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DAY ONE

ABIDE

ABIDE

I hate it when the electricity goes out—especially in the summer. “Noooooo,” I groan because I know that in minutes I’m going to feel like I’m dying. It’s the hardest thing about living here—sometimes the electricity is out for eight hours or longer. Thankfully, unlike our electricity, God’s power never shuts off. But the trick is to stay connected to Him, the source, in order to receive power from Him, to receive His life. If I’m not connected, I can’t receive the power.

I have my abiding time in the morning. Abiding time is extravagant daily time with Jesus, lavish time spent with Jesus in the Word and in prayer. It’s a fixed time spent with Him each day. But what happens after I finish that time with Jesus? Because I find it real easy to just start going about my business and forget everything I just talked to Jesus about. How easy it can be for Jesus to slip from my mind. How do I walk with Him all day? How do I stay connected to His awesome power?

I discovered that it’s easier to walk with Jesus all day when I think of Him as a friend I live with and not as a duty I spend time with. When I intentionally involve God in all areas of my life throughout the day, even the small, seemingly unimportant things, I remember that He’s there and that He cares and understand—because, like a friend, what happens to me in a day matters to Him. He knows what’s going on in my life, but so often I just forget to ask for help, and I’ve found that a quick prayer in the moment or quick word of thanks makes Him feel close.

One other thing that helps me to remember Him all day: sticky notes. I stick notes around me to remind me throughout the

day where it all began. They remind me of Jesus and His gifts to me. I see little verses and song lyrics all around me. I think God is OK with me and my sticky note brain.

I don't believe that I can just check in with God. I don't send a message to update Him about where I am. He's always present. He's always here, waiting, speaking, and listening. But I also found that breaks throughout the day help me spend time with Him, so I set aside a few times where I can sit in my bedroom or go up to the little room on our roof that overlooks the city and pray or journal or just sit. With practice it gets much easier to spend time with Jesus. It takes a lot of practice to intentionally involve Him in all parts of my day, and I often forget, but I keep trying. And maybe that's what Jesus wants—not perfection in a moment but persistence over time.

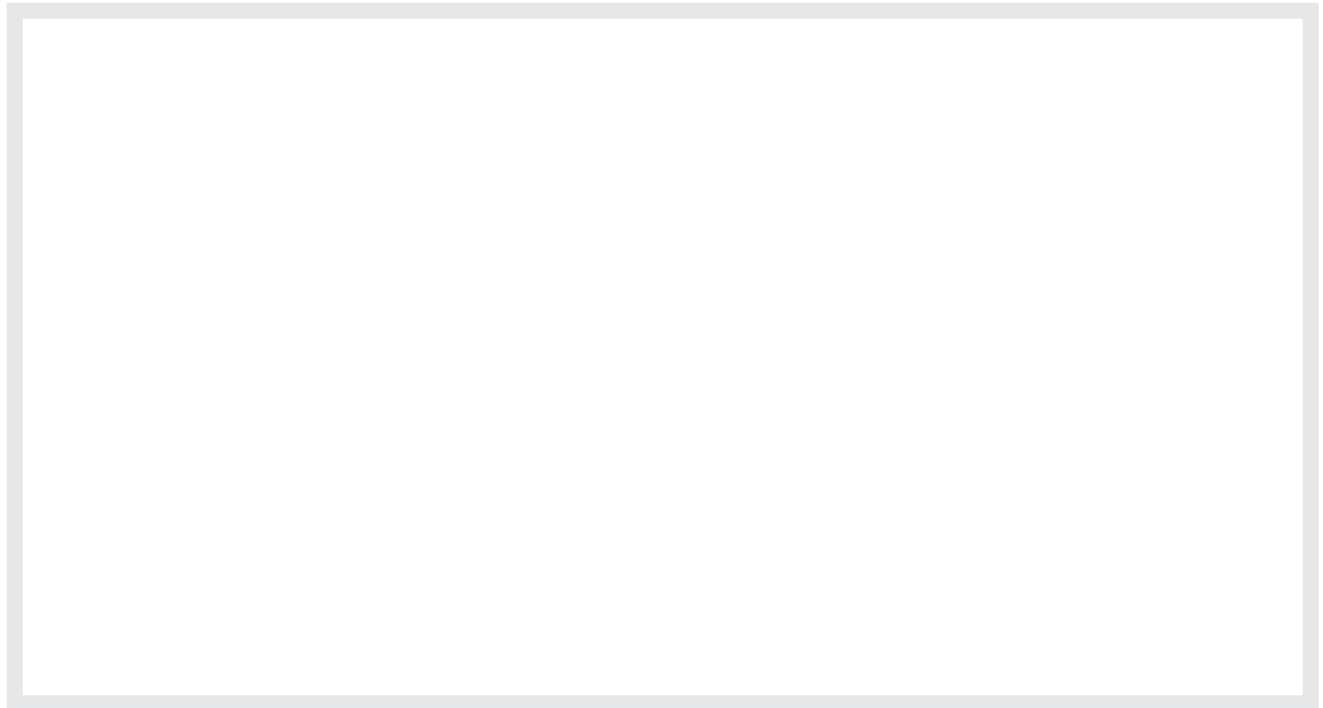
What Jesus really wants is just me. I used to make homemade gifts for my dad when I was little. You know, some real Picasso-like artwork made from construction paper and glitter and glue. My dad always appreciated those, mostly because he loved me and not because I was some protégé artist. The same goes for God. He appreciates my gifts and the work I've done in a day, but what He really wants is just me, that my love, my worship, and my time, and not all the pretty things I can create for Him. He wants me to enjoy Him, rather than rushing out to do something for Him.

Jesus says, "Remain in Me." Without Jesus, I have no power or life. I become a dry and withered branch, and I don't want to live like that. My set abiding time and the rest of my day are not two totally separate things because Jesus is the same always. He is the Vine all day, and I trust Him to take care of me and to point me in the right direction, but I must stay connected. I must remain in Him. Though I abide in Jesus all day, I have

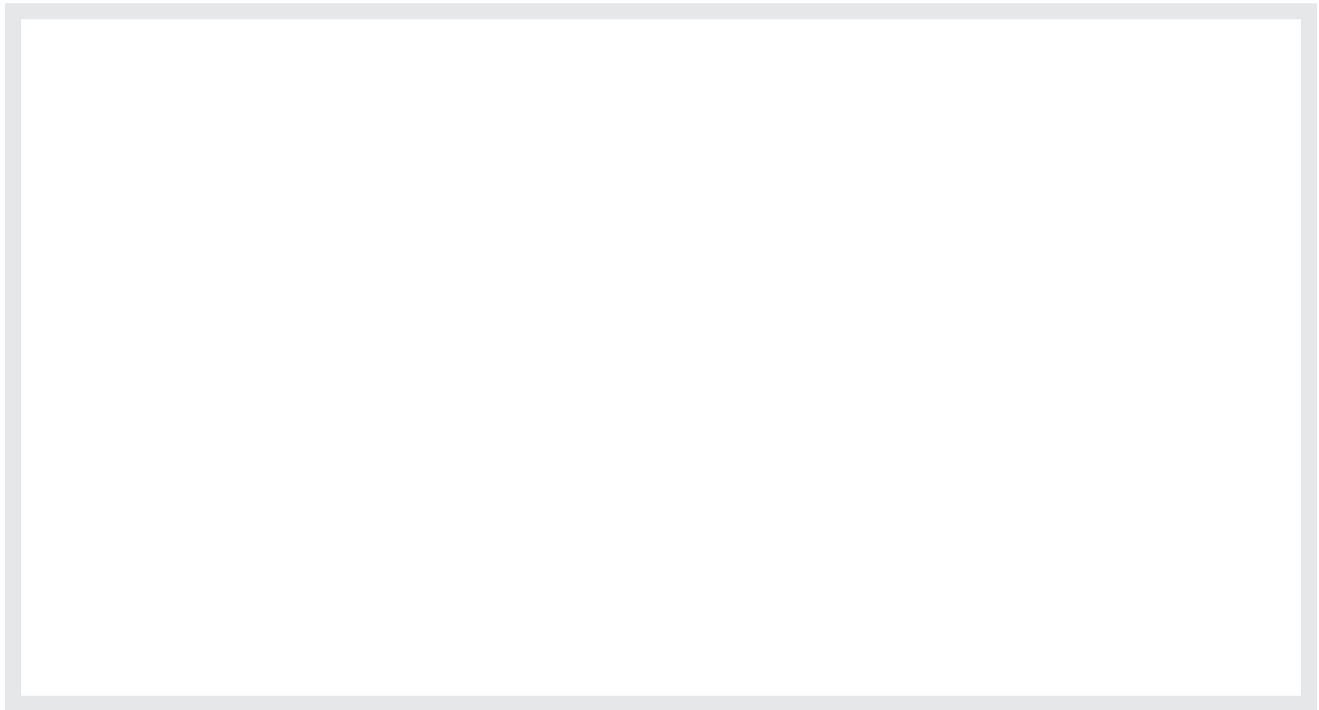
no guarantee that everything will work out perfectly or that every person I talk to will accept the gospel, but I do have the guarantee that I will always have life. Philippians 4:13 says: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Abiding is the power. It’s my connection, my hand to hold, and the Father that never lets go. I get my strength for life by walking with Jesus all day

ABIDE IN HIM

Abiding takes intentionality. It takes practice. Sometimes it takes sticky notes. What is your sticky note? What tools can you use to remind you of the presence of Jesus all day?



Are you willing to change your schedule so that Jesus has the best of your time every day? If yes, write down what your schedule needs to look like.



DAILY CHALLENGE

Remember Jesus all day long today. Write out three notes with a favorite lyric from a worship song along with a Scripture verse. Put them in places that you know you will see them throughout the day—the back of your phone, on a mirror, or near your computer screen. As Jesus becomes part of your everyday activities, you will experience fullness. His strength will empower you to face anything that your day may bring.





DAY TWO

CHARACTER

CHARACTER

An old proverb says, “It’s not about the destination; it’s about the journey.” This is certainly true regarding development of godly character. Our purpose is not to focus on our goal but to submit ourselves fully to the journey of refinement that the Lord sets us on. When we give ourselves over to the Lord’s journey, without even realizing it, we will arrive at our destination and receive our reward.

The apostle Paul, in Romans 5:3, clearly charts our path. We see the first step of the journey is one of the scariest words in our dictionary, a word with so many dark and troubling connotations: suffering. “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:3–5). One of the key components to our journey toward character is suffering. Paul instructs us in our attitude toward suffering: Rejoice in it! What a paradox, to rejoice in something that is by definition uncomfortable, frustrating, discouraging, and painful. One of the first things we need to do on our journey to godly character is to look at suffering as an opportunity, the gateway to the destination we are striving for.

But knowing that we should rejoice when suffering comes our way doesn’t mean it will be enjoyable. We—and even the great heroes of the faith—rarely feel happy about suffering. However, the Bible doesn’t teach us to be happy about it, but rather to rejoice in it.

