

# *Adventures in Faith*

## *Devotion 1*

### *On a Mission from God*

The entire world is a mission field. Every day, as we walk out the door, we're going on a mission trip—to work, school, the store . . . wherever. In fact, we don't even have to leave our homes. We're on a mission from God with every phone call we make, every e-mail we send, each blog we write, every status update we key in, every tweet we answer, and shocking as it may sound, with every letter we write with a pen on paper!

But this trip is unique. It's different than those other "mission trips" we take. Many of the experiences we have will be new. We'll meet and serve with new people. (Even if you've been to this same place before, you'll likely encounter new things!) It's an adventure in faith! God has blessed you and will lead you to bless others.

In the movie *Blues Brothers* from 1980, the characters repeated one tagline again and again: *We're on a mission from God*. It was a fun movie, but less than godly. The producers used the tagline as a joke. But you can say you truly *are* on a mission *from* God, *for* God, and *for the sake* of God's eternal kingdom. What an honor and privilege!

You're probably excited. You may also feel nervous. You may find your mind and heart flooding with questions and even some concerns. You have so much to look forward to; you'll get to watch the Lord unfold his plans right before our eyes! He's bringing us all together to serve him. Some of us don't know each other all that well. It will be fun. We'll laugh together, and maybe even cry together, too. You'll learn, and you'll teach. And the Holy Spirit will strengthen your faith. While you're making plans, your Lord has great plans in mind for you. Remember, you can "commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed" (Proverbs 16:3).

In every mission trip, a lot goes on behind the scenes—some of which we'll never know about. People are praying for us. Some are supporting us financially. Leaders are working on details. Our Savior is at work behind the scenes, too. He's not only with us here and now, but he's also present in (*name the place you are going*). He's already opening doors for our service, laying the groundwork for our ministry, preparing hearts to receive Jesus. Yes, some will reject God's Good News, and Jesus knows it. Our Lord asks only that we sow the seed. He'll give the growth. Listen to what the prophet Isaiah wrote about that:

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:*

*It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

*You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

*Isaiah 55:10–12*

How comforting to know that God is in control! We can travel with joy, led in peace, knowing that he works through imperfect people in an imperfect world.

Take time to reflect on your giftedness. Consider how God might use it. Pray for discernment as you seek his will, and then follow where he leads. Confess any lack of trust in your Lord's protection or purposes, and receive the forgiveness that flows from Christ's cross.

As you set your goals, evaluate your strengths and your weaknesses, and begin journaling your thoughts, prayers, and experiences, consider using this acrostic. Down the side of one page, write the location of your trip. Use the city, site name, state, or country—whatever you choose.

Use each letter to trigger words, phrases, or prayer thoughts regarding your participation in this trip. What characteristics do you want to define you as you begin your mission from God, for God, and for the sake of God's kingdom?

Here's one example. Add more words and phrases to your list as you serve. Let it become a prayer list and a reminder of your heart's desires. Let that heart beat with a passion to share Christ with others as his light shines through you.

**P** – Praise God; Pray; Prayer partner; Patient in all things; Pleasant disposition; Plan to be flexible in times of change; Passionate about God's Word and his mission to go into all the world and make disciples

**E** – Encourage others daily; Emptied of pride; Enjoy opportunities and people; Eat healthy

**R** – Respect for the people and culture; a Repentant heart; cultivate Relationships; Remain Renewed, Refreshed, and Rested; Reliant on God's will

**U** – an Understanding of God's Word and the needs of others; an Undivided heart; Unity among the team members; Unashamed to be a Christ-follower

**Prayer suggestion:** Take time for each person to begin his or her own acrostic and to create a prayer from it, praying it either out loud or silently. Then close with the following prayer. It comes from the ancient church, so many hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters in Christ have prayed it before us—many of them as they set out to do just what we're about to do. We share their faith and their love for Jesus:

*Lord, God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

# Adventures in Faith

## Devotion 2

### Let's Talk

You love the Lord! You've discovered a passion inside you that wasn't there before. You've begun to look at others through Jesus' eyes. You've begun to respond to situations differently. You are seeing that it's possible to forgive others freely, because Jesus has forgiven you. You realize that praising your Savior has become a more and more regular part of your life.

