

A PRAYER
DEVOTIONAL
FOR THE
NATIONS

AROUND *the* WORLD


One Hope
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AROUND *the* WORLD

A PRAYER DEVOTIONAL FOR THE NATIONS

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Today’s Decisions Could Have a Great Impact Tomorrow

Welcome to your grand adventure! Through these devotions, we will travel around the world exploring truth from God's Word. Our guides will be friends from the diverse network of OneHope global partners. Their geographic areas may vary, but they are all unified with the purpose of sharing God's Word.

Journey with us for the next thirty-one days on a tour through the Scriptures!

Enjoy the excursion,

Your friends at OneHope

Venezuela: Land of Grace

The name Venezuela literally means “little Venice.” The name is attributed to Amerigo Vespucci, who would have thought of the Italian city when he saw the indigenous palafitos suspended over the waters of Lake Maracaibo in the west of the country. Venezuela is also commonly known as tierra de gracia, or “land of grace,” as Christopher Columbus called it upon his arrival at the Orinoco Delta in 1498 during his third expedition.

Venezuela has the largest proved oil reserves in the world, the eighth-largest natural gas reserves, and the sixteenth of gold. Its territory covers extremely varied climatic and biotic regions, which include the Caribbean coast, the Andean highlands, the Amazon rain forest, the Orinoco Delta, plains, deserts, and part of the Guiana massif.

The current Venezuelan population is the product of a strong ethnic miscegenation and a very high margin of cultural syncretism. Venezuelans have always been known as kind, cheerful, frank, and open. At one time Venezuela was considered to have one of the happiest populations on the planet.

However, for a few decades this “land of grace” has suffered the serious consequences of removing its eyes from the Creator, its maker, to serve other gods. In 2016 and 2017, Venezuela was the country with the largest economic dip, according to data from the International Monetary Fund, displacing nations such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen. It has become a refugee-generating country, a phenomenon

that until now only appeared in territories in conflict. Currently, Venezuela meets all the characteristics of a nation in post-war chaos because of the social breakdown due to economic instability, lack of available health care, and food shortages.

In Deuteronomy 30:19–20, God tells us:

“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! You can make this choice by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the LORD, you will live long in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

God has given us free will for every aspect of our lives. Love, obedience, and commitment to Christ are the keys to living a life of blessing. The Venezuelan population is learning that even if they have natural resources, they can fall to ruin by choosing disobedience and breaking God’s heart.

Life is a gift from God, and His Word is full of advice and instructions that urge us to seek and enjoy His love and blessings every day. Let us not allow temptations, pain, and suffering to cause us to choose the curse and fall into sin.

The Bible also says that where sin abounded, grace abounded even more (Romans 5:20). Therefore, no matter how many times we fall, God’s grace is always available to give us a new opportunity to choose the right thing—the blessing.

While the Venezuelan population learns this principle and decides to take the right path and return to be that wonderful “land of grace,” we invite you to pray for the thousands of children and young people who are living in poverty, malnourished, dropping out of school, surrounded by violence, and without families. Above all, pray that their hearts turn to God and that each day they decide to live in obedience to Christ.

Prayer Requests

- **Pray for the growing humanitarian crisis and current political situation.**
- **Pray that the education system will be restored and improved.**
- **Pray that the Lord continues to advance His kingdom through the witness of His church.**

Kyrgyzstan: A Country of Mountains, Walnuts, and Silk Roads

Kyrgyzstan is frequently called the “Switzerland of Central Asia” since it is, first of all, a country of mountains. The land is a part of the Tian Shan mountain region, which covers 80 percent of the country. Its highest point is Jengish Chokusu (“Victory Peak”), one of two mountain peaks that are more than seven thousand meters high. More than forty peaks are more than six thousand meters, which makes the area attractive for tourists, especially climbers.

In addition, Kyrgyzstan is rich with rare earth metals. One might even say the people of Kyrgyzstan “walk on money.” However, it is one of the poorest countries in the former Soviet Union and Europe, second only to Tajikistan. This is a reminder that we may live poor spiritual lives because we have abandoned the treasures we have in Christ, such as love, joy, gentleness, peace, and faith.

In contrast with the Kyrgyz mountains, the southern region of the country almost resembles a fairy forest. Kyrgyzstan has the largest collection of walnut trees in the world, and the beauty of the forest and freshness of the air draw many tourists. It is a place



that makes people feel something special in their hearts as they enjoy the splendor of nature.