The second and most crucial step in our journey toward character is perseverance. The trials, suffering, persecution—whatever you call them—will come. There is no question. Though it may look different and be of varying severity for each person, difficulty will confront you. The question then remains: What effect will those trials have on your character? Will they fortify the DNA of your soul? Much of this depends on whether you persevere.

Our response to and attitude in life's difficulties can reconstruct the DNA of our souls for the better or for the worse.

I remember one of our first earth-shattering trials on the field. My wife and I had arrived in one of the most gospel-resistant countries in the world, and we were ready for all types of demonic attack. We were ready to be shot at, targeted for kidnapping, spat upon, assaulted by manifest demons that would oppose God's work. We were ready! What we weren't prepared for was a painful and unexpected disagreement with a friend, believer, and colleague. We had thought we had prepared for it all, but here we were being attacked in the very area we had the least experience.

Those nights were agonizing, filled with frustration, anger, and bitterness. This trial brought out all shapes and forms of a monster living inside of me that I never knew resided there. The disagreement and my reaction to it shook the foundations of so many areas of my life that I had thought were solid. The poisons of bad attitude and hate began creeping up. I was ashamed of my response. This was the beautifully painful process of the reconstruction of my spiritual DNA. After months of dealing with the issue, I hit my fork in the road. My negative responses up to that point had been a natural reaching reflecting the current state of my character. And the Lord and my friends began to challenge me to shift my attitude, to put down my flesh, and to persevere.

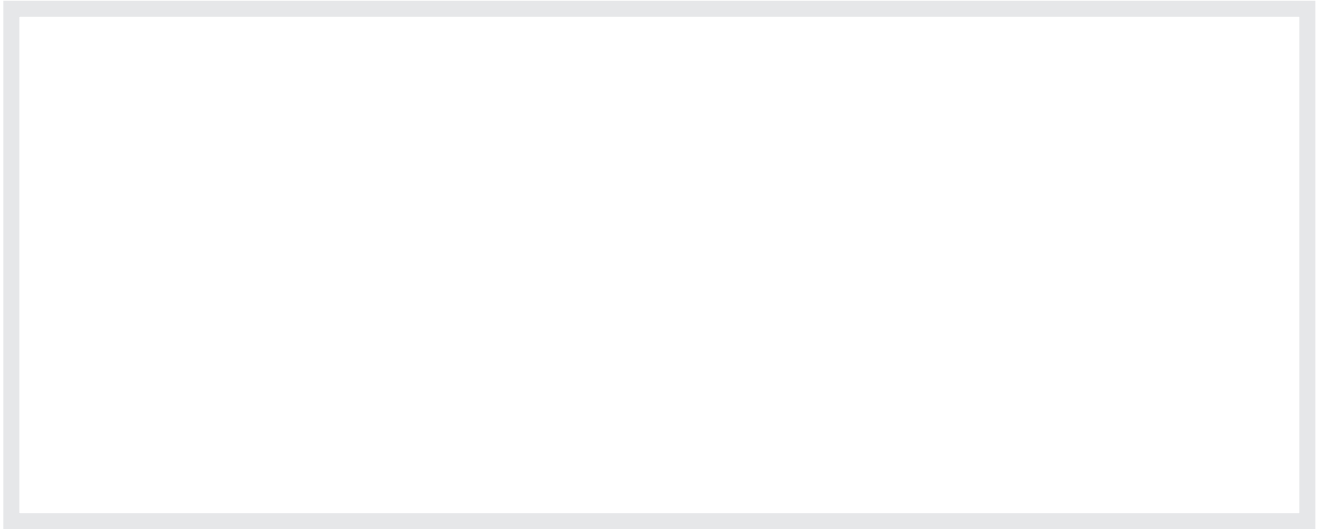
Little by little, I started to identify areas of my spirit and character that needed change. It was by the grace of God and through the help of the Holy Spirit that I was able to ask forgiveness where I was wrong and to intentionally begin to change my attitude.

About a year into this episode, the Lord gave me an epiphany that I will never forget. As I sat in my car, having just finished a phone call with the person with whom I had the conflict, the Lord dropped on me every area that I had been wrong in my spirit. Surprisingly, it was one of the most amazing feelings of freedom I have ever experienced. All I wanted to do was call all my close friends and tell them how the Lord had graciously broken me and corrected my arrogant and prideful attitude. A major piece of my character had been reconstructed, and I could not have felt better.

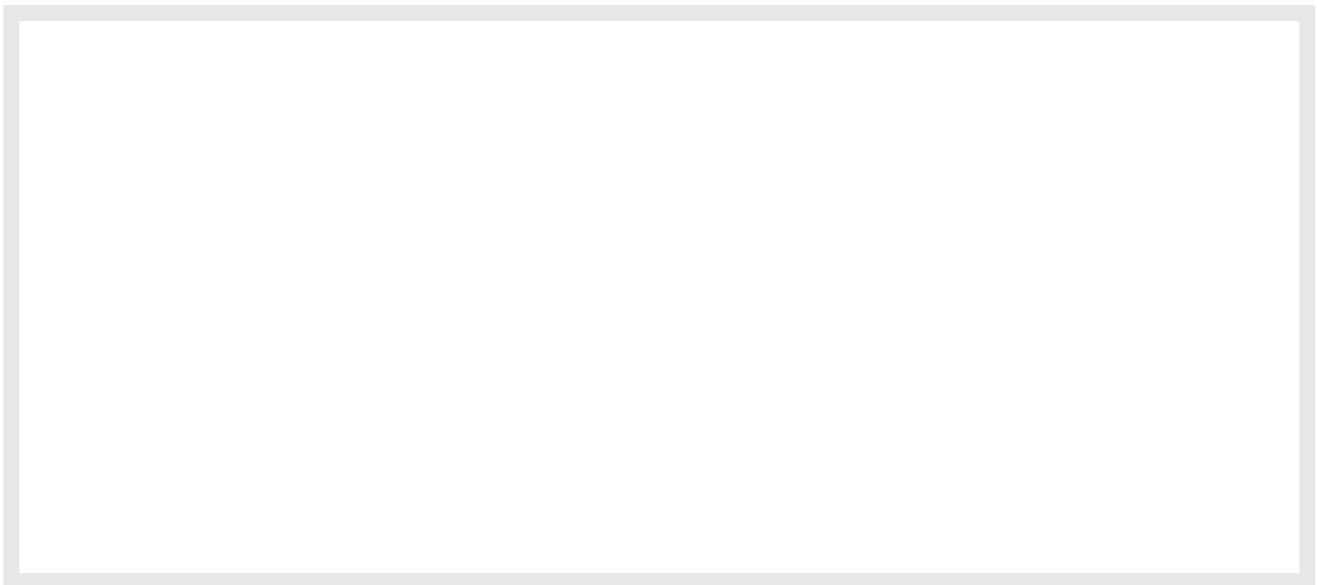
At the end of this journey through suffering and perseverance comes the building of our character. If you have opened your heart to the Lord's refinement during your trial, you will be changed. You will not only act more honestly, you will be more honest. People won't just perceive you as having integrity; you will be a man or woman of integrity. The more the Lord allows you to suffer under His powerful and precise hammer of refinement, the more you become a person of character.

ABIDE IN HIM

Make an honest assessment of your character. What does your reputation say about your character today?



In what areas of your life do you feel like your character is weak—where what you say doesn't match with who you are? At school, work, church? With family, friends, Jesus?



DAILY CHALLENGE

A daily choice to be like Jesus takes complete surrender. The more you pray and seek to live a life of good character, the more you see the things that Jesus is asking you to get rid of. The process of becoming more like Jesus is never easy, but it sure is worth it. Are you willing today to build a strong foundation in the Lord? Write out a prayer and share where you are and where you would like to be.



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DAY THREE

SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT

SPIRIT EMPOWERMENT

We went to preach in a small village where a group of believers were meeting. The people were obviously poor. Faded cloth adorned work-worn bodies. Rough hands clasped ours in welcome greeting. Children crept to the aisle to “relieve themselves” and then toddle back to crawl on their mothers’ laps. Women on the front row openly breastfed their hungry babies with no thought of covering up.

It was one of those moments where anything that could go wrong did. The singing was terrible. The announcements went on forever. People randomly walked in and out of the small building with no walls, a dirt floor, and a thatched roof. As a guest speaker and wife, we were asked to sit on the “altar” (platform). The sun beat on our backs and we fanned furiously to create a slight breeze and respite from buzzing flies. When my husband began to preach, the interpreter did a pitiful job. It was so bad that the congregation shouted out for another interpreter. The second wasn’t much better, so a third one was given. At that point, my husband stopped his message again and prayed that God would speak to the people.

Again, another commotion broke out. I didn’t pay a great deal of attention because there had already been a lot of movement. This new disturbance was someone helping an old woman to a seat on the ladies’ side. I noticed her wrinkled face and horrible scowl. I thought she was probably the ugliest person I had ever seen. Arms folded, she glared at my husband through his entire message. I also wondered how he seemed totally oblivious to everything that was happening. He was determined to preach his sermon regardless.

When he invited people to meet Jesus, several people surrounded the old lady. They joined with her and brought her to the front for prayer. I watched in amazement as her face transformed from being filled with darkness and hatred to being filled with light and love. Tears streamed down and, with no prompting, she lifted her hands in praise to God. The change in her was astounding. She was beautiful!

We learned that this woman had been a witch in this community for over 70 years. She saw us come to the village and knew we would speak against the gods she served. As the service began, she stood outside with her bag of charms and fetishes and attempted to cast a spell over us. As nothing she tried worked, she became more and more agitated. One of the believers asked her to step inside and simply listen to the message the oyibo (white man) brought. For the short remainder of her life, she no longer practiced juju (witchcraft), but wholeheartedly served Jesus, her beautiful Savior.

ABIDE IN HIM

Tell us about a time when you felt the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit work in your life right now?



DAILY CHALLENGE

Think of a person in your life that seems impossible to become a follower of Jesus. Write that person's name on a card or a post-it note and attach it to a mirror or place it in your Bible. Pray for this person every day in confidence knowing that no one is beyond reach if given the opportunity to hear.

Do you ever have moments in which you want to say or do something, but then doubt creeps in, so you stop? Today, believe that you are never alone. God is with you and the Holy Spirit lives inside you. Follow His prompts.

Take a few minutes and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your day. Pray that you would be aware of what happens around you. Perhaps there will be a friend that needs encouragement or prayer. The incredible thing to know is that when you trust that the Holy Spirit inside you, you can approach these special moments empowered. So get ready!





DAY FOUR

LEARNING

LEARNING

We're a pretty relaxed generation. The thought of "doing our best" can mean a million different things to us—pushing fewer buttons on the remote, cramming fewer chips into our yawning faces, trying to enjoy or, minimally, to stay awake in the church service (even when it shatters the predetermined one-hour length), taking the stairs instead of the elevator. But, what did it mean to Timothy? The man who led him to Christ, nurtured him in the faith, trained him for ministry, and placed him in the pastorate in Ephesus encourages him: "Timothy, take this thing seriously. Do all you can to present yourself to God in a way that pleases Him. Work at it with all your heart and all your being." These words spank our ears with foreign sounds. It's not that we don't have passion. It's not that we don't crave transcendence. It just seems so...ordinary.

