!

We can read all the books in the world on ministry, but we cannot guess what He is able to do with what we have. Peter and John went to the temple to pray, met a man with deep needs, and were able to meet his need with what God had given them to give to others.

We look at ministry like a fast moving merry go round already in motion … believing we’re the invalids trying to hop on. However, if we look within our own playground, we may find that there is a merry go round waiting for us to give it a push.

Father, thanks for reminding us that You don’t call the equipped, You equip the called. Help us walk faithfully in the ministry You’ve given us. Amen.
This year we’ve learned that even the driest of deserts can bear fruit. Our first couple of years in Central Asia felt like a very dry desert with little results to show from our efforts. We questioned everything and wondered what we were doing wrong or if we were serving in the right place. But after much sowing, the Lord blessed us this past summer with the sweetest of fruits—seeing dear people come to faith in Jesus.

We’d invested and poured ourselves into this family for several years, and it was a joy to see both the husband and wife accept the gospel. We walked around for several weeks glowing and felt like we had given literal birth to these baby Christians. Their story reminds us that our Father is great, and the gospel retains the power of God for salvation of souls in the driest, darkest places on earth.

Father, we’re in awe of Your gospel’s power to save souls in the driest, darkest places. Please continue to do Your work in the hearts of the lost. Amen.
COME TO ME

from a national partner in Russia


It had been three years since I’d vacationed when a pastor taught on the familiar words of Matthew 11. My physical, moral, and spiritual strength were on the verge of collapse, and, as he preached, my whole being cried, “That’s me!”

In that moment, Jesus was calling me to stop and rest. When I did this, I didn’t immediately receive peace. I had to yoke to Him first in order to move forward with renewed energy.

This lesson made me realize why I felt so beaten down—I was getting ahead of my Lord. Instead of pleasing Him, I was trying to please people, and it had left me completely exhausted. We’re designed to rest under the light burden of Jesus. When we’re yoked and working in unison with Him, we then find peace.

Lord, forgive us when we try to run on our own. Remind us that Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light. Amen.
THE JUST JUDGE
from a missionary to East Asia
READ LUKE 18:1-8.

This story describes a widow who repeatedly comes to the judge to gain justice over an adversary. The judge was not a very good judge—he didn’t fear God or respect people. And for a while, he decided to forego giving justice to the widow. After repeated visits, he changed his mind and gave the widow what she wanted because of her persistent asking.

I used to think this story meant I should bother God as often as possible until He answered my request. It turns out, I just needed to read the text more carefully to catch that Jesus’ is explaining the difference between God and the judge.

Why should God’s children always pray and never give up? Because God is just, caring, and quickly aids His children, unlike the judge in this story.

Think about that for a minute. The God of the universe really cares for you, listens to your prayers, and speedily responds with justice. We should always pray and never give up because of Who we are praying to.

God, we’re thankful that You are just and for our good. Help us remember that we can pray constantly and trust in Your goodness because of Your unchanging nature. Amen.
DECLARATION BOOKENDS
from a missionary on our Equipping Team
READ PSALM 92:1-2.

Lately, I’ve created a habit of declaring God’s loving kindness for me in the morning when I wake up and at night before I fall asleep. It’s easy to grow numb to the gospel and God’s grace. This is a dangerous place to be spiritually, which is why I’ve decided to encourage myself with this specific passage at the beginning and end of my days.

God is deserving of our praise because His faithfulness and kindness to us is astounding. It’s an encouragement to reflect on who He is through these “declaration bookends.” It really makes a difference in my day!

Father, thank You for giving us bookends of Scripture that remind us of Your loving kindness and faithfulness toward us. Amen.
At the age of 20 and as a fairly new believer, I accepted the challenge to start memorizing Scripture. Romans 8:18 was the first verse I memorized, and God has continually used that specific verse as a foundational rock for me in the various storms of life. Everything from health issues to wayward children and the results of living in a fallen world are undergirded by that truth.

It was also a lifeline the 10 years I lived in Russia. Life overseas was not easy emotionally, physically, spiritually, or relationally. My husband and I often questioned whether we heard God correctly by moving to Russia. Although our sufferings didn’t compare to many faithful saints who are severely persecuted, they were still our sufferings—the issues God called us to trust Him in and walk through.