Even biblical characters visited peaceful, natural places. We read in Song of Solomon 6:11, *“I went down to the grove of walnut trees and out to the valley to see the new spring growth.”* In this peaceful place in the Kyrgyz mountains, we can walk with God and catch a glimpse of what the Garden of Eden may have looked like.

Most people who know anything about Kyrgyzstan and the Stans associate them with the Silk Roads. It is true that these territories were full of thoroughfares from Europe to China. The roads ran through local settlements, many of which were nomadic camps. For a merchant or a pilgrim, it was a temporary place, but for the locals it was home.

This too can serve as a reminder that wherever we are, we are here only in temporary settlements. We are destined for the eternal city. As Philippians 3:20 says, *“We are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.”*



Prayer Request

- Praise the Lord that several thousand Kyrgyz have accepted Christ in the previous three decades. But many have not developed a solid foundation in the faith. Please pray they will grow in their relationships with Christ.

Facts About Kyrgyzstan

- The most famous national drink is horse milk called kumiss.
- The national hat for males, called ak kalpak or “the white hat,” reflects Kyrgyzstan’s snow-capped peaks.
- There are just twenty-nine and a half residents for each square kilometer of land, making Kyrgyzstan one of the world’s least crowded countries.



Unity in Diversity

If Kenya were a collage, pieced together from the different tribes, cultures, and traditions that exist within our borders, then we would no doubt be the most beautiful piece of art that was ever made. A quick study of the forty-two tribes that call this country home will reveal a sense of pride, love, and community. This, no doubt, brings glory to God.

Our diversity may not have worked for us at times in the past; however, it is not beyond God to use our brokenness for His glory. In celebrating Kenya's beauty, I would like to highlight a few points the Bible illustrates on unity.

God expects us to be united.

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

—Ephesians 4:11-13

Every Christian is part of the body of Christ and is called to help bring non-Christians into the body. The unity mentioned in Ephesians will continue to grow until the end of time. At no time should we be divided. This is God's expectation of us—togetherness until the end of time.

Forgiveness and love are key ingredients in bringing unity.

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.

—Colossians 3:13-14

In order to move as one unit, we must forgive one another then look at one another through Christ's lens. The early church demonstrated this perfectly by living together; caring for one another; looking out for the poor, widows, and orphans; and sharing meals *“with great joy and generosity”* (Acts 2:45–46). What does loving one another entail?

- **Forgiveness:** The pure nature of love does not allow us to carry grudges. This can only be achieved by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- **Radical generosity:** This calls on us to give over and above what we are comfortable giving and to reach out beyond our comfort zones to uplift those who need it.
- **Authenticity:** When we love genuinely, we will not have any cards hidden under the table. We will be open to rebuke and correction.

Unity and peace go hand in hand.

Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

—Ephesians 4:3

There can be no unity when arms are raised against one another. The Bible talks of “peace, which exceeds anything we can understand” (Phil. 4:7). This may sound impossible, but it is available to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this peace that will bring unity.

Jesus must be at the center of everything.

We cannot talk about peace, leadership, and good governance without referencing Christ. He is the head of His body, the church. He existed before everything and holds all creation together (Colossians 1:17). With this picture of Christ, we should turn to Him whenever we are praying because He knows and sees beyond our understanding.

Whether in the church, government, a country, or even a family, unity can only be genuine if it comes from God. His desire is that we operate as one body and continually work to lead others to be part of this body. He has gifted us all differently and expects us to use these gifts for His glory by uplifting one another, bringing hope, healing, and restoration, and promoting oneness.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for unity in the body of Christ, especially among church leadership.
- Pray the younger generation will embrace godly leadership and be at the forefront of praying for their leaders.

Kintsugi: The Glory of Brokenness and Healing

Artisanship is a key part of Japanese culture both in the past and today. Whether they are making sushi or kimonos, artisans will spend years, even decades, repeating the same task in order to perfect their art. The same is true of pottery; an apprentice will serve at a master's house for years to learn how to make a worthy vase or bowl.

But like all material things, pottery breaks. You can imagine the shock of anyone who accidentally breaks his treasured rice bowl. What would you do in this situation? Would you throw away this masterpiece made by a famous potter who had trained for decades? Or would you try to glue it back together and pretend like nothing happened?