In a recent email exchange with a close friend, I wrote, "Man, when I grow up I want to be just like you." He replied simply, "Be more." Be more? That's it! That's what Paul is telling Timothy. Be more. Laziness and lethargy are the twin, ugly stepsisters of our fallen nature. But, following Christ demands of us: "Be more!"

When we first arrived in Ethiopia, I was assigned to teach a class at the Addis Ababa Bible College. It was a moment of excitement mixed with fear. Here I stood before a crowd of 40-plus Ethiopians, most with graying temples and weathered faces. As the young American missionary I was supposed to have all the answers, at the ripe old age of 32. Oh yeah, intimidation—the other ugly stepsister; they were triplets.

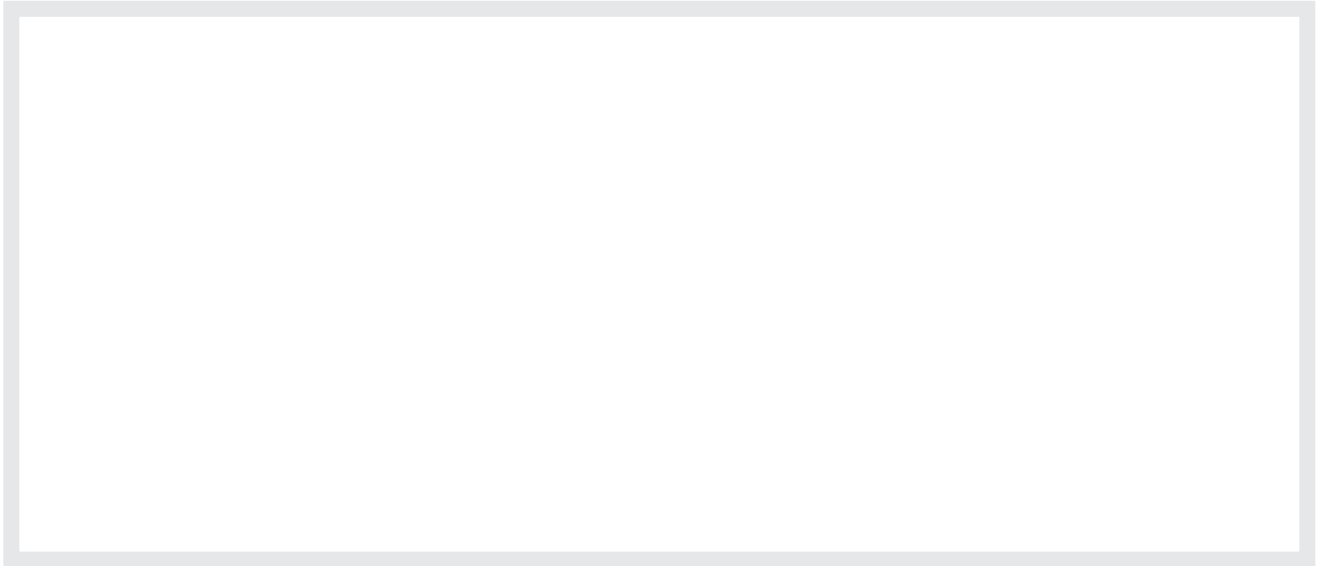
I asked the class, “How many of you have been jailed for your faith?” Nearly every hand in the room went straight up. I spoke no Amharic at the time, so I thought they must have misunderstood my American English. I tried it again from a different syntactical angle. Same response. One more time.

Same response. Finally, an exasperated young man in the front row politely asked me, “Brother Steve, are you asking how many of us spent time in prison because we are believers in Jesus?” Yes! That’s it, that’s what I’m asking,” I joyfully retorted. He turned and spoke in what sounded like tongues for a few moments...a pause...then nearly every hand in the room went into the air. Be more.

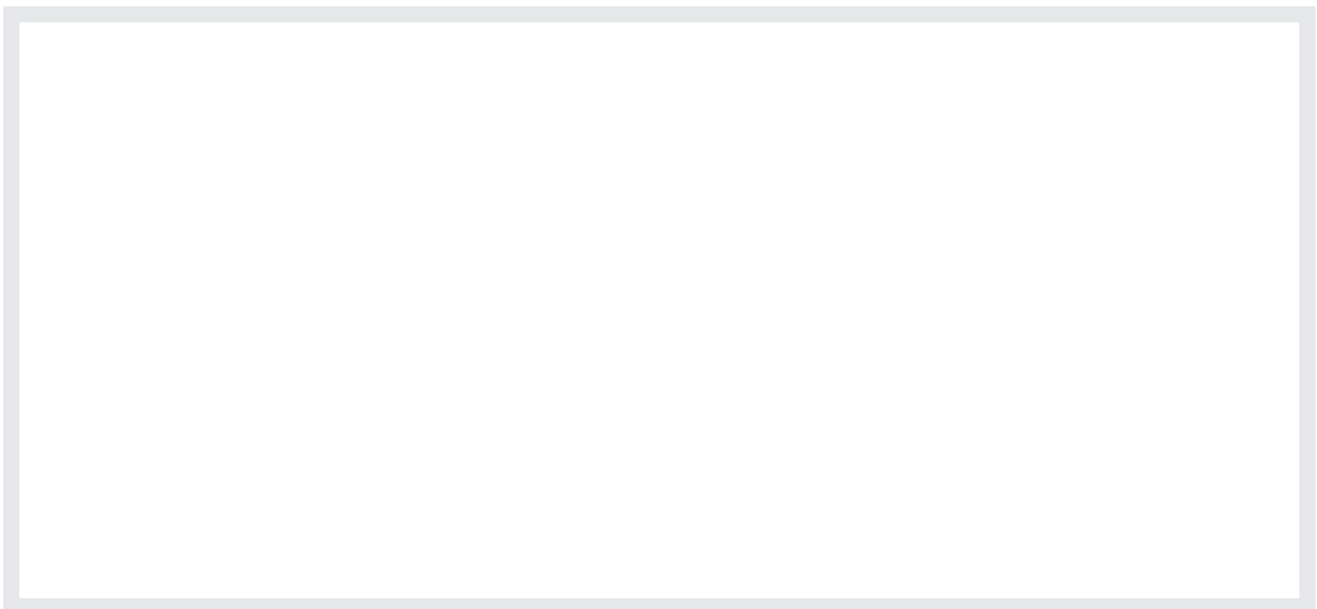
The call to the nations demands it of us. We cannot escape the conviction that following Christ compels us to uncompromising excellence in our normal Christian lives. But, when you are called to represent the King of Heaven in that nations of the earth—be more! What does that practically mean? Are you passionate for the Word? Be more! Are you seeking His face in daily prayer and worship? Be more! Are you studying the culture of those you are called to serve? Be more! Do you struggle daily to speak the language of another just so you can tell him about Jesus? Be more! It never ends. We never eclipse the need to be more for Him. It’s a lifelong endeavor, a wonderful journey that He takes with us.

ABIDE IN HIM

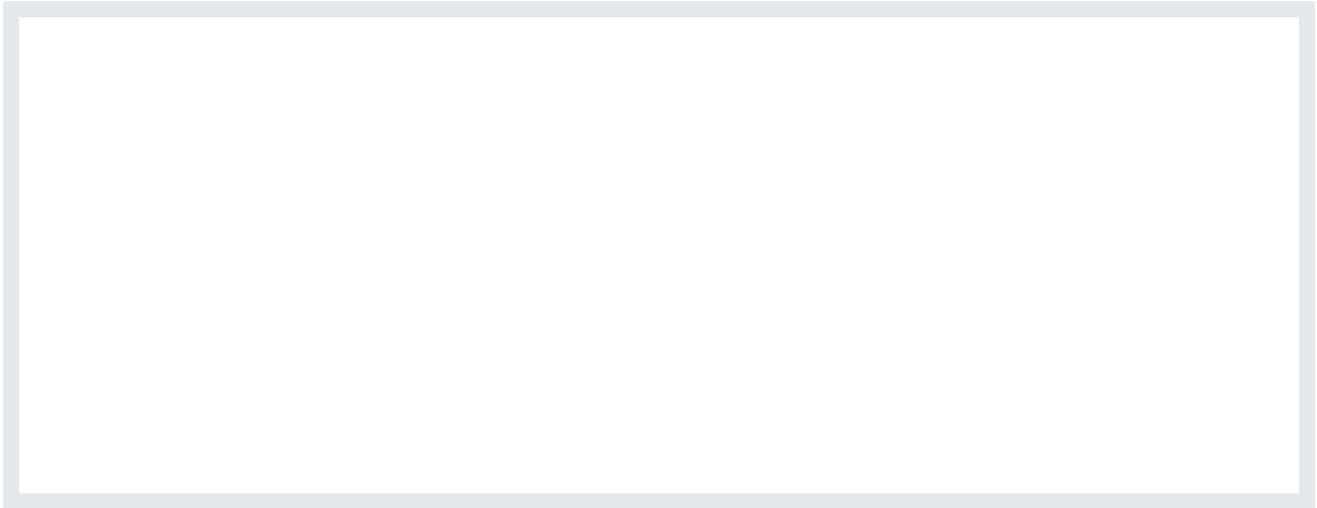
How has Christ framed the command for you to “do your best to present yourself to God as once approved”?



What do you need to do to “be more”?



What are the ways in which you learn well?



DAILY CHALLENGE

I once heard Leonard Ravenhill say, “This generation needs to learn to eat less, sleep less, and pray more.” Being more for Christ, learning-for-life, is an attitude. But it’s an attitude that demands we actually do something in order to achieve it. I keep a running record of my New Year’s resolutions. I’ve had one on there for a long time. “Expand your prayer time.” Every year I looked at that unchecked box and whispered to myself: “This is it. This is the year I expand my prayer time.” Every year I wrote it again. It’s not that I wasn’t praying. I was. I am. But the all demands more. About a month ago I came to a conclusion, *If you’re going to do this, you need to wake up earlier.* Check! Wow that was a no-brainer.



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DAY FIVE

APOSTOLIC FUNCTION

APOSTOLIC FUNCTION

My wife and I don't feel apostolic. We don't wake up and see super-apostles in the mirror as we brush our teeth. We don't feel like we're in the same league as Paul. We don't feel like opening up Asia Minor for the gospel, enduring shipwrecks and stoning, rebuking foolish Galatians, standing up to religious councils, evangelizing Caesar's house, shaking snakes off into fires, singing hymns in prison, or happily having our heads chopped off.

When we get up in the morning, we feel tired, overwhelmed, unable, and feeble. We open our door and look at tens of millions of Muslim Arabs in our city, despair that they march unwarned into hell, and think there is no way we can make even a tiny gospel dent in a seemingly impregnable community. And then we look over our shoulder and see there is no one standing in line behind us. We are the ones God has in this place and in this moment, and the Holy Spirit must and will help us to live and minister in apostolic function— even if we feel nothing like Paul.