The truth of Romans 8:18 regularly rang in my heart and mind, especially in the midst of the hardest times. God didn’t have to show us glimpses of His glory during those moments, but He graciously did and continues to. As John Piper so aptly explains, “God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.” I believe that to be true, especially in our sufferings.

God, thank You for reminding us of the eternal glory waiting for us when life is difficult. Amen.
SEEKING SANCTIFICATION

from a national partner in Central Asia

READ JAMES 1:19 AND PHILIPPIANS 4:4.

Some weeks I search the Scriptures for a special word, specifically for areas of my life that need to be refined. During one of these weeks, the Holy Spirit gave me two contrasting areas that I need sanctification—anger and rejoicing.

Despite the years I’ve followed the Lord, I still have a short fuse when it comes to anger. And there are times where I forget to rejoice in my salvation and the work God is doing through me.

Neither of these reactions are good, and I am seeking the Lord through His Word and prayer for help in changing them. What is He calling you to refine in your life today?

Father, show us areas we need refinement and give us the will to seek changes in our lives for Your glory. Amen.
THE AROMA OF CHRIST
from a missionary to the Middle East
READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:15-17.

These verses have been so encouraging to me in times of both lack of fruit and in the middle of the harvest. In this line of work, it’s easy to let my identity and mission hinge on my success in the harvest field.

When people accept the gospel, we praise God, send out newsletters, and beam a bit more when we look in the mirror. But when the soil is hard and people shun the good news of Christ, we tend to doubt ourselves and even doubt God … forgetting that His mission to the world is to proclaim His glory through the pursuit of His people. Part of that equation involves people who reject His offer of redemption.

We don’t always understand why this is because we don’t fully comprehend how God—in His infinite goodness and justice—receives glory through judgment. But these verses in 2 Corinthians remind us that no matter the response, we are the aroma of Christ!

When we proclaim the blood of Jesus and it’s met with open arms, that aroma is pleasing to God. And when we proclaim the blood of Jesus and it’s met with hostility, that aroma is pleasing to God. I find this incredibly freeing, encouraging, and motivating because we don’t have to care about the results or let our identities fluctuate with based on our harvest. Instead, we get to simply speak Christ among all peoples.

Whether you’re in the middle of a movement of thousands to Christ or you’re banging your head against a wall looking for a single person to follow our Savior, know that you are the aroma of Christ to God. That’s got to make us all beam a little!

Father, it’s a joy to be the aroma for Christ among all people. Thank You for reminding us of that identity today. Amen.
COME AND DRINK
from a missionary to Russia
READ ISAIAH 55:1-3.

On a recent prayer walk through a dry creek bed, I cried out to God, asking Him to refill me with Living Water. My wife and I had lived in Russia for a decade. The mission field always brings plenty of circumstantial factors to bear, and I felt there were plenty of contributing factors—or excuses—for the spiritual desert I was in.

I felt heaviness on my weary soul while walking through the cracking ground of the creek bed. My pleas for Him to quench my thirst were still streaming from my lips when my eyes fell on a donkey standing in a nearby field. He looked up at me and stepped a few feet forward. Then lowering his head into a barrel, he began to drink. The words of Isaiah 55 immediately came to mind.

I had waited and begged God to restore my soul. He was waiting, persistently calling to me with a still small voice—muffled under the noise of my thirsty pleas—saying, “Come. Come to the waters I have for you. Come and drink. Come to me daily and be nourished by my Word.”

Speaking mercifully through a donkey, the Spirit graciously reminded me that though my salvation is a gift, my sanctification is a process—one that I too often take for granted. God has given me a role to play to drink daily and deeply of the waters of life. My survival in ministry and soul-satisfying sanctification depends on it.

Lord, we’re grateful that Your Spirit speaks to us through Your Word and the World around us. Let us come to the Your waters for satisfaction today. Amen.
This year, one of my friends decided to support my ministry in honor of a three-year old boy who lost his battle with cancer. In an email to me, she described the incredible faith of this child’s parents as they praised God during one of the most difficult seasons of their lives. And now, through his short life, people on the other side of the world are hearing the good news of Jesus.

I’m floored, humbled, and feel the heavy responsibility placed on me to do ministry well in his honor. It is sobering to think of the ones who have gone before us—the living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. I’m realizing that we stand on the shoulders of such amazing people of the likes of Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, and the tiny life of this little boy.