Things have changed for us because of Jesus Christ. His life has affected our lives—eternally! As the Holy Spirit grows our faith, we want others to know the contentment, joy, and freeing peace that come only from Jesus. Our ears of faith have heard his call to go and make disciples of all nations, and we've responded.

Some of you may find yourself comfortable talking about your faith with those around you at home. But on this mission trip, we will meet up with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar surroundings. Along with excitement, each of us may notice some anxiety forming, too. It's like developing a relationship via the phone or Internet, and then anticipating a face-to-face conversation:

- ♦ Will I know what to say?
- ♦ Will the other person like and accept me? Or will I be rejected?
- ♦ What if this experience doesn't line up with my expectations?
- ♦ What if some communication barriers arise?

Ahh, the joys of relationships! As you think about all this, what worries and concerns pop up most often? How do you push them out of your way? Our Lord provides help and encouragement in his Word.

First of all, remember that Jesus wants you to communicate with him about all your concerns. The psalmist wrote:

*I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.*

*Psalm 34:4*

The missionary Paul encourages us:

*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

*Ephesians 6:18–20*

Why not boldly ask your prayer partners at home to pray for you in this very same way! You'll also want to ask for wisdom in listening and watching for the Lord's answers. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you clearly communicate the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ with others, and pray for trust that you are covered in the grace of Jesus Christ when you still find it hard to know what to say.

Many of us probably feel inadequate to share God's Word. Scripture is filled with stories of people who could relate:

- ✦ Moses voiced many concerns, but the Lord had answers to every one of them. He promised to help Moses speak and even teach him what to say (Exodus 4:10–12).
- ✦ Isaiah confessed he was a man of unclean lips, unworthy to share the Good News. But the Lord assured him of forgiveness and equipped him with the eternal, saving Word (Isaiah 6:5–8).
- ✦ Jeremiah felt he was too young. He confessed he didn't know what to say. The Lord calmed his fears and put words in his mouth (Jeremiah 1:7–10).
- ✦ God took Amos—a farmer—way, way out of his comfort zone and empowered him to serve with confidence (Amos 7:14–15).
- ✦ The apostle Paul certainly knew of his Savior's grace and strength as he served on mission trip after mission trip (Acts 9:1–22; 1 Timothy 1:12–17), often experiencing persecution and even rejection, but knowing the joy of God that strengthened him to keep on going.

Just as God was faithful to all these people, so he is faithful to us. The Holy Spirit wants to open Scripture to us—to you, personally—so you grow in understanding and faith (Colossians 1:9–12). He'll help you commit to the study of God's Word. He'll send others to teach and guide you.

God's Spirit promises to help you speak, especially as you speak to people who trust other so-called gods, gods who offer no forgiveness, grace, hope, or eternal life. God's Spirit will help you speak the name of Jesus with people who talk about "god" but don't know the God of the Bible—the one true God, the world's Savior. On this trip, you will likely interact with those who don't know the truth that "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Maybe you have met some of them already. They may completely reject the truth of Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

It is Jesus Christ—and Christ alone—who transforms lives, forgives sins, offers true hope, brings real peace, and opens heaven to all who place their trust in him. Speak in his name and in his power. As your words and life speak for him, you'll find that instead of a spirit of timidity, he will bless you with a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). You will have strength and courage, because the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).

You will communicate the love of your Savior as you hammer nails, serve a meal, play with a child, laugh with a new friend, or share a hug and a smile. As you do that, Jesus will communicate with you, too. Constantly! Pray for eyes and ears to discern what he would have you do, where he would have you go. He will! On this trip and in every day of your life from here on!

**Prayer suggestion:** Use the acrostics you began last time as the basis for ongoing prayers today. You may want to set aside a few minutes for individuals to pray with a partner and then come back to the whole group to pray together about specific concerns, people, and circumstances.