Apostolic function proposes that every missionary (and even every Christian) can live for the glory of God among all peoples. Not all missionaries or Christians have the same gifts, but all our gifts combine to see the unreached come to Jesus. My hours of email and administration contribute to God's glory. My wife's hours of shopping, cooking, hosting, serving, and washing dishes contribute to express the heartbeat of God. My team member who coordinates our home school co-op labors faithfully so the missionary kids' parents can preach the gospel to a Muslim family who has never heard of Jesus. My team staff leader oversees our logistics and banking, so the whole team has time for language study and empowered proclamation.

Our team all participates in the big picture by some daily, hidden, practical role. None of those roles in isolation are the gospel or apostolic, but taken together and working in harmony, we in community function apostolically that the gospel can be preached fully in this Muslim city. When one Muslim in our city comes to Jesus, we all have a part in that salvation—every mom who spent four hours of her day in the kitchen, every teacher who helped a missionary kid with math, every administrator who spent four hours on budgets, emails, and strategic planning, every logistician who fixed cars, houses, and plumbing. One person physically prayed with the new convert, but we, all together spiritually, walked that new brother or sister into the family of God.

THE INDIVISIBLE SPEAR

One way we illustrate apostolic function is through the image of a spear. The spear reflects the work of the mission—the collective call of the Church moving towards the target of planting the Church where it does not exist. A typical spear illustrates how the work of missions can operate.

At the point of the spear is the Church being planted in an unreached people group. It embodies apostolic leaders of church planting teams—men and women with the calling and gift of being an apostle, leading others to pioneer the church. Joining them on the spearhead are multi-gifted team members who engage in church planting among the unreached. Their involvement in discipleship, training, translation, social concern, member care, and Christian education are part of the larger strategy to develop a robust, fully indigenous church among a group with little or no access to the gospel.

Also on the spearhead are missionaries whose ongoing work strengthens the growing indigenous church and encourages others to work for church planting among the unreached. We

call this apostolic partnership; these missionaries are not on a church planting team but they mobilize funds, people, and prayer for the advancement of the church everywhere—with an emphasis among those not yet reached. A fourth segment of the spearhead includes apostolic administrators—missionaries who serve in administration, leadership, and strategic development. Every missionary on the spearhead needs to be able to draw a straight line from their particular call and personal obedience to the collective call and obedience we all partner in—that is, planting the Church where it does not exist.

But a most critical part of the spear is the shaft. A spearhead without a shaft becomes just a few impotent inches of metal. We call the shaft of the spear apostolic passion. It refers to pastors, laymen, church volunteers, mission committees, donors, intercessors, senders, and mobilizers—men, women, and children who live their lives for the glory of God in their home countries for the sake of reaching the unreached people of the world.

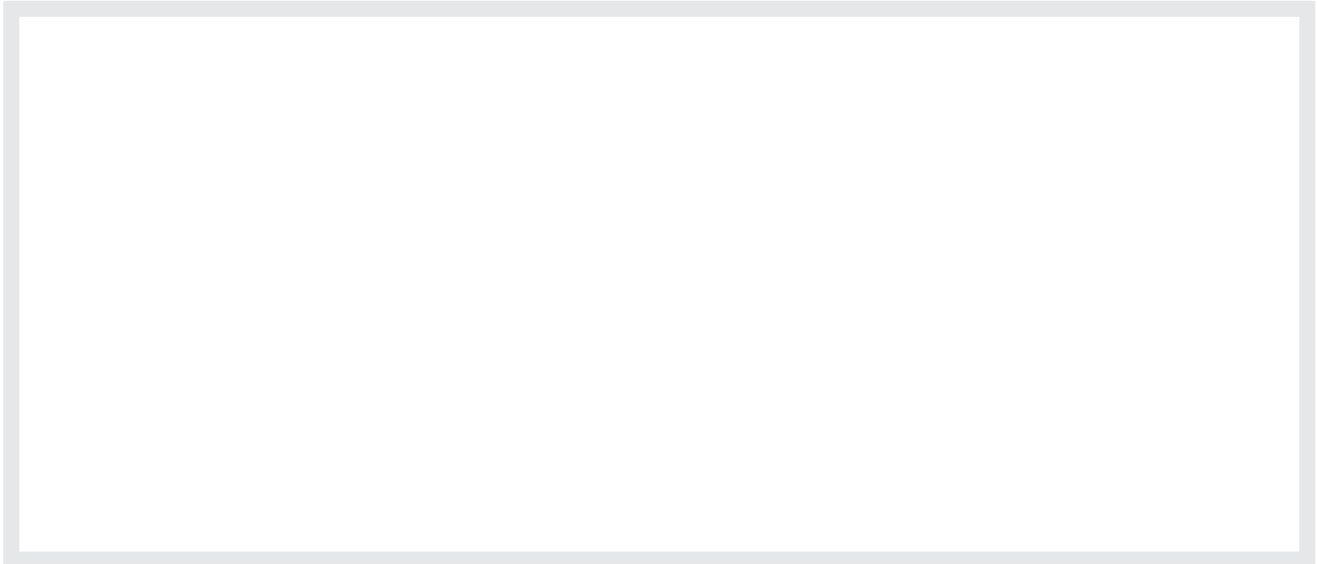
Every missionary and every partner belong to this indivisible spear; they each have a role in apostolic function. Through the spear, every Christian can discover how his or her calling aids the whole Church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.

WATCH THIS VIDEO ON APOSTOLIC FUNCTION

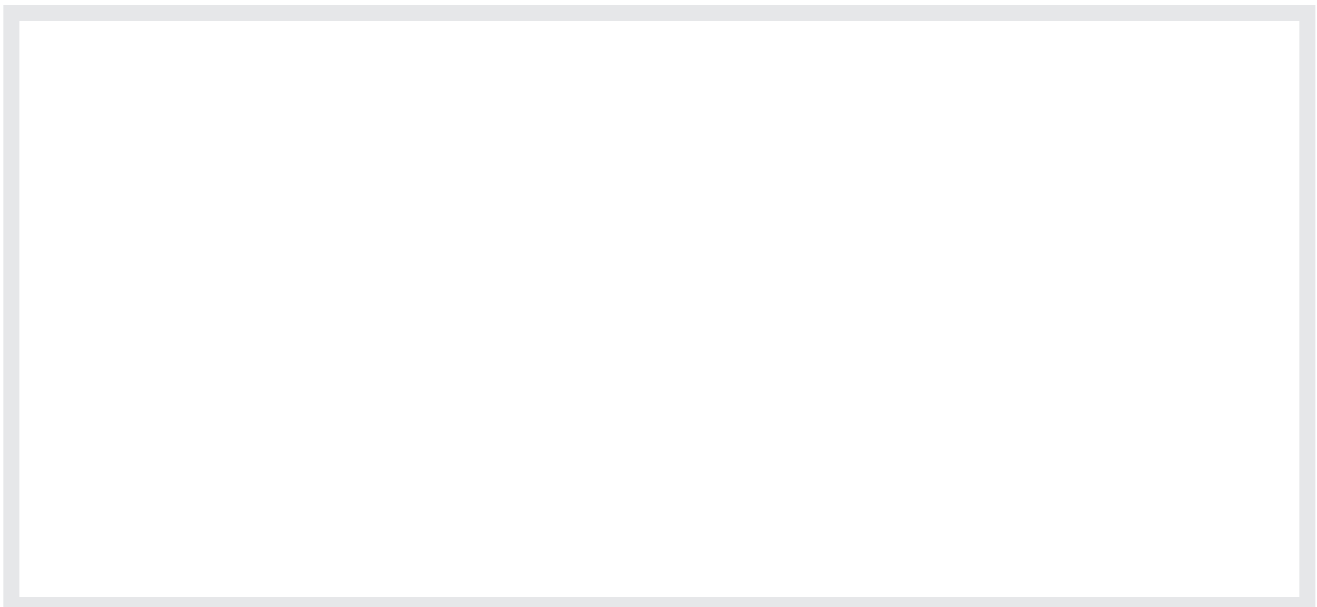


ABIDE IN HIM

Do you believe that God has chosen you to be a part of what He is doing all around you? Write down your thoughts.



What are ways that you have seen varieties of gifts used in the Kingdom?



DAILY CHALLENGE

Take a moment and think about where God has placed you today. Think about the kind of people you are surrounded by or the ones you interact with every day. Imagine what it would be like if everyone around you was talking about Jesus. Imagine conversations that included “Jesus changed my life!” Ask God what your role is supposed to be to see those images come true. Write what comes to your heart.



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DAY SIX

TEAM

TEAM

There we were, 61 team members—yes, 61!—traipsing into the desert to camp for five days among an unreached Muslim people group. Small groups were dedicated to interaction among women, men, and children. There were sub-teams for storytelling, food prep, worship, and prayer. The logistics for a camp this large were daunting. One person said, “I feel like we just erected a Six Flags amusement park for a week.”

Even though we did not know what to expect or whether we would be allowed contact, we planned and prayed together. God blessed, and we found favor with the entire community starting on the first day. Families graciously invited us to their tents. By the second day, there was a steady stream of nomad visitors in our common area enjoying tea, playing games, and engaging us in comfortable conversation about life and Jesus.

The team performed a choreographed dance, attending to assigned duties and pitching in wherever they saw a need. It was a great example of the many parts of the body working together for a common goal. God blessed, and people’s lives were changed. “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom. 12:4–5).

Even in such a Spirit-directed event, there were times I felt overwhelmed with the task. Five days and 61 people is a lot of “different” in one place, and grace really has to kick in. The more grace I give, the more I’ll receive from others when I really need it. That’s normal. That’s life. That’s team.

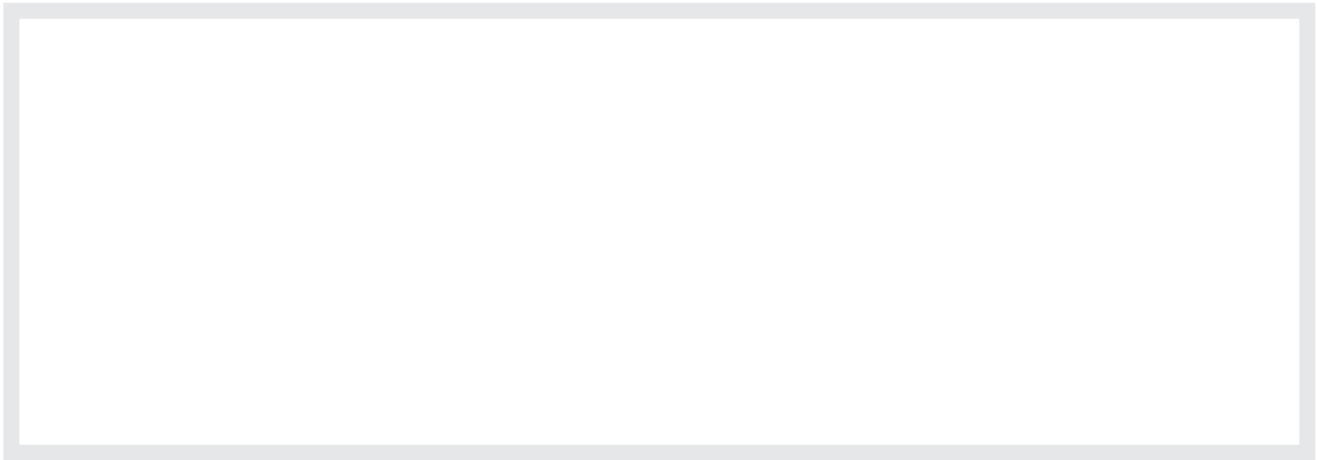
In my experience, the main reason interpersonal challenges arise is lack of communication. It is easy for tiny remarks or actions to get blown out of proportion and for communication to shut down. My mind can run amok, and before you know it I have assumed the worst about a teammate. Most of the time, the other person does not know he has hurt my feelings or caused confusion. There have been other times when I've had to ask for grace and forgiveness from my fellow team members because I was the one who offended. When any of us struggle with relationships, it distracts from our main purpose and drains energy from each other.