This fills me with strength and passion, knowing that not only do I—first and foremost—go in Christ’s name, but that I am also held up by those who’ve gone before me. And I am thankful for the life and the breath in my lungs that are held in the good Hands of my Maker.

Father, thank You for examples of incredible faith. Help us walk faithfully to glorify You and bring honor to those that have helped pave the path to missions. Amen.
FULFILLING THE MANDATE

from a missionary to Africa

READ REVELATION 5:9.

God has encouraged and challenged me for many years through this passage. Today we know there are thousands of people groups who are still unreached by the gospel, yet we also know they will be represented before the throne in heaven … lifting their voices to sing of Christ’s worthiness to be praised.

When I think about this, I’m greatly challenged by God about what I am doing to reach the unreached and fulfill the mandate of Christ to make disciples of all nations. He’s shown me that by training local leaders, I can be a part of multiplying His gospel among those far from Christ.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to train people of other cultures who are filled with the same passion as me, and who are incredibly faithful to bring the gospel to the unreached in their nations.

How is God challenging you to make disciples today?

_Lord, show us ways we can support those who are sent to share the gospel among the unreached and how we can be witnesses where You’ve placed us. Amen._
FINDING HEALING
from a missionary to Central Asia
READ JAMES 5:16A.

I have seen healing come through confession in my own life and the lives of others. A common Alcoholics Anonymous saying is, “You are only as sick as your secrets!” That certainly seems to be true.

I believe that Satan wants to remove our unity in any way that he can, and our secret sins—the things we’re ashamed of or the seemingly small mistakes festering in our minds—can make a mountain out of a molehill. These sins influence how we see ourselves in small and big ways, and this often leads us to isolate. When I use God’s method of confession by sharing my struggles with others, I realize that though I’m uniquely created, I am not alone unless I choose to be.

Through the practice of confession, God promises us healing. There are so many self-help strategies advertised to help us feel better, but God wants to heal us in the way that only He can—from the inside out. So find an understanding, confidential friend, and start the healing process by confessing your shortcomings to them today.

God, thank You for promising healing through confession. Give us the boldness to confide in a faithful friend who loves You. Amen.
EARS TO HEAR AND EYES TO SEE

from a missionary to Russia


When reflecting on these verses, I have always assumed it was for the people I am trying to share Christ with. I often pray, “God, open their eyes to see the truth. Open their ears to hear and receive the gospel with joy.” And in general, this is the context it is used in throughout Scripture.

But recently, I feel like God has directed it straight at me, saying, “Can I give you ears to hear what I am saying? Can I give you eyes to see what I see?”

I’ve realized this thought is also biblical. When Jesus sent the disciples to find people of peace, He directed them to hear and see who would be responsive and welcoming to His message. Jesus also said that His followers would hear and follow His voice. And God opened the eyes of Elisha to see His protective horses and chariots.

Right now I’m in a place of active looking and listening. He’s given me these practical questions to ask when seeking those He’s working in:

- Do they respond to me reaching out to them?
- Do they ever initiate contact with me?
- Do they introduce me to their friends and circles of influence?
- Do they openly engage with me on spiritual matters?

What do you think God wants to show and say to you right now? Before we ask God to open others’ eyes and ears, maybe we should ask Him to open ours first.

God, open our eyes and ears to see and hear what You see and hear for Your glory. Amen.
I love Galatians, and this specific verse has been ringing in my head. It’s such strong language, especially in context of the whole book. And it’s a direct reminder that salvation is found in Christ alone—not through any of our own self-righteous striving. All of our works are like filthy rags. We bring nothing to the table, and Jesus brings everything.

He’s the giver, and I’m the taker. This true gospel by grace through faith alone is what I preach to myself daily. It’s what I repeatedly use to build my teammates up, and it’s the message I’m taking to the lost. Jesus—the only way to the Father.

*Jesus, thank You for paving a path back to the Father through Your sacrifice on the cross. Give us new opportunities to share the true gospel with more people. Amen.*
THE POWER OF INFLUENCE
_from a missionary to Russia_

READ NUMBERS 1.

As I slogged my way through Numbers, I felt like God spoke to me really clearly, specifically through a list of Israelite names for a census tally. God identified 12 men by name—Shelumiels, Elishamas, Abidans, and Ahiezers are the names of just a few—to help Moses and Aaron count the number of men available to serve in the army. The descriptions of these significant men really stood out to me:

- The head of his family (Numbers 1:4)
- Men appointed from the community (Numbers 1:16)
- Leaders of their ancestral tribes (Numbers 1:16)
- Heads of the clans of Israel (Numbers 1:16)

In a way, these men’s identities were inherited from their family, but they were also earned. God specifically appointed these 12 men for this task, and their identity gave them enormous influence over large numbers of people.