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# *Adventures in Faith*

## *Devotion 3*

### *Are You Aware . . .*

Many times, minds and bodies experience an overload during mission trips. Emotions run high. Concerns and questions about unknowns invade. Senses move to high-alert mode. Are you feeling that way? Then use your heightened senses to take it all in—the place, the people, and the emotions.

Instead of noticing only the physical aspects of our surroundings, pay close attention to the adventure in faith our surroundings present to us. Think deeply about God's purposes for this trip. The Holy Spirit wants to grow, stretch, and strengthen your faith along the way, so ask him to make you keenly aware of his work in you and in those around you. Give thanks for all of it—the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our mission.

Would you describe yourself as a very observant person? Or would you not even notice a new piece of furniture in your own living room? Do you notice God's activity in your daily life? Because we are sinful, imperfect people, it's easy for us to walk right past our daily blessings. We easily forget or ignore God's constant presence with us and his ongoing work for us.

Look around. Take in all the details. What do you see? What do you feel? Notice the reactions of others. Look for signs of God's work among us. And when you're doing that, don't miss our Savior's cross and his empty tomb. Let them remind you constantly of the sacrifice Jesus offered for us, so that we can live forever forgiven and free!

Finally, pray that the Holy Spirit will develop in each of us an extra-keen sense of awareness that he is with us and working through us. As he does that, we will find him drawing us closer and closer to our Savior and to each other.

The Lord has great plans for us, for our team, and for the people we will meet on this trip. He's made great promises to us. Consider the following and let it shape your thoughts into a prayer you bring before the Father in Jesus' name:

#### **Are you aware . . . ?**

- ✦ That Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are interceding for you before the Father at this very moment? (Romans 8:26–27, 34)
- ✦ That our omniscient God already knows what tomorrow will bring? (Job 38–39; Psalm 139:1–10)
- ✦ Of the needs of those around you? (Philippians 2:4)
- ✦ Of the joy of the Lord, and of the fact that that joy is your strength? (Nehemiah 8:10)
- ✦ Of the miracles God has worked in your life the last 24 hours? (Job 5:9; Psalm 77:14)
- ✦ That God's peace is yours? (John 14:27)



- ✦ Of the fact that your Savior, Jesus, is crazy in love with you? (Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; John 10:14–15; Romans 8:31–39; Ephesians 2:4–5; 1 John 3:1, 16)
- ✦ That Satan would like nothing better than to dampen your passion, steal your joy, and destroy your desire to follow God's will? (1 Peter 5:8)
- ✦ Of the power of God's Word? (Psalm 119:11, 89, 105; John 17:17; Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- ✦ Of Immanuel's presence in this place? (Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:9; Matthew 1:23)
- ✦ That the hope that comes through Jesus can transform even those things that appear hopeless? (Jeremiah 31:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14)
- ✦ Of the spiritual battle going on around you? (Ephesians 6:11–12)
- ✦ That God has entrusted to your care just the talents you need? (Romans 12:4–8)
- ✦ That your Father knew you before you were born? (Psalm 139:13–16; Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:3–4)
- ✦ Of how powerfully the Lord works in response to our prayers? (James 5:13–16)
- ✦ Of God's complete forgiveness? (Hebrews 8:12; 1 John 1:8–9)
- ✦ Of the Holy Spirit's renewing and transforming power? (Romans 12:1–3)
- ✦ That Jesus' perfection covers all your imperfections? (1 John 1:7; Revelation 7:13–15)
- ✦ Of your ability to do all things *through Jesus Christ* who strengthens you? (Philippians 4:13)
- ✦ Of the power of Christ's resurrection? (Romans 6:5; Philippians 3:7–11)
- ✦ That God has used others to encourage and strengthen your faith? (2 Timothy 1:5–7)
- ✦ Of your full potential in Jesus? (Jeremiah 29:11; John 10:10; 14:12–14)
- ✦ That the prayers of many others envelop you? (Ephesians 6:18)
- ✦ That the "ministry of presence" can be transforming? (Job 2:11–13)
- ✦ Of Jesus' voice speaking to your heart through his Word? (John 10:27–29)
- ✦ That Jesus is truly the only way to heaven? (John 14:6)
- ✦ Of God's grace surrounding, comforting, and upholding you? (John 1:14–17; Romans 5:20–21; 1 Corinthians 1:3–4; Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 4:23)

