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the Journey

Meditations from Our Missionaries



Cover Photo: Jon Bonker

Photo: Amy Robinson

embark

“What’s your plan?” This question has become such a part of our culture that it has given rise to a phobia, atychiphobia—the fear of failure. We balk at entering relationships. We can’t commit to a life direction. We resist change. We are often driven by the fear of being disappointed.

The key to overcoming this fear is embracing the truth that even though our journey might zigzag, and a plan might not be discernible, there is indeed a plan — a plan to prosper us and not to harm us, a plan to give us a hope and a future. This plan might only be known to our loving and mysterious God, but by the work of His Spirit, He is leading us every step of the way.

We are all on a journey, one that is often difficult and full of hardship. But we endure and even find joy, because of an overwhelming sense of greater purpose: becoming new in Him; growing the Kingdom; and completing the mission He has given us to fulfill.

This is a compilation of meditations and photos by MTW missionaries. As you consider God’s unfolding plan for your life, it is meant to give insight and inspiration to your own journey.

No matter your path, you need not fear. Our success is found in the Lord alone and His work on our behalf. **“For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you”** (Isa. 41:13).

So come and join the Journey! ▶▶

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Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go... ."

(Isa. 6:8-9)



Photo: Bob Burnham

God's Flight Plan

Chuck Linkston, Australia

***Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go . . ."
(Isa. 6:8–9).***

Flight plans are documents filed by pilots with the FAA. They include basic information such as departure and arrival points, estimated time en route, alternate airports in case of bad weather, etc. Fifteen years ago, my wife and I sensed a call to international

missions. What we didn't have was a "flight plan." What we did have was a desire to be faithful to God in whatever place or way He led. I must say, it was hard not to envy the other missionaries who knew: "We're going to Japan" or "We're called to Mexico." All we could say was, "We're just called."

It turns out God's "flight plan" for us was and is Western Australia. We have now served here for 11 years. If we had insight into His plan back in 1998, I don't know if we would have pursued it with the same passion and zeal as we did when it was a huge unknown.

If you were to dig a hole straight down in the town where I grew up, you would end up in the ocean west of where we live now. Talk about "the end of the earth"! But also "talk about" God's goodness, mercy and omniscience in His most excellent placement of us. He has brought us to an amazingly challenging and blessed place of ministry! I can't


imagine a better spot for my family's unique mix of personality, ethnicity, gifting and faith. God definitely knows what He is doing!

Whatever, whenever, wherever, however . . . God knows. Isaiah 55:9 says: ***"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."*** We must continually trust the One who not only knows us but loves us. He is good! And His "flight plans," they are always perfect.



Photo: Bob Burnham





▶ Seeing Them as Daughters

Dal Stanton, Bulgaria

The Daughters of Bulgaria is an MTW ministry to women caught in human trafficking.

“Simon, ‘Do you see this woman?’” (Luke 7:44)

Of course Simon saw her—a sinner, a woman of ill repute, someone to avoid. Jesus pushed Simon to see that his pride and external-focused religion were strangling his heart and blinding him from “seeing” the woman as He saw her. Jesus saw her heart. She was broken.

Totally unexpectedly, our team started hearing Jesus’ question: “Do you see these women?” Honestly, I didn’t want to see them, but the Lord was doing something we couldn’t ignore—I, as a man, couldn’t ignore. He opened my eyes not to see hookers and prostitutes, but to see with His eyes: to see daughters. Not just any daughter, but my own daughter.

Human trafficking and prostitution became real to us after a long-time “rescuer” from Germany shared how the Spirit’s nudge to network in Bulgaria became unrelenting. So many of the women she met on the streets there were from Bulgaria. We learned from her about our country, and its role as a “feeder” country for human trafficking. She shared but it really didn’t impact my heart—it was too big, too impersonal. What could we possibly do? We were a church planting team. But then she said, “These women on the streets are our mothers, sisters and daughters . . .”

I am a father—but not just a father, I’m *Daddy*, and my 16-year-old daughter was sitting next to me as these words jolted my core. Suddenly all those nameless, faceless girls we drove by on the streets—I trying not to notice as a Christian man—had faces, and not just any faces but those of my own two daughters.

I realize now, the Lord had to work first in my heart for our team to really “see” these women and prayerfully seek how the Father wanted us to respond. I was looking at the women like Simon—making an idol out of religious/moral purity and seeing these prostitutes only as sexual objects to be avoided and not as daughters needing to be loved.