Most of us will not go out alone to share the gospel; we will be team players. We will rely on others to fill in our gaps and model the Body of Christ. Living and working as a Live Dead team can be wonderful. We truly can be a powerful army of believers who coordinate endeavors, pray together, and encourage each other through the tough times. May God help us to sacrifice our will daily and offer grace, respect, forgiveness, kindness, and genuine love to each other.

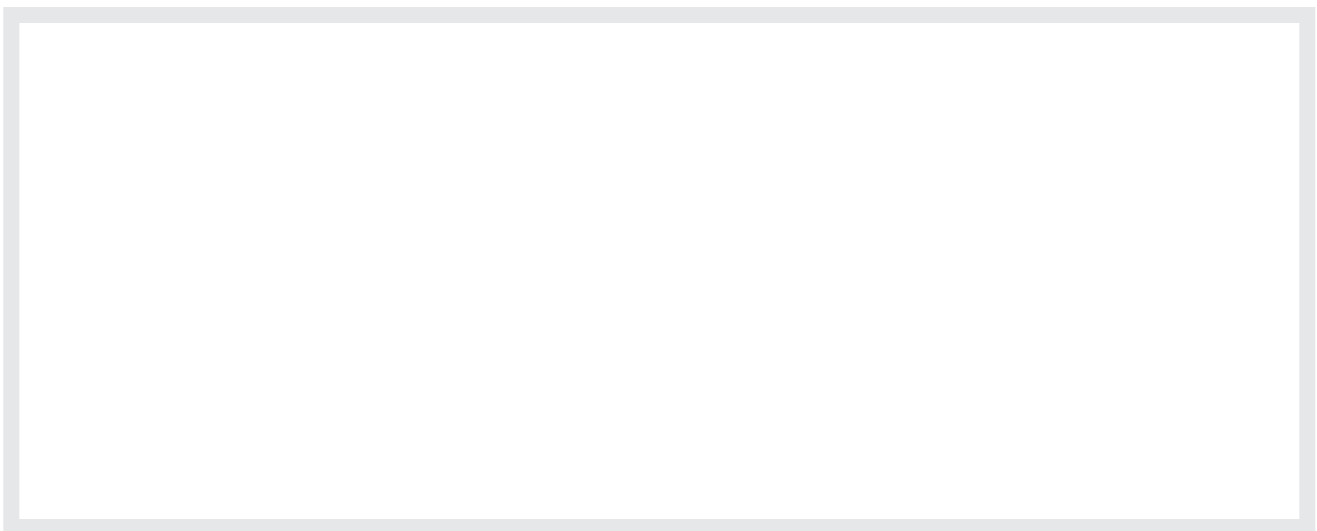
The individuals of every team I have served with have brought more joy to my life than I ever dreamed. No matter the age difference, experience, or background, God takes care of me by providing good counsel, companionship, and someone to share the load. I have learned to appreciate all members of our team and pray God's richest blessing on their lives.

ABIDE IN HIM

Live Dead is a personal commitment to Jesus and to His concept of team. It often means laying down your will for the will of God and others. Are you currently submitting your gifts, strengths, and personality to God's purpose and the larger purpose of the team you are a part of?



What is the best team that you have ever been a part of? What made it such a great team?



DAILY CHALLENGE

Look today for the opportunity to celebrate the victory or success of someone else on your ministry team, or in your family, or on your dorm floor, or in your apartment, or in your workplace. Write a note of congratulations expressing how glad you are for this person's effort and achievement.

Read Ephesians 4 and let the words sink deep into your heart.

Take a few minutes and pray that you would work to do your part in this world, even if it's something you might not want to do or if it makes you feel uncomfortable. You might be the first person to ignite a passion in others to work together so the lost can know Jesus as their personal Savior!





DAY SEVEN

PARTNERSHIP

PARTNERSHIP

Last fall we had a thanksgiving service at the church my family attends. The congregation brought their offerings and laid them at the altar at the beginning of service. There were squawking turkeys all tied up, a goat lying on the floor, and chickens eager to break free over the course of the two and a half hour service. When the service finished, the animals were auctioned off as a fundraiser for the church. Now, I think all loud and smelly animals belong outside, but as a partner in the work to reach the lost (and as a kid with no say in the matter), I had to overlook the desire for my own comfort in order to see the big picture. I kept my thoughts to myself so our church could raise money and my arms at my side so as to not accidentally bid on a turkey.

Partnership is hard but beautiful. Partnership is a relationship, and like so many relationships in life, partnerships will have off-days. But also like so many relationships in life, partnerships will have blissful days. A partnership is like a friendship in which we must have a “we’re in this together, so let’s fight through it” mentality. In partnership, there is an equality in which no one has the upper hand or is superior over another. There is one Master and one goal—Him glorified. In partnership is great strength—there is someone to lift me up to Jesus when I’m down and vice versa.

My favorite thing about partnership is that it reveals the creativity of God through the cultures that cross borders to work together. There are so many backgrounds represented but there is one thing we have in common, one thing that holds us together—Jesus. God provides the grace to work, live, and love together because we love Jesus first. We find unity in our diversity as the love of Christ flows between us. We’re all very different

with our own sets of talents and flaws, but our differences don't hinder unity. Instead, they make our unity stronger because we complement and balance each other. My friend makes up for something that I'm not good at, and we learn from each other as we follow the example of Christ together.

Paul and the Philippian church are a good example of partnership. Once the church was planted in Philippi, it helped Paul move on to plant more churches. Through the joy of partnership, they encouraged each other and worked together. They had a relationship. The Philippians helped Paul in both practical and spiritual ways—they visited Paul in prison, supported him financially, showed concern for him, and lifted him up in prayer. The partnership brought both Paul and the Philippians joy. They encouraged one another and built each other up while working together in the practical and spiritual parts of life.

How cool would it be to see such a joy-filled, life-changing church planting work come from the partnership between the Libyan church and missionaries—a partnership in which we rejoice together in the victories and lift each other up through all the trials! I look forward to the day where there is a thriving local church in Libya that sends out its own Libyan missionaries to share the gospel in other parts of the world.

I don't know that I'm perfect at the partnership thing—it's sort of still new to me—but I really want to work in cooperation and not insist on my own way. I know I need to work on that humility and service part of me. I need a love for partnership that is stronger than a love for myself because I know every believer in the city needs to work together to see Jesus exalted here. I know there is strength in numbers, and as partners with the existing church as the body of Christ with the same mission, we will see the church grow together.

ABIDE IN HIM

Why is partnership important? What is the point of partnership?

When was a time that you partnered with others? Was it successful? What was difficult about it?

DAILY CHALLENGE

Think about your church and your community. Are you currently praying or serving side by side with others in sharing the love of Jesus?





DAY EIGHT

PIONEERING

PIONEERING

Pioneering is following the example of Paul: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (Rom. 15:20). Pioneers are propelled by possibility. They are always looking ahead, thinking about “out there,” just a little further. Paul’s conception of frontier missions was one of the constantly pressing beyond where the church was established to places where there was no witness to Christ.

Some imagine that the work of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth is just about wrapped up. Nothing could be further from the truth. More than 40 percent of the people groups of the world are still considered unreached. The Great Commission to make disciples of all nations is still in effect. And since there are thousands of nations—ethno-linguistic people groups—who have never heard of Him, every Christ follower should pray that God would not only make all of us evangelists among our own people, but also that He would raise up from among us pioneers to take the gospel where it has never gone before.

John 4 records a teaching of Jesus that reveals great insights for pioneers, especially the idea of lifting our eyes and looking on the fields. While His disciples are away searching for food, Jesus strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well.

First, you need to know that Samaritans were literally despised by the Jews. Tensions between the Jews and Samaritans dated back well into the Old Testament period. Jewish and Samaritan religious leaders taught that it was wrong to have any contact with the opposite group, and neither was to enter the other’s territories. So you can imagine the disciples’ surprise when they return with the food and find Jesus talking with a woman— in

itself a cultural taboo—not to mention that she is also one of those detestable Samaritans.

After her encounter with Jesus, the woman leaves them and her water jar and goes back to her town to tell everyone, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” (John 4:29). The people flock out to see for themselves.

Now with the Samaritans encircling them, Jesus speaks these words to His disciples: “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields” (John 14:25 NASB). The fields in this case were clearly all the Samaritan people surrounding them. Maybe it was scary. I’m sure the thought of Samaritans being included in the harvest plan had not yet crossed the minds of the disciples. Jesus a few lines down in the text, we read in verse 39, “Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him,” and again in verse 41, “And because of his words many more become believers.” For Jesus’ Jewish disciples, it must have been a stretch to lift up their eyes toward the Samaritans and to see them as being included in Jesus’ harvest plan. I’m sure the disciples were blown away as they witnessed so many Samaritans believing in Jesus.

For many Christians today, the thought of moving to an Arab country to live among Muslims so that they might hear the gospel is also quite a stretch. It was for us. But this is what pioneers do. So here’s the point. Lift up your eyes today and take a fresh look at the fields. Ask, Where are the unengaged, least-engaged, and unreached fields of our world? What is there no church? The Arab world is made up of 300 million people, and very few pioneers are on the ground engaged in the world of proclaiming the gospel and planting the church where it does not exist. Ask God to help you lift your eyes for a fresh look at the peoples of the world who are waiting to hear the gospel for the very first time. It’s their turn.

ABIDE IN HIM

Live Dead value of pioneering means to establish a church where there is no witness of Christ. In what ways can you be the “pioneer” wherever God has you today?

Think of your school or your job. Have you or anyone else started a Bible study or Christian group?

DAILY CHALLENGE

What is an area in life you can see an opportunity to pioneer and take new ground for the Kingdom?