**Prayer suggestion:** During part of your prayer time, simply thank and praise God for the individual blessings mentioned in the list above. Ask each person to select one or two blessings to include in his or her prayer. Assure everyone it's okay to thank Jesus for a blessing someone else has already mentioned.

# Adventures in Faith

## Devotion 4

### Running on Empty

Mission trips are both exhilarating and exhausting! At times spiritual, emotional, and physical adrenaline runs wild throughout your body and mind. What a wonderful feeling! But it's also exhausting to put so much of yourself and your heart into serving the Lord and his people. Some factors that might lead to your running on empty include

- a heightened sense of compassion for others in need;
- physical labor;
- unfamiliar surroundings;
- working with children;
- adjusting to a new schedule;
- traveling to new areas;
- communication or cultural challenges;
- less sleep than usual;
- dynamics of living with a new “family” unit;
- sharing your faith and serving as a witness of Christ's grace; and even
- a change in plans.

It's great to run on empty! Running on the power of the empty cross and tomb, that is. Because Jesus Christ lives within you, his resurrection power refuels your heart for mission. Your living Savior empowers both you and your desire to make him known to the nations. Listen to what the apostle Paul once wrote about our Savior and the power of his resurrection:

*I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. . . . **I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection** and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

*Philippians 3:8–12, emphasis added*

The power of Christ brought Paul through a lot on his missionary trips. Paul knew the exhilaration of seeing the Holy Spirit create faith in other people and grow the faith of still others. Wherever Paul went, he gave his all for the sake of Christ. But Paul also knew exhaustion and disappointment. He knew what it was like to run on empty—and to power up on the news of Christ's empty tomb.

Paul needed the power of his living Lord to deal with changes in plans and unplanned obstacles along the way. Maybe your mission team has already learned the importance of flexibility (not physical flexibility, although that can help in some situations, too!). But if you haven't yet learned that lesson, here's a hint: On mission trips, things rarely go as planned. And that's a good thing, because we want things to go according to God's plan instead of our own.

Sometimes sin and Satan throw a wrench into the best plans, and we're tempted to think God is asleep at the switch. But nothing takes him by surprise. Even when things go wrong, we can know for sure that God will work through it for the good of his people and his glory.

Paul dealt with amazing obstacles. Listen to what he writes in 2 Corinthians 11:25–28. The context describes suffering for the Gospel, but the passage gives examples of many unexpected and unwelcome stressors Paul survived:

*Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

It's not likely that we will face such life-threatening obstacles. But hearing them reminds us to trust our Savior's guidance and remain flexible when making plans. Paul's experiences also remind us of the great emotional and spiritual challenges of mission work, including the tears he shed and the anguish he felt in realizing that not everyone we serve will come to know Christ as Savior. (See Acts 20:31; Romans 9:1–5; and Philippians 3:18.)

As we think about our own challenges, we can find great encouragement in Colossians 1:10–12. Eugene Peterson translates that passage this way in *The Message*:

*We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.*

So expect the unexpected. Trust in the changeless God when changes arrive. Be blessed by the exhilaration of sharing the saving truth of God's Word. But also realize that service and exhaustion sometimes go hand in hand. No matter the situation, the Holy Spirit will empower you to keep running, even when you're on empty—running to the cross for forgiveness and receiving the limitless power that flows from our Savior's empty tomb.

**Prayer suggestion:** Invite anyone with special concerns to pray aloud about them or pray for one another regarding special challenges you know about. Then conclude with these words:

*Holy Spirit, we want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. Keep us running on empty—on the Good News of our Savior's empty cross and empty tomb. Amen.*

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# *Adventures in Faith*

## *Devotion 5*

### *Can You Relate?*

Mission trips are all about relationships. First, there's our relationship with Jesus. Then there are the relationships we enjoy with those who travel with us. And there are also the relationships with new people we meet along the way. Negotiating all those relationships can be tricky, so it's a good thing that relationship experts come a dime a dozen.