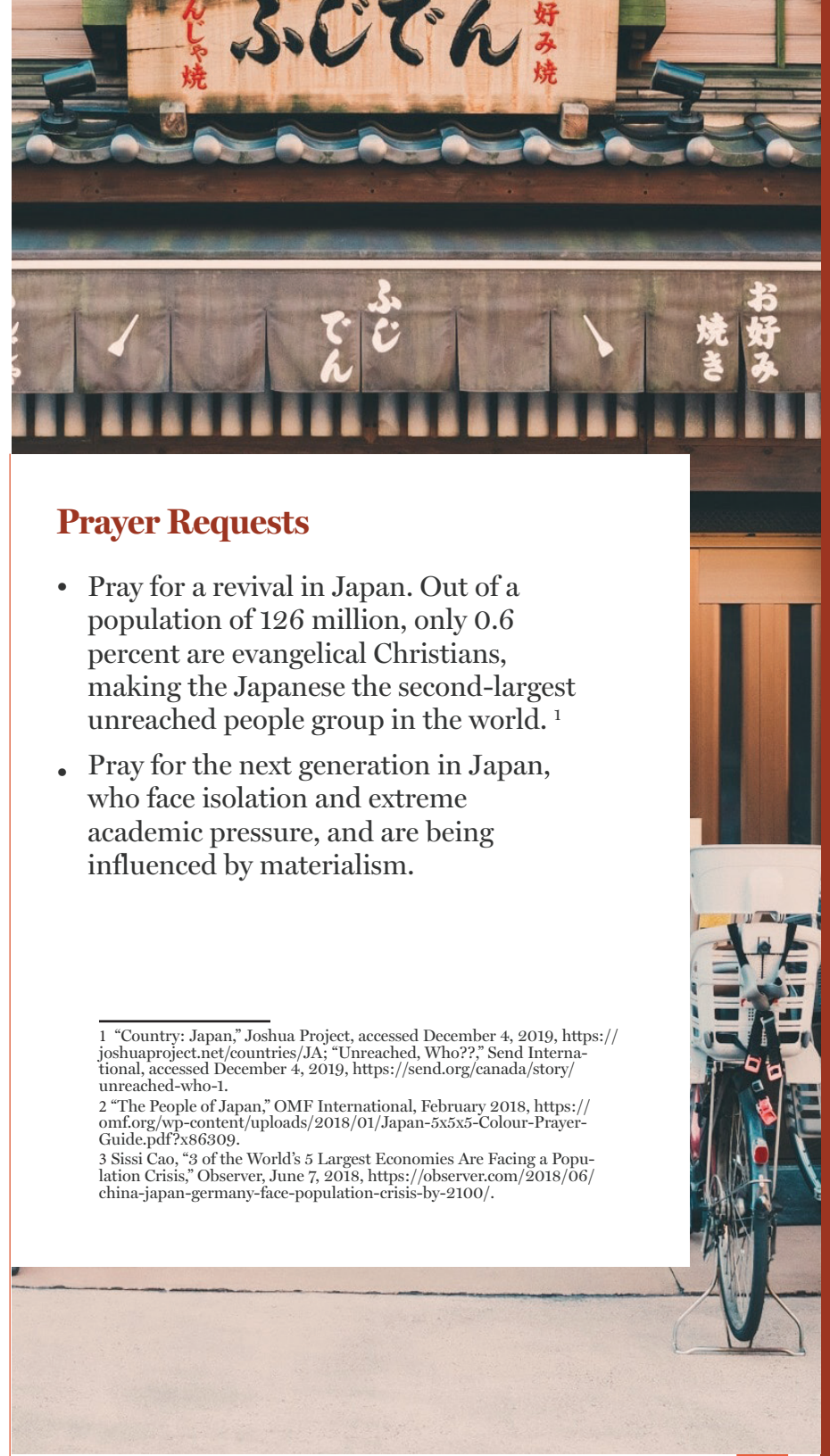
What if there was another way? In Japan it is called kintsugi. It is a method of repairing pottery using golden lacquer to mend the broken pieces. Through kintsugi, a piece of pottery, beautiful but broken, can be transformed into something even more beautiful. In the Bible, God is described as a Potter in several places: Isaiah 29:16, Isaiah 45:9, and Jeremiah 18. He is our Creator; we belong to Him, and He can make us, or recreate us, as He wishes. In the same vein, I believe God is the One who does kintsugi, healing and restoring broken vessels. As the psalmist said, “*He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds*” (Psalm 147:3).