As I drive our team members to the Ring Road for our weekly ministry visits with prostitutes there, I know I am but a man, weak and in need of God’s grace. I see much that could weaken my resolve towards purity, but it helps to remember my two precious daughters. If one of them were to be enslaved as these Daughters of Bulgaria are, would not my prayer be, “Lord, please send someone to rescue my dear, dear daughter?”

Jesus asked, **“Do you see this woman?”** For every broken, enslaved, provocatively dressed prostitute on the Ring Road, my answer is, “Yes Lord I see her, and she’s just like my little girl.”

▶ Photo: Christopher E.

The Silver Man

Eowyn Stoddard, Germany

The Brandenburg Gate. A German national monument to grandeur, stolen by Napoleon and abused by Hitler. At the foot of the Gate, there are numerous entertainers. The Silver Man catches our attention. He has painted his entire body silver. He stands on a box and when a passerby throws some coins into his hat, he moves like a robot. My children are mesmerized and ask to make him work. I scrounge around in my wallet for a few lonely coins. One of my boys throws them into the hat. The Silver Man moves slowly and mechanically. He glances down at his hat and stops. He picks up our coins and starts toward me. He opens my hand, slaps the coins into it and asks: "How much do you make per hour?" I am stunned. Anger bubbles up within me, and I turn away from my silver adversary. After all, a few coins add up to a pretty respectable hourly pay, and beggars can't be choosers. The anger continues to rise in me, and I am surprised to hear myself yelling repeatedly: "I hate Germany, I hate Germans." To my great shame, the words were spilled at the foot of the monument that represents the nation I'm supposed to love and serve.

For many years this event symbolized to me the response of so many to the message of grace we were bringing to them. Though spiritually poor and needy, they refused the help the message offered. Were we casting our pearls before swine? It was so painful to have the pearl of grace slapped back into our hands.

Years later, an even more painful truth percolates through my soul: I am the Silver Man. He and I are blood relatives. He slashed open a wound full of ugliness in me: criticism, slander, rudeness, rejection, which became part of my act. I was angry that people were not throwing enough coins into my hat. Did I believe the message I was preaching from atop my missionary box? Did I really believe that I cannot impress God with my silvery appearance? That He wants me to step off my box, get down into the crowd and look them in the eye with sadness instead of anger?

God used a silver man to lance my wound at the foot of the Brandenburg Gate. But in reality, it was at the foot of the cross that Jesus, betrayed for silver coins, was lanced for me. The monument to my shame and the place of my healing and glory are one and the same: the cross. May the Brandenburg Gate someday stand as a monument to the healing and glory of the nation of Germany as silver men and women, one by one, understand that they ***"were ransomed. . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ"*** (1 Pet. 1:18–19 ESV).



Duty is Not Enough

Michael Oh, Japan

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”
(John 3:16).

Missions is hard. It’s hard because people are sinners. And by “people” I mean you and me. It’s hard because there are sacrifices involved—big ones at times. And we are born complainers. I learned this lesson from my teenage daughter, who is sitting next to me on an airplane as I write this. After meeting Joni Eareckson Tada 24 hours ago (which my daughter thoroughly loved), she just gave me the “are you serious?!” look, when she learned that she doesn’t get a window seat on the plane.

Sometimes we lose sight of the big picture. We inspect our sacrifices with a magnifying glass and fail to look upward to the cross, where our Savior shed His blood and received wrath on our behalf. Despite this, we persevere. At least I did for the first term of my mission service. I was a missionary on mission. I had a mission. We were at war, and I was a soldier. Others might not step up to the call, but I did.

But as sinners sinned (including me) and complainers complained (including me), my duty-driven missions began to wear. A crisis moment could have led to quitting . . . or even worse . . . continuing as “the angry missionary” serving people like a cafeteria lady spooning out slop with a frown on her face.

But God in His grace reminded me that missions goes beyond duty. It goes beyond “grin and bear it.” Jesus did more than “grin and bear it” on the cross. The Father more than begrudgingly sent His son. And so we too are to both send as the Father sent—with joy empowered by love—and be sent as the Son was sent—with joy empowered by love.

This stubborn sinner finally learned the lesson. Part of the eternal life that Jesus bought for those who believe is the eternal joy of serving God’s eternal purpose of salvation. This all flows from His eternal love.

Yes, missions is hard, but God’s love is enough.

Photo: Tim Mills