Actually, that's not exactly true. One ad I read tells me that the relationship doctor who placed it charges \$50 for an online IM session and \$10–15 for each consultative e-mail. Someone else posted an ad online offering to pay at least \$20 for working solutions to her marriage—payment negotiable, depending upon how happy the marriage is after she applies the solutions.

As you scan the Internet, though, you probably won't discover any experts who deal specifically with relationships on mission trips.

At times, we may wish there were! We're going to spend a lot of time together, often in close quarters throughout this trip. Before it's over, we'll know one another much better than we may have expected. We'll have lots of opportunities to forgive others and to ask for forgiveness ourselves. Sadly, though, when people spend this much time with each other, it's easy to focus on faults instead of on forgiveness. It's easy to take others for granted. It's easy to forget the words of Psalm 133, words reminding us how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.

In reality, we don't need a relationship expert's help. Our heavenly Father has given us a remarkable how-to blueprint for building successful relationships. Compared to plans of the so-called experts, God's plan is quite inexpensive, even though the one who gave it to us is, without question, the foremost expert in the universe. Listen:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*Colossians 3:12–14*

This passage hinges on the little phrase "as the Lord forgave you." Think of it! God has forgiven us—every one of our sins! Trusting that forgiveness and the God who gave it in the cross of his Son, Jesus Christ, we can live as "God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." We can grow in our ability to forgive and to relate to others with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and all the rest.

During this mission trip experience, each of us will likely strengthen some friendships and forge some great, new ones. We praise God for this and for the opportunity that has brought us together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Still, we need to remember that we're not called to be best friends with everyone in our lives. We are, however, called to love others, with a Christlike love. As in our everyday lives, those of us on this mission trip need to rely on God's help to encourage each other and build each other up. We ask the Holy Spirit to work in us the humility that makes it possible for us to respect each other and learn from one another.

Proverbs 27:17 reads, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Does this passage encourage us to get sharp with others, to use cutting words or biting sarcasm? Of course not. Instead, it reminds us that the Lord wants to use each of us to sharpen the faith and lives of others, following his lead and his example. Working together, encouraging each other, we find the Holy Spirit sharpening our understanding, commitment, and resolve. Surrounded by our Savior and his people we will each mature—grow up—in God's grace!

Don't forget: The people you meet while on this mission trip will be watching you! They'll notice the way you interact with others and the way you respond to aggravations and setbacks. This gives you an opportunity to reflect the grace of Jesus! What a great thing!

Here's more help from Paul as we consider meeting new people and building relationships on this trip:

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view . . . We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

2 Corinthians 5:14–20

Our Lord's death and the love that led him to die for us compel us to love and serve others. Everything starts at the foot of our Savior's cross. And that cross compels us to . . .

- ✦ Work from a Christ-centered focus. ("Seek first his kingdom and righteousness." Matthew 6:33)
- ✦ Spend daily time in God's Word, in his very presence. ("You have the words of eternal life." John 6:68)
- ✦ Model our Savior's commitment to prayer. ("Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." Luke 6:12)
- ✦ Surround ourselves with wise, godly people. ("Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise." Proverbs 19:20)
- ✦ Trust the leading of the Holy Spirit in all things. ("But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:13)

Yes, the Spirit will guide us into all truth about Jesus. He'll guide you into the truth about salvation, which comes only through Jesus Christ. He'll guide you into the truth of God's Word as he opens Scripture to you. He'll even guide you into the truth of healthy, Christ-centered, God-pleasing relationships!

Can you relate? By God's grace and empowered by him, you can!

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# *Adventures in Faith*

## *Devotion 6*

### *Sow What?*

I'm hardly an expert on gardening and planting. And evidently, I passed my lack of knowledge on to my children. When my son was quite young, my wife asked him what he'd like to plant in our garden. He immediately had an answer—mashed potatoes! He had great expectations! That's my boy!