Where I now minister, there’s a great chance that one very influential leader choosing to trust in Jesus will lead to his family and networks following suit in unprecedented numbers. I’ve recently met two Muslims who wield tremendous influence over their family and relationship circles. It is exciting to imagine the far-reaching impact it would have for the Kingdom of God if they starting following Jesus!

Who are the leaders in your circle that God could use to influence large numbers of people to Christ?

_God, please show us the Shelumiels, Elishamas, Abidans, and Ahiezers in our worlds and lead them to faith in Your Son. Amen._
It is only by His Spirit that we can cry out to God, “Abba! Father!” In Christ’s time, no Jewish person would have referred to God as “Abba.” It would have been considered too informal—too disrespectful. Yet, Jesus constantly addressed His Father this way, and He certainly had the right to do so as the literal Son of the Father.

The absolutely astonishing thing about Romans 8 is that we also have the right to call out to God in this way because of the Holy Spirit in us. We are the adopted sons and daughters of God with the same privileges as Jesus. Only those who are being led by the Spirit—putting to death the things of their flesh—can come humbly and simply to the Father.

This is an incredible privilege that also comes with suffering. This suffering is the result of having turned against this present world’s ruler—Satan—and having chosen to be led by the Spirit of Jesus. This suffering is why we need to be able to cry out to our Father. If we are led by the Spirit, we will suffer for it. But we also have a Father who has adopted us, loves us, and will never leave us nor forsake us. So let us cry out to Him, “Abba! Father!”

Father, thanks for adopting us and giving us the ability to cry out to You at any time. Amen.
WALKING IN WEAKNESS
from a missionary to Russia and the Caucasus
READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5:9.

In this passage, Paul is writing at a point in his life where he’s pretty banged up. He’s on mission, but the manner and mode he’s living out of is characterized by weakness. His body is wasting away, while inwardly he’s being renewed to a forever body. All of which is by God’s design.

These passages are teaching me that we’re not supposed to shrink back in our weaknesses, especially among the family of God. Frailty is our finest hour. Through my personal disease, God has shown me that the worldly model of a leader is not what He had in mind when He called me to follow Him. Rather, He is using me in my weakness to show His supremacy.

However tough it may be to embrace, these are my best days—my glory days and His. I would never have chosen this role for myself, but in my intimate times with the Lord, He has asked me to take this on. And I’m working to do so faithfully.

Father, help us see Your strength working in our weakness. When You call us to follow through sickness and disease, give us the grace to do so faithfully. Amen.
THE FRUIT OF ADVERSITY

From Kurt Nelson, President and CEO

READ PSALM 88 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-11.

Our western worldview teaches that adversity is bad and is occasionally deserved because of our wrongdoings. But I believe Scripture teaches something different about adversity. Here are a few things I’ve learned about adversity:

- Adversity is normal for believers (2 Timothy 3:12)
- Adversity can be fruitful (Romans 5:3-4)
- Adversity can be joyful (James 1:2-4)

Jesus faced the greatest adversity and persecution. He was despised, rejected, and suffered to the point of being crushed by God for the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:10-11). And He warned that His followers would be marked by that same adversity (Luke 21:12).

Corrie Ten Boom, a believer who stood strong amidst Nazi persecution, made great suggestions on preparing for persecution:

We need to feed on the Word of God, digest it, and make it part of our being. We need to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Not just the Jesus of yesterday, the Jesus of history, but the life-changing Jesus of today who is still alive and sitting at the right hand of God. We must be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not an optimal command of the Bible, it is absolutely necessary. We must be ready to help each other and encourage each other … The fruit of the Spirit should be the dominant force of every Christian’s life.

I’ve experienced the adversity Jesus prophesied, and it produced amazing fruit in my spiritual journey with Jesus … including drawing me to utter surrender and dependence on God.

Father, thank You for using the adversity we face on earth to draw us into a deeper, more abiding relationship with You. Amen.
We would like to thank an anonymous print company for graciously providing their services at no cost to the ministry.

Professional photography provided by Trey Hill: squarerootofnine.com