Not only does God restore us from our brokenness, but He takes us to another level of glory. For example, Jesus made Peter, a fisherman, His disciple, yet Peter denied Jesus before He was crucified. In John 21, Jesus healed, forgave, and restored Peter—not to being a fisherman again or even just a disciple, but to being the rock upon which Jesus would build His church (Matthew 16:18).

We see another example when we look at God's creation. God created the world, and “*it was very good*” (Genesis 1:31). He put man and woman in a flourishing garden. Unfortunately, sin and death have tainted creation, and creation awaits its restoration (Romans 8:21).

When Creation is restored, it will not return to the state it was in on the seventh day of Creation. The Bible tells us, rather, that God will create a new heaven and new earth so glorious their beauty can't be summarized here. You'll just have to read Revelation 21 and 22.

Let's look at one final example—Jesus. Although God revealed His glory through Jesus in His earthly ministry, after Christ's brutal death on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead, and His body was transformed into something glorious, though the nail marks from His crucifixion were still in His hands.



Kintsugi gives us insight into two biblical principles. The first is that when God heals and restores our brokenness, He doesn't bring us back to where we were originally, but instead takes us forward into a new realm of glory.

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later.

—Romans 8:18

The second principle, especially exhibited by the nail marks in Jesus' resurrected body, is that our past is part of us, even our broken past. Kintsugi doesn't conceal that the pottery was broken. Rather, it acknowledges that the pottery was broken but turns our attention to the glittering golden lacquer that restored it.

Going back to an earlier question, What do you do with broken pottery? Or, rather, what do you do if you are the broken pottery? Are you going to live in your brokenness without seeking healing or perhaps throw yourself out? Are you going to try to glue yourself back together, pretending that you've never been hurt or that you've lived a flawless life? I hope you will go before your Maker as a broken vessel and ask Him to not only restore you but also make you golden.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for a revival in Japan. Out of a population of 126 million, only 0.6 percent are evangelical Christians, making the Japanese the second-largest unreached people group in the world.¹
- Pray for the next generation in Japan, who face isolation and extreme academic pressure, and are being influenced by materialism.

¹ "Country: Japan," Joshua Project, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/JA>; "Unreached, Who??" Send International, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://send.org/canada/story/unreached-who-1>.

² "The People of Japan," OMF International, February 2018, <https://omf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Japan-5x5x5-Colour-Prayer-Guide.pdf?x86309>.

³ Sissi Cao, "3 of the World's 5 Largest Economies Are Facing a Population Crisis," Observer, June 7, 2018, <https://observer.com/2018/06/china-japan-germany-face-population-crisis-by-2100/>.

Peru:

The Cradle of the Incas

Peru is famous for its incredible history and impressive landscapes. It was the cradle of the Inca Empire, a civilization that left numerous cultural monuments, great palaces and temples, excellent roads, and sophisticated aqueducts.

From the year 1532 Peru was dominated by the Spaniards, and they took most of the wealth of the Inca Empire. In 1821, Peru gained independence.

The main attraction and pride of Peruvians is the legendary Inca city of Machu Picchu, a site of Inca ruins located in the Andes at 2,450 meters above sea level; its name means “old top.” In 2007, Machu Picchu was declared one of the new seven wonders of the world.

Peru has around thirty-two million inhabitants, and it is divided into three regions: the arid coast, highland, jungle. Seventy-six percent of the population identifies with the Catholic religion, 14 percent are Evangelical, 5 percent are atheist, and another 4.8 percent are agnostic.¹

Just as Peru was oppressed for many years, we may find ourselves in the same situation in our personal lives. But in Christ we can find freedom. Jesus said, *“So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free”* (John 8:36).

This verse motivates us to be free. At some point we may find ourselves slaves to some sin, overwhelmed, or feeling out of control due to our circumstances. God is there to meet us and rescue us. All we have to do is believe Him. That is why it is



important to know Jesus. When you know Jesus, you know the truth. And when you know the truth, the truth will set you free (v. 32). And when you acquire freedom, you can then help others find freedom in Christ.

I encourage you to continue announcing the gospel where you are. As Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4:18, *“The Spirit of the LORD is upon [you], for he has anointed [you] to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent [you] to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free.”*

Prayer Requests

- Pray that even more children will be reached with the Word of God.
- Pray for immigrant families who have come to Peru in search of better opportunities.

¹ Timothy J. Demy and Jeffrey M. Shaw, Religion and Contemporary Politics: A Global Encyclopedia (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 477.

Freedom and Faith in the Face of Fear

The United States of America has a global reputation for being the country of freedom, opportunity, and prosperity. Our national economy has grown so that unemployment is the lowest it has been in fifty years.¹ The number of reported violent crimes nationwide has plummeted since the early 1990s.² And the percentage of young people pursuing a college degree in our country is steadily increasing each year.

Despite these important causes for celebration, our country is currently facing what many are labeling a crisis of mental health. According to the nonprofit organization Mental Health America, more than forty million American adults suffer from an anxiety disorder of some kind.³ The numbers are even more striking when we look specifically at children and youth, many of whom are experiencing struggles with mental health from younger ages.

We are, one could say, haunted by a spirit of fear. We feel bound by it, even paralyzed, and unable to escape its hold on our lives. Experts point to a number of factors that contribute to anxiety disorders, from biology and genetics to eating habits and social circumstances. While these are all legitimate things to consider in an attempt to overcome the anxiety epidemic, very little attention is given to the theological diagnosis and treatment plan for our fears.

In the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we gain some insight into the problem of human fear. In Genesis 3 we read that Adam and Eve's first response to God after they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was to fear (v. 10). The sin and brokenness in our lives led to guilt, shame, and isolation from God, the source of life. All of those things produce fear: Fear of never being welcomed back into the home God made for us. Fear

of condemnation or judgment for all the bad things we have done. Fear that God cannot and will not love us because of our failures. Fear that we will not live up to the expectations of others.

The Bible is full of good news for those of us who feel haunted by fear. Paul told the community in Rome, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because of this, he said, "So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father'" (v. 15). We no longer need to fear death, judgment, or any of the consequences of our sin, because we are God's children, and God has shown His love for us by sending His Son to deliver us from sin. The disciple John wrote, "Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18). The perfect love he describes is the love of God supremely revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. (See Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4–9; and 1 John 4:10.)

There is hope for those who long to be free from bondage to fear. God wants to deliver us from the power of sin, but He also wants to deliver us from the fear that controls our lives. And we want to replace that fear with a faith that believes He is good.

Certainly, many people in my country and others around the world need the assistance of medical professionals to help them overcome the crippling effects of anxiety and fear. There should be no condemnation associated with seeking that help to be able to learn to walk in the full freedom Jesus came to give. Surely, the testimony of the psalmist can be the same for everyone: "I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4).

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the mental health of people in the United States and the world, that they may receive the help and support they need.

¹ "U.S. Unemployment Rate Falls to 50-Year Low," WhiteHouse.gov, October 4, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/articles/u-s-unemployment-rate-falls-50-year-low/>.

² Nathan James, "Recent Violent Crime Trends in the United States," Congressional Research Service, June 20, 2018, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45236.pdf>.

³ "Anxiety," Mental Health America, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.mhanational.org/conditions/anxiety>.

Facts About the Netherlands

- Tulip bulbs were eaten during World War II due to food shortages.
- We have twenty-three million bicycles with seventeen million people.
- As many as 90 percent to 93 percent of Dutch people can hold a conversation in English.¹
- The tap water in the Netherlands is the cleanest in Europe.² It is of the highest standard and is from natural, protected sources.
- Most children bike to school by themselves or walk with their friends because it's safe.

¹ Alexandra Huetter, "Why Are the Dutch So Good at Speaking English?" DutchReview, January 28, 2017, <https://dutchreview.com/expat/learn-dutch/dutchies-so-good-at-speaking-english/>.

² "General Information About Amsterdam," AmsterdamTourist.info, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.amsterdamtourist.info/about-amsterdam/>.



Prayer Requests

- Pray that the church will be bold to bring the whole gospel.
- Pray that Christians will know who they are in Christ and realize that they actually have good news to bring.

The Power of “Being”

There are millions in the Netherlands who need to hear the good news to find meaning, truth, and peace again. So many societies hardly recognize the value of a life lived in the existential fullness of faith. The challenges brought to Europeans by secularization and changing cultural and social realities should be seen as a challenge and inspiration for action. Christians can see it as an opportunity to present a dynamic presence in the environment “outside” the church.

For Europe today, evangelism is a question of being rather than doing. Individuals participating in transforming European societies by powerfully living out their faith is the best way to see a true and much needed re-evangelization of this continent.

Now is the time for believers to be intentional in Europe—to rediscover what it means to be a Christian in this region of the world today, addressing issues that will bring meaning in people’s lives again.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 the apostle Paul writes about the power of being:

Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

The example has been set. Now we must practice this critical means of evangelism.

Cedars of the Lord

Lebanon is known for its mountain ranges, giving the nation a unique landscape compared to other Arab countries in the region. It is also known for its food, like tabbouleh salad and hummus. Yet Lebanon is probably most famous for its cedar trees, which fill its mountain tops and is the emblem on the country's flag. In the district of Barouk, the cedar trees are known as the “cedars of the Lord.” There are two distinct elements concerning these trees that earned them this title and from which we can draw valuable lessons for our lives.

First, like most trees, when a cedar tree starts growing, it is generally wide at the bottom and spiky at the top. However, as these cedar trees age (some taking thousands of years), they start to flatten at the top. As grand as the cedars of Lebanon are, they remain in total reverence of their Creator. The older the cedar tree, the flatter it becomes at the top, which can be seen as an act of worship and submission to its Creator.

When Job was struggling to make sense of all the calamities he was facing, he concluded that *“wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to the old”* (Job 12:12).

Second, most people have heard the expression “dangling fruit.” Yet this does not apply to the cedar tree because, unlike other trees whose fruit dangles from its branches, the cedar's branches hold its fruit upright, much like a person offering a piece of fruit to a friend. According to locals, this reflects the cedar tree offering its fruit back to its Creator—an acknowledgment of who gets the credit for the fruit.

The writer of Psalm 92:12–5 aptly proclaimed:

But the godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the LORD's own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. They will declare, “The LORD is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him!”

Both pictures of the cedars of the Lord reflect a posture of submission and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Submission to our Lord is a matter of understanding that all blessings and flourishing are from the abundant grace of God. We must acknowledge that the fruit of our labor is not a reflection of our ability to be successful but rather of our Lord's abundant love for those He has created.

Prayer Requests

- Currently child marriage remains legal, domestic violence is not criminalized, and there are not strong efforts to stop human trafficking. This puts women at great risk of exploitation in the country.
- Pray for the 1.5 million refugees in Lebanon.¹

¹ “Lebanon Events of 2018,” Human Rights Watch, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/lebanon>.

A New Thing

China is a diverse country with immense cultural variety. The people in the northeast are known to be super open and outgoing; the people in the southeast tend to be soft-spoken and careful with their words. People in the southwest, which has a very humid climate, enjoy spicy delicacies all the time.

Over the past four decades, there have been extraordinary achievements in our economic development, but people's hearts have been empty. The growth of metropolitan cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou stands in stark contrast with the southwest mountain areas. Due to parents' need to work in the cities throughout the year, there are sixty million children in the countryside with grandparents or by themselves in the rural areas.

China adapts to new ideas and technology at a rapid pace. While enjoying all the benefits of urbanization, families are being stretched. Virtues such as hard work, harmony, and kindness have long been valued, but with fast urbanization, these traditional values are being challenged.

Since the 1980s there has been great revival across the country. Many church-planting partners evolved from gathering in individual apartments to renting or buying a church venue in office buildings, and there are also many megachurches in the big cities with congregations of roughly five hundred to a thousand. However, in recent years, urban megachurches have had to make swift changes to their church strategies.



In the Chinese language the word crisis literally means “danger and opportunity.” With the changes, we have seen many church leaders have the vision to make an impact in the communities where they are located.

For I am about to do something new. - Isaiah 43:19



Facts About China

- The name China 中国 (zhōng guó) literally means middle or central country, based on the traditional view that China is the center of the civilized world.
- Red is a popular color in Chinese culture, symbolizing luck, joy, and happiness.
- Giving red envelopes (called hóng bāo) is a custom at Chinese New Year. Red envelopes always contain money and are mainly given to kids from their parents and grandparents.
- Before their first year of college begins, Chinese students participate in a mandatory military training that is at least two-weeks-long.
- Ping-pong is the most popular sport in China.
- Han is the majority ethnicity in China, with fifty-five minority populations.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for our brothers and sisters to stand strong and courageous, knowing that greater things are yet to come!
- The Chinese church needs new, innovative ways to reach the next generation.

The Grace of Kindness

When a visitor disembarks from the airplane and enters the arrival hall of the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, the first thing that attracts his attention is a big portrait of a young lady smiling broadly. She is holding a pot of water and a calabash, and the word akwaaba is boldly written on the portrait.

Akwaaba means “welcome” in the Akan language of Ghana, and this beautiful smile is a warm welcome to visitors to this country that is said to have the friendliest people in the world. A visitor to any home in Ghana is first offered water to drink, which tells that visitor he is welcome