A year later, we planted an apple tree in the backyard. When we were done, my son called his grandpa and said, "Pop-pop, we just planted an apple tree, and now we're going to put apples on it!" I envisioned the neighbors watching our family as we attached apples to our sapling with duct tape, staplers, and glue guns!

Funny? Yes, but not so uncommon a picture when it comes to what Jesus called "spiritual fruit," "fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

Since my son and I weren't blessed with green thumbs (those mashed potatoes never saw the light of day), I'm glad Jesus taught some lessons about sowing seeds and bearing fruit. There are quite a few biblical references to this topic, especially in the parables.

We expect great things from mission trips, and rightfully so. As we share God's Word—"sowing the seed," as Jesus described it in several of his parables—we want to see that seed bear fruit. And sometimes, perhaps, we expect it immediately. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does allow us to see that kind of instant miracle. But often, not. When apples don't appear on the tree right away, it's tempting to get frustrated. We may even want to force the matter, trying more aggressively to attach a growing faith to someone else's life.

Matthew 13 includes three "seedy parables," if you will, each using gardening images—the sower, the mustard seed, and the weeds. (You may want to read Matthew 13:1–43 on your own and talk about it with a friend at some point during this trip.)

Jesus also uses garden imagery in John 15:1–8. There, he reminds us that no branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine.

*(Pause to read this passage and talk together about how the truths our Lord teaches in this passage apply to the calling he's placed in your hearts to sow the seed and bear fruit for him on this mission trip.)*

The apostle Paul, himself a tireless missionary and ambassador for Jesus Christ, also used gardening imagery to describe what he and his fellow missionaries did. In his first letter to the believers in the city of Corinth, he corrects the boasting of some people he and his companions had served. They were boasting, "I follow Paul" or "I follow Apollos" (1 Corinthians 3:4).

To this, Paul responds:

*What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God*

*made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.*

*1 Corinthians 3:5–8*

What a great reminder for each of us as we share the saving news of Jesus Christ with others! Not only has God given each of us different gifts, but he's also assigned each of us different tasks. Paul first came to a new mission field and planted the seeds of God's Word. Then the Lord called Apollos to serve these new believers and used him to encourage and strengthen the people in their Spirit-created faith. As Paul put it, Apollos "watered the seed." But as Paul emphasizes, God is the one who creates faith, causes it to grow, and blesses each believer with fruitfulness.

God is using you—in your everyday life at home and on this mission trip, too. He's gifted you uniquely. He's brought you through a variety of experiences that bear testimony to his grace and saving power in your life. He's created saving faith within you and has caused it to grow. And he's assigned to you specific tasks and equipped you for them.

God will work through you—whether through your words or actions or both. But be prepared! You may return home, never knowing exactly how God used you as a seed-sower and faith-encourager. You may be the planter, and the Lord may bring in someone else after you to water the seed. Still another person or mission team may cultivate the ground and pull out weeds. We may never know.

But here's one thing we can know for sure: God makes things grow. We can't create faith. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. In another place, Paul writes, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Jesus asks that we be faithful to his Word and to his calling. Walking in grace, rejoicing in his forgiveness, we follow his lead. We allow him to take our lives and use our hands to sow seeds of grace with us and through us.

So grab a handful of mashed potatoes or an apple—figuratively speaking, of course! Let's go sow some seeds with our Savior.

**Prayer suggestion:** Share a time of "popcorn prayer," allowing praises, thanksgiving, and specific requests to pop up from around the group as individuals are led to contribute.

# *Adventures in Faith*

## *Devotion 7*

### *The End?*

We've heard that all good things must come to an end. But is that true? For example, God's love for us, his favor toward us, and the salvation Jesus won for us on his cross will never end. We certainly thank God for that! And what a joy it has been to share this Good News with others during this trip.