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DAY NINE

SACRIFICE

SACRIFICE

We recently traveled outside the city to a neighboring village to help a local pastor and his wife with an outreach they do with refugees living nearby. They bring the kids out by bus once or twice a week for a small program and a light meal. This week our son Eric was a super helper. He led songs, helped with a game, and passed out sandwiches; he had such excitement about helping out at the event. We pray that Jesus continues to cultivate that excitement in his heart. But it's a prayer that leaves us with a lump in our throats because we know what challenges we face as a family in our next home.

THE COST OF SACRIFICE

There's something romantic about pioneer missions—the thought of packing up select belongings and hurling oneself into another culture, language, and way of life. When we first moved to the region a decade ago, our romantic ideal meter was through the roof.

Over time though, it's been both a challenge and a balancing act to remove the romance but keep the heart. Refining and sharpening has taken place, with sacrifice becoming the most brutal of honors. It's come in degrees. First it was the sacrifice of the comforts of our home culture: restaurants, clean parks, and libraries. Then we had children and the degree of sacrifice cut deeper—grandparents farther away, schools not as fit, activities not as abundant.

Our Live Dead value statement for sacrifice says, “We commit ourselves to pay whatever price is necessary.” We can see that Jesus has been expanding our capacity for sacrifice, preparing us to pay whatever price, even as we face our most immense

challenge yet: Will we go and plant the church in a country known for violence? Will we subject our family to a culture that has been steeped in war for years? Could we send our children to the best possible school, one that is still not up to our public school standards in the States and one in which our children will most likely be bullied simply for being foreigners?

God met us with an answer through a believer we met during a visit. When we asked about schools, he responded very candidly: “The children here are very aggressive, but trust that your children are the Lord’s and He will take care of them. It’s not up to you.” Those words hit hard. We would never knowingly put my children in harm’s way, but we’re realizing there is an element of sacrifice that Jesus wants to teach them as well.

God is not just calling us as husband and wife. He’s beckoning our children into this new place to share the gospel as well. He is drawing our entire family into His Kingdom work in a difficult place. Our children will make disciples, too. We see Eric’s excited face singing songs and handing out sandwiches, and we have to trust that Jesus will cultivate that heart in our new home as well. There is a price. It will cost us something. But it’s also our call.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF SACRIFICE

There’s an interesting thing that happens to hearts that have the right perspective on sacrifice. They end up saying, “I never made a sacrifice.” On December 4, 1857, David Livingstone, the great pioneer missionary, was telling Cambridge University students about his work in Africa. Someone asked him what it was like to leave the “benefits” of England. He answered, “People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa.... Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege.”

As we look at the reality of what this new calling means for our family, the list of obstacles is long. First, living conditions. The land is hot and smelly, and most of the buildings are in disrepair. Second, utilities. Power is unreliable, salty water comes from the tap, and housing is expensive. Third, family. The schooling system is poor and very Islamic. We hope the school will be adequate for our three children, but we know we will have to supplement and guard them from false teachings. Finally, the political situation. It's daunting. In our previous homes, soldiers were the people you ran to, but in this new place soldiers are representatives of different militias. Whether that soldier helps or not is up to whose side that militia is on.

But for all the obstacles, there are opportunities. The church there is vibrant—breathtaking, really. The believers involved are convinced that conditions will worsen even while the opportunities to share increase. We see that they've been called to sacrifice, and we call it a privilege to join them.

Our friend there told us: “We have all eternity to enjoy stable governance in heaven. Why not put up with the instability on earth for a few decades?”

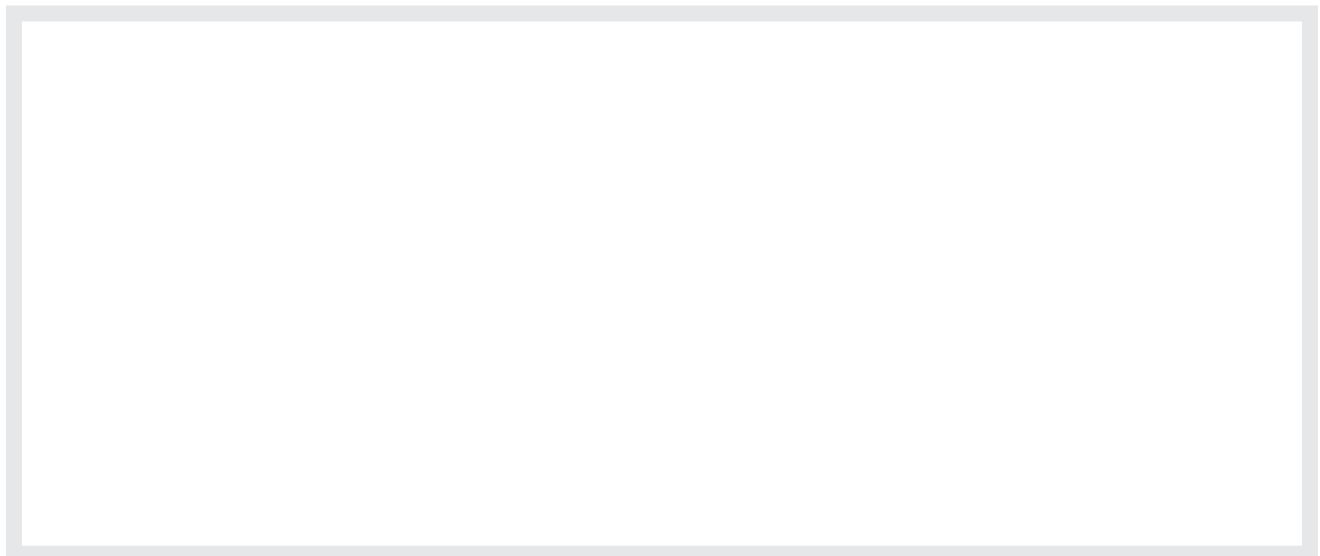
Moving to this deeply sensitive place is a difficult calling. It does include sacrifice. But pioneer church planting here will nearly always include that. If it were easy, the church would already be planted. We prayed that the Lord would make our decision easy, that it would be obvious from the moment we set foot in the city that we were supposed to be here. Alas, we were too earthly minded in our first evaluation and thought, “How could we do this?” But thank God for second chances to evaluate! At first, we mistook the poor infrastructure we encountered as a release from God's call in our lives, but all praise to Jesus who calls us to difficult things!

We believe now that choosing not to pioneer because the calling is too difficult is choosing not to pioneer at all. Choosing to walk with Christ without suffering is choosing not to walk with Him at all. We thank Him for the privilege to go.

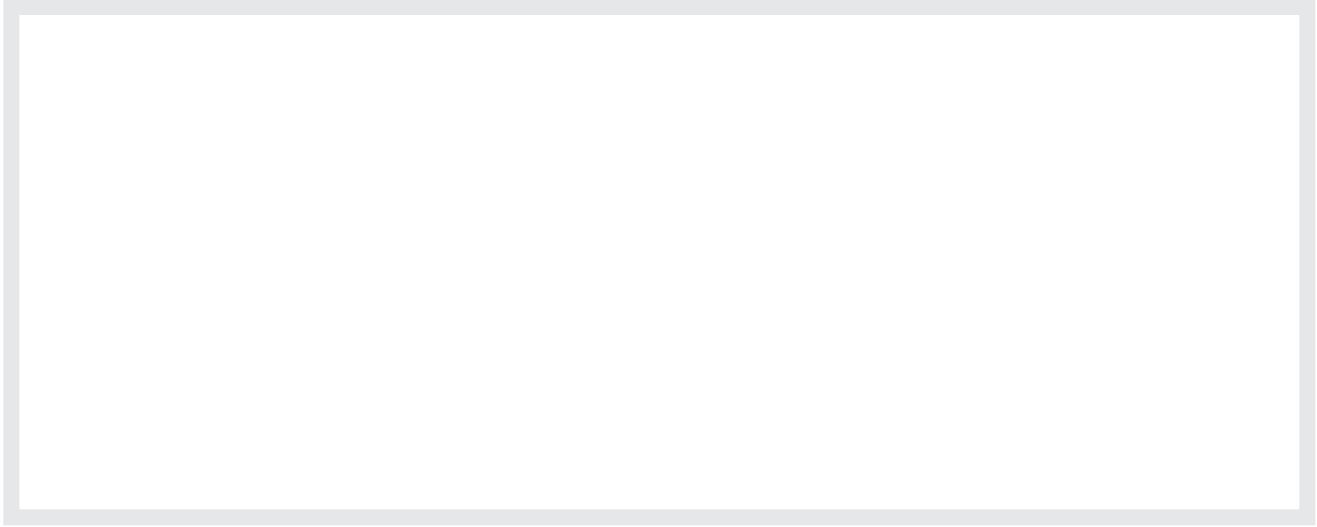
And we don't believe we're the only family being given offered this privilege. There are too few workers for this abundant harvest. We can't fathom that the Father has only called our family and a few others to reach these people. We believe He's asking more people to lay down their ambitions, their comforts, and maybe even their lives to pick up their crosses and drag them through the sands of the difficult places so the lost can hear.

ABIDE IN HIM

Make a list of things you value most. Do you value any of those things more than God?



What are the things that you know the Lord is asking you to sacrifice so that you are prepared to go and proclaim the gospel among the unreached?



DAILY CHALLENGE

Pray about the list you just created. If you currently value other things more than God, pray deeply and sincerely that He would give you the grace to replace those things with Him.





DAY TEN

ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY

The older I get, the more freedom my parents give me. Sometimes I feel pretty independent. “I got this,” I think. I know my goals, and I know how to reach them.

But I’ve discovered it doesn’t always work out quite right if I’m left to my own devices—even if one of those devices is prayer. I need to remember freedom and strength for daily living comes from dependence on God and on others. It comes from transparency with God and with others. I can do more and grow stronger when I rely on God and those people He places around me, more than if I tried it all on my own. Independence is good for some things. Accountability is good for all things.

Accountability frees me. I need accountability. There is security in accountability. It keeps me safe. It can keep me from mistakes. It takes away worry. It helps me place my plans in God’s hands. I thought accountability tied me up and took away my independence and the chance to make decision, but whenever I am dishonest or hide things, I feel like a wall goes up. I feel cut off from others. I feel less effective in my witness and walk with God. In that place, life becomes a lie and lying becomes exhausting. It holds me captive. But whenever I share what’s happening in my life, when I confess what I’m thinking or feeling, there is no wall. The air is clear, and I feel like I can freely talk to my mom, my dad, my siblings and friends, and to Jesus.

Accountability is also about respect. I can give the gift of respect to my parents, to older team members, to our leaders, and to anyone in authority over me. I also need to give the gift of

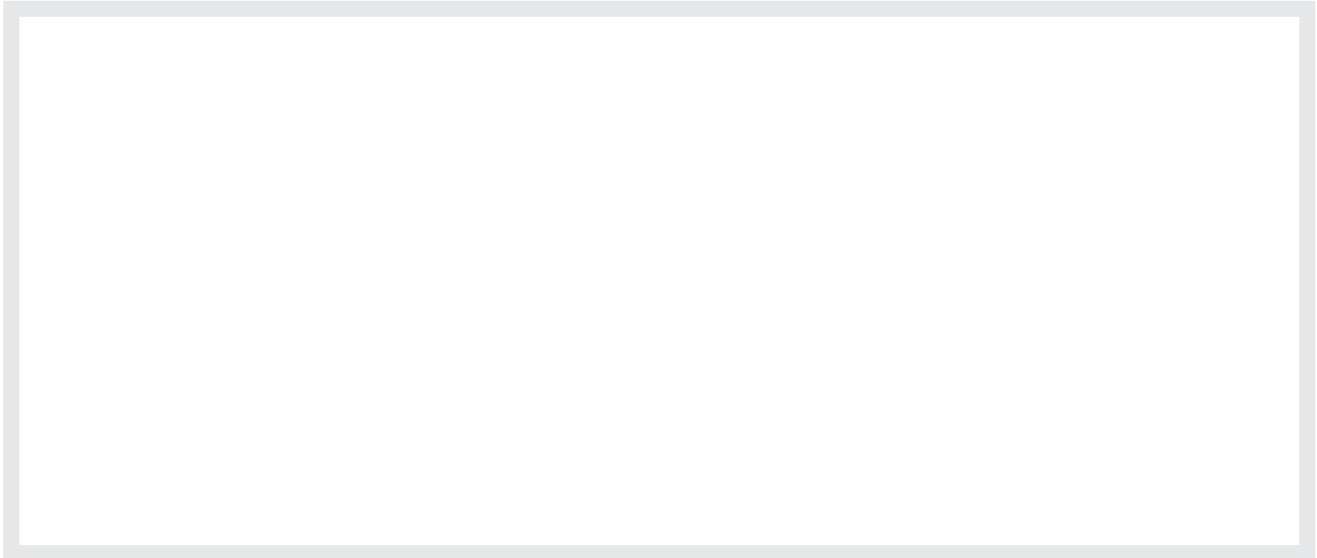
respect to those in authority with whom I disagree or simply find disagreeable. That is a hard gift to give sometimes. Sometimes I feel like they don't deserve my respect or submission, like they're wrong and I'm right. But when I make the choice to show respect (maybe with loads of grace), I honor them, and I honor Jesus.

There are some days when I think I'd rather do without any accountability, but then I remember that honesty keeps things real and clear. It helps me accomplish more because I'm not holding back or trying to hide something or trying to remember what to say or what not to say. Transparency turns my stumbling blocks into stepping stones so I can grow and help others to grow and lift Jesus higher. Transparency builds trust and helps me live and work better with others. Transparency builds relationships on foundations of love and trust. When I honor my family (or anyone) with honesty, it builds trust.

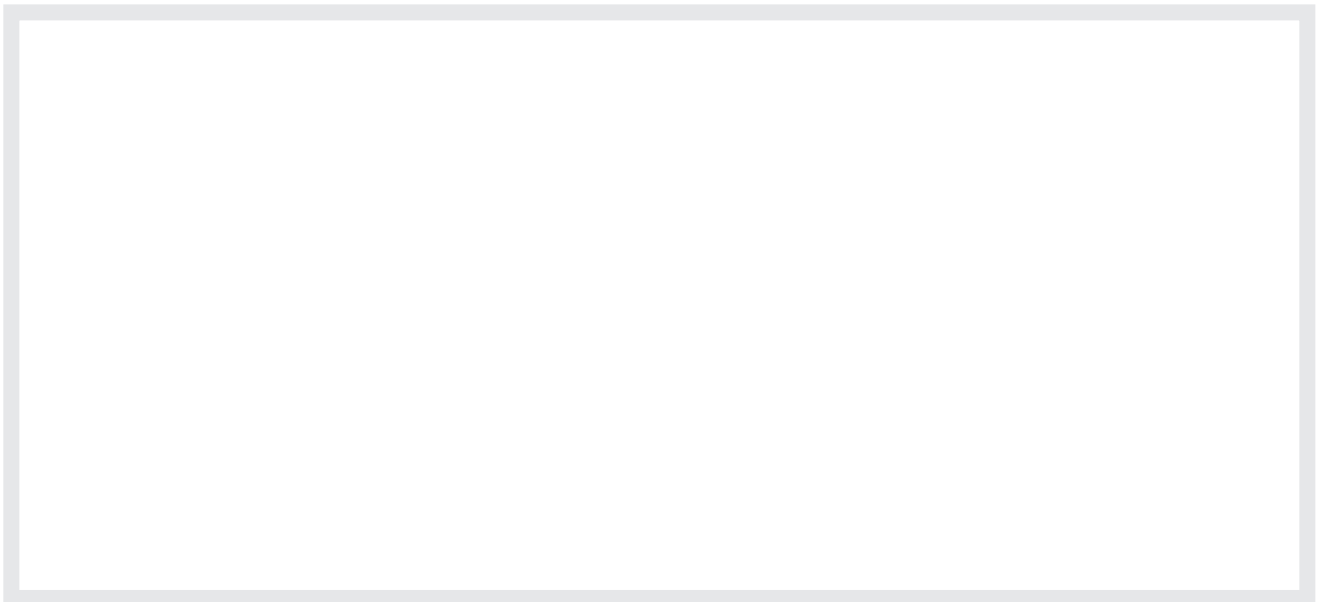
I have the freedom to choose—the choice to follow Jesus in accountability or lead myself. That choice decides everything after it: where I go, where I stay, who I am, who I am not. When I live a transparent life, I feel free and lightweight because I don't hold anything in that weighs me down. In a transparent life, God uses our weaknesses because He is glorified through our weaknesses. I have so much to learn from God through accountability, whether it's through my parents, siblings, friends, fellow team members, or leaders. And it's in accountability that I begin to resemble Jesus, a servant and ransom for many, where I set aside my wants for the greater good of His glory. I need accountability so that Jesus becomes greater and I become less.

ABIDE IN HIM

Is there someone in your life that holds you accountable? Is there someone with whom you can be absolutely honest?

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What is the best team that you have ever been a part of? What made it such a great team?

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DAILY CHALLENGE

Accountability frees you and allows you to learn the importance of transparency. If you don't already have someone like this in your life, take a moment and ask God who a good accountability person might be for you.

If you have people with whom you can be transparent, do you openly share everything, and are you presently growing? Ask God what steps you might take to go deeper.





DAY ELEVEN

TRANSFORMATION

TRANSFORMATION

Everyone is bound to the patterns of this world. God wants us to be transformed from a sinful, destructive pattern to the harmonious, loving, and just pattern of His Kingdom. Only Jesus can break the sin pattern and truly transform people through renewing their minds. And everyone needs the renewal and transformation Jesus gives, each one of us, young and old, rich and poor, Arab and American, Christian and Muslim.

Jesus used stories and word pictures to teach His disciples the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. But our words alone cannot give justice to the things that God alone can do, which is especially the case with the value of transformation. To put into words what God is doing in our lives and in the lives of others would keep us at our computers day and night, typing as long as we live.

So, to give just a glimpse of what transformation looks like in us and in those to whom we minister, I offer some word pictures and some life stories that will hopefully open hearts even more to the infinite possibilities of God's transforming power.

THE ONION EFFECT

I often have many questions when it comes to transformation: Can Muslims be transformed? What can I do to be a part of transformation in a Muslim's life? When does faith begin? Is transformation instantaneous or gradual? How will I know if someone is being impacted by the gospel?

I used to think that conversion was a singular moment in time, a moment when the truth of Jesus and his death and his gift

of salvation was revealed in someone's mind and that person mentally reached out and took the gift. While this might have been true in some sense for me, my Muslim friends have a very different background. They are a bit more like onions with many layers. I see the layers peel back, and each layer peeled back is both a real victory and a necessary step of faith for them to come to a full understanding of the gospel and to make a commitment to be a follower of Christ. As for which peeled back layer of that onion represents "the beginning of faith" or "conversion" or "salvation," I cannot pretend to know. I just believe this whole process of peeling back the layers of the onion is called transformation. Our friend Seif runs a local restaurant. He quickly came to our aid in helping us navigate the city and learn cultural things. He also made himself available as a friend, and he and my husband have spent hours and hours together over the years. Though he was very hard and cynical to the gospel message at first, over time we have seen the layers of the onion peel back. He is now exploring the Bible and researching Christianity, and is always open to discuss and learn more with my husband.

Sahar is an employee in our business. A mother of two small boys, she was delighted to receive a part-time job that gives her work experience, gets her out of the house, and gives her social interaction with adults. We've had many opportunities to share the gospel with her, and yet just as impacting has been her witnessing our work ethic and integrity in business matters. She is taking steps of discovery, asking spiritual questions and grappling with the answers. While she has not made a distinct conversion, she is clearly being transformed by the impact of godly living and the gospel in her life. Those layers of the onion are peeling back. At a work party, she told me, "I'm not the same person you hired a year ago." I agree and am thankful, trusting God with the continual transformation He is working in her life.

Erin is a single woman on our team. She has walked with Jesus for a long time, but I'm amazed and blessed at the transformation I see happening in her life. She arrived here with insecurities and fears (as we all do). She is learning to trust her teammates and open up about her fears, believing God wants to use her weakness to bring glory to himself. The layers are peeling back, and the gospel is transforming both Erin and others through her. She is learning to lean on Christ for everything. She has many relationships with local women that through humility and transparency, God is using her to pass on a message of restoration and wholeness.

THE SEED EFFECT

Our family has been living and laboring in the Arab world for five years. During this time we have spent hours learning language, starting and working at our business, meeting new people daily, and praying regularly for transformation in the lives of those with whom we interact. It has been a season of plowing and sowing seeds in our community—every prayer, a seed; every attempt to learn and speak Arabic, a seed; and every conversation and act of love, a seed. Every time we've prayed for people's needs in Jesus' name has been a seed. Each time we've sat over coffee in a local coffee shop has been with every intention of planting seeds. The business was started to meet the felt needs in the community and was done so in an effort to plant seeds in people's lives.

Take Yousra, a cashier at my local grocery store. As I check out, I greet her by name, ask how she's doing, and let her know that I pray for her. She knows I am a Christian and I pray to Jesus. She shares things with me that she wants prayer for and lets me know how God has answered in her life. I believe and pray that God will reveal himself to her and that I will be available to explain more to her when that happens.

Aymen is a young man who spends a lot of time with our college interns. He has enjoyed hours of conversation, helping them with Arabic, and showing them around. He agreed to study the Word with my husband and a friend and seemed to have great insight into what he was reading, but after some time he stopped studying. We continued to spend time with him and after a year he showed interest again. It was during this further study that he made a decision to live as a Christian and be baptized. He expresses his journey as a “love story” of God pursuing him. He continues to slowly grow in his faith, understanding, and obedience.

THREE ENCOUNTERS

When we talk about transformation here, we often say that for a Muslim to come to Jesus, to experience transformation, it takes an interweaving of three encounters—a love encounter, a truth encounter, and a power encounter. A love encounter is a physical act, life on life, like attending weddings, making hospital visits, and meeting felt needs of a person or community. A truth encounter is a verbal presentation of the gospel, a Bible study, and a call to repentance. A power encounter is supernatural intervention—a miracle, healing, or an obvious answer to prayer. We encourage team members to do one act of love, one communication of truth, and one prayer in faith for the miraculous each day.

The Bible is pretty clear that faith comes by hearing, so we do place a priority on verbal proclamation of the gospel. We believe it's necessary and biblical to serve those that we proclaim to with loving deeds.

My onion and seed stories offer just a glimpse of what transformation looks like in the Arab world, but you can see this same kind of work of transformation happen wherever you are, every day. The more we can grasp the importance of each onion layer peeled back and of each seed sown, the more we can pray and serve with joy, fully anticipating that God will work the transformation, that He will empower the seed sowing, and that He will do the hard work of peeling back layers to bring forth a harvest.

ABIDE IN HIM

What are needs around the world that seem too enormous, perhaps even impossible, to fix all by yourself?

What are some of the aspects of you and your life that have transformed as a result of Jesus work in you?

DAILY CHALLENGE

Meeting a need in this world can feel overwhelming, but there is something you can do from right where you are. You can pray for the one in need to have an encounter with Jesus and experience life transformation.

Spend some time praying for the lost. Pray for a person living in a war-stricken area, a person living in poverty, and/or a person without access to the gospel. Pray that a believer would sit down with each of them and share the truth about Jesus. Pray that each one would receive a Bible and have the opportunity to hear about Jesus.

Now consider the lost in your community and pray the same prayers. What will your response be to the spiritual needs of others? Write it down.





DAY TWELVE

COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY

A loud knock rings out from the tall metal gate that separates the dust that is our yard from the dust that is our neighborhood. It is unlatched, so I know the visitor is not a neighbor, not a friend. My friends would walk on in after a cursory polite tap, not thud the door with a small rock to make sure they are heard.

I wonder if I should go to the gate.

I am supposed to be on bedrest. I am six months pregnant and the midwife says I have placenta previa. I am supposed to only move minimally. Apart from the all-day nausea that accompanies my pregnancies, I feel fine, but I can't go out anywhere or visit friends. I haven't advertised to my neighbors that I am on bedrest. I know they would sweetly come to visit; but that would mean, in absence of any other women in my house, I would feel I had to get up and do hostess things, especially since I don't actually look sick. They would also bring generous amounts of food. The strong smell and unappealing texture would make me, in my nauseous state, likely to vomit then and there.

I wonder if it's the crazy milk guy. He often arrives about this time. Wearing a white turban, he balances precariously atop his milk churn-laden donkey and endeavors to convince me to buy his milk. I think by the time he gets to me the milk has been in the sun too long because it becomes chunky, but he insists that his milk is "beautiful."

Perhaps the person knocking is selling something useful, or perhaps it is the cockroach killers, come to offer their services to rid our drains of roaches. In the days after the treatment, dazed survivors flee the drain, wandering drunkenly into our house, where we splat them with flip-flops.

Hopefully not the door-to-door immunization ladies who, refusing to believe that my daughter has already been vaccinated, inform me in haughty terms that they will tell the United Nations and the World Health Organization I am refusing the vaccination.

I hear the knocking again. I go to the gate. The hot sun beats down, I feel a bit queasy, and I momentarily regret getting up. I tug the gate open.

It is a young woman, slim under the slightly torn, bluish tobe (a length of fabric) that she has wrapped over her jellabiya (an outdoor robe). She is carrying a little girl who looks well cared for. The girl is clean and tidily dressed, albeit in an old dress and too small flip-flops. The woman asks for work. She says she can wash clothes, perhaps sweep the yard.

I am very relieved it is not the crazy milk guy. I do need someone to help in the house.

My husband is trying to keep the house clean, while looking after our small daughter and doing his work. Then there is James, a disabled guy who lives in our yard. He has been earning some money washing our dishes mostly clean and waving a mop somewhat vaguely over the floor. He occasionally mops the table with it, too. Not really the ideal “helper.” We will give him some other work.

I invite her into my yard. She sits in the shade on one of our beds that, as in all houses here, doubles as our “garden furniture.” I bring her a glass of cold water and ask if she is willing to wash dishes, clean the floor, and hang out the washing. I explain that the doctor says I need to rest, and I supposed to just sit and do nothing.

Her name is Miriam. She is also pregnant. She sticks out her tiny tummy and pats her bump. I feel rather like a whale; I think I must weigh twice as much as her.

She is like a butterfly, full of fluttery energy and enthusiasm. Her husband is in the countryside. Sometimes he comes to the city but is usually away for weeks at a time.

I tell her the things I want her to do, and she gets on with them. Her daughter is thrilled to play with my daughter's toys. We eat some food together. I pay her a generous amount for a couple hours' work.

I ask her to return the next day, early, before she tries to find work elsewhere. I tell her that I will pay her the same amount. She smiles and proclaims God's blessing on me. She returns the next day and becomes a regular helper in my house.

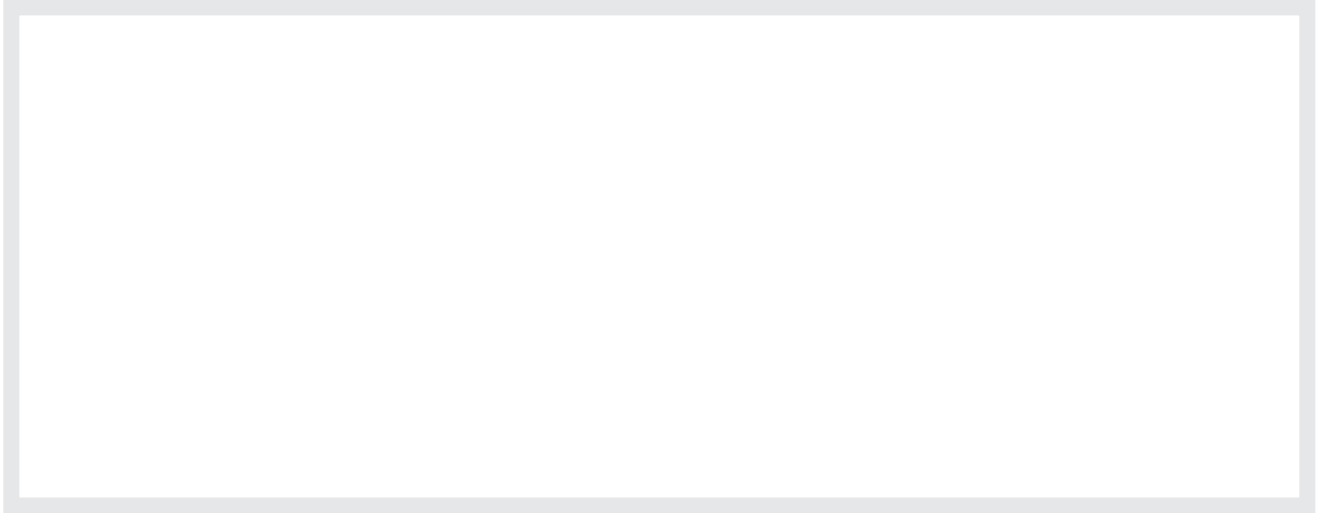
That day brought a blessing from God for us both. God brought her to my house when she desperately needed some work. God brought her to my house when I desperately needed someone to help.

It was not by chance she came to my house that day. It was not by chance that anyone ever came to my house. All were God-ordained appointments, opportunities for me to be to "the praise of His glory" and to do "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 1:11, 12; 2:10 ESV).

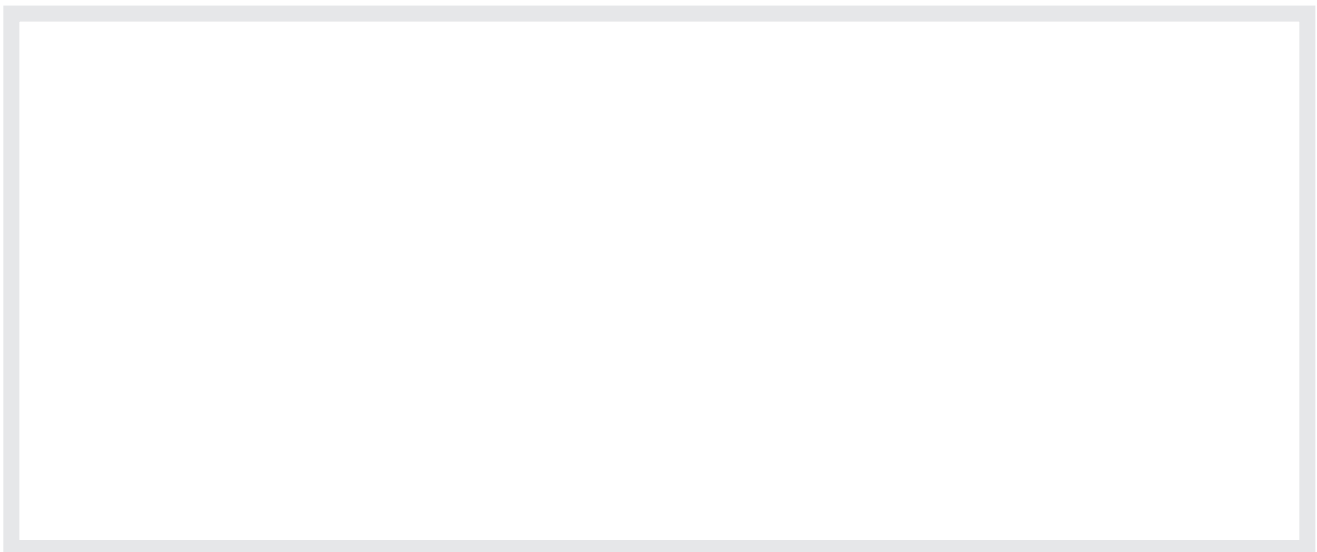
Often so very hard to remember. I can give a friendly smile instead of a frown, a polite "no thank you" instead of a rude rejection, an open heart to a new friendship, words of hope to a tired soul. God loves the crazy milk guy, the salesman, the cockroach killers, the vaccination ladies, neighbors, and Miriam. He tells us we are salt and light to them. I can trust He will give them every possible opportunity to follow Him. The question is, will I be the one who has the eyes to see these opportunities and seize them?

ABIDE IN HIM

What impression do you think you leave with people? Do you leave the impression that you're kind, compassionate, or loving? Write down a few things that you believe people think of you.



Do you believe people leave you undoubtedly knowing that you are passionate about Jesus? If yes, why?



DAILY CHALLENGE

One way to share Jesus is to look for opportunities to invite Him into your conversations every day. Take some time to pray that you will be prepared and willing to talk about Jesus. Pray that through your conversations, others will know that you love Jesus and will be interested in knowing more. Try to view today's "interruptions" as "opportunities." Take time with people. Pause, smile, visit. Everyone has a story and many have no one to hear it. Will you listen? Will you offer hope? Will you proclaim Jesus?