Can we say that all good mission trips must come to an end? We can truthfully say that this mission trip is ending. Or can we? What if we were to look at this experience in a different light? What if we were to think of this trip as simply one leg—one segment—of a lifelong mission trip for which God has commissioned you?

As Christ-followers, we're on an ongoing mission from God, for God, and for the sake of God's eternal kingdom. It's a lifelong journey. We live on the mission field! This particular phase or leg of our God-given, Christ-inspired journey is coming to an end. That reality can stir up a lot of different emotions and feelings. We take time to reflect on what has happened over the past days, and we take time to look forward, too. Be sure to do that! Be sure to find time to process your experiences and emotions. Do it on your own and also with others.

We also want to take time to give thanks for the experiences we've had and for God's faithfulness to us. Take time to thank people—those you met on the trip and those who have been journeying with you since long before it.

Finally, we want to take time to pray for the people we've met and ask the Holy Spirit to bless the seeds that were planted. It's wonderful to look forward to a reunion in heaven one day with those who know Jesus as Savior.

With all this in mind, find a quiet place to talk to the Lord on your own and with other people, too.

*(Allow time for prayer right now, if circumstances will permit it. Otherwise, continue with the devotion and encourage participants to set an intentional time for prayer later.)*

So where do you go from here? As this leg of your lifelong mission trip draws to a close, what's next? One verse from Luke's Gospel cues us into one answer. Luke describes our Lord Jesus in these words:

*When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

*Luke 9:51*

That's a great visual. Moving on from one leg of his mission, Jesus set his face on what his Father laid out before him next. That path would take our Savior on an inexpressibly emotional and physical journey. It would ultimately lead him to a cross on a hill just outside of Jerusalem, a hill called Calvary. Focused on his Father's will, strengthened by his Father's love, and



empowered by his own deep love for us and on our deep need for a Savior, Jesus set his face on Jerusalem. With great resolve he continued his journey.

Jesus knew all this lay ahead. But he also saw beyond the cross. He knew it had been written in stone that he'd see the sun rise on resurrection morning, announcing to those in mourning that the Son had risen, never to "set" again. And Jesus foresaw a reunion forty days after his resurrection, a reunion with his Father in the presence of the holy angels on that day he ascended into heaven. His journey wouldn't end in death; instead, he would give new life to everyone who trusts in him. That's why he set his face on Jerusalem and began his journey to the cross.

We can too. We can look back over the past days, give thanks, and pray. Then we can continue into the next leg of our journey with resolve, looking toward the cross atop Calvary, remembering the sacrifice our Savior offered there. As we do that, the Lord will continue to put more people in our path, more opportunities at our feet.

No, the harsh realities of life won't magically unwind into fairy-tale endings. Unexpected—even unwelcome—changes may still surprise you. Your journey will likely take you through some difficult situations. Yet, nothing will be the same again—because you're not the same. You've been changed by the changeless God.

The one who changed history by hanging around sinners and then hanging on a cross to take those sins away will change how your journey pans out. You'll be strengthened by Jesus Christ, who himself was weakened by the torture and finally lay lifeless in the tomb. You'll receive strength for your journey from the one who crushed Satan's power, ransacked hell, and shattered the grip of death.

Death didn't end our Savior's mission, and it won't end yours, either. One day, though, that mission will drastically change as it takes you into the perfection of heaven. There, no one will need to sow the seeds of God's Word, because we will live in perfection with the Word himself, the Word who became flesh and lived among us. We will, though, continue throughout eternity to praise our Savior, the one who made such wonderful blessings possible for us and for all who will surround us in the eternal joy of our heavenly home.

We have so much to look forward to! We can't begin to imagine it all now, but what a perfect, unending mission trip reunion we'll enjoy, thanks to the one who made it all possible—Jesus Christ, the world's Savior.

So, the answer is no. All good things do not come to an end—not for those who live in union with the one who has no beginning and no end!

**Prayer suggestion:** Incorporate the prayer suggestion above if time and your circumstances will allow. Then ask everyone to pray Psalm 117 aloud with you as a closing exclamation of praise and thanksgiving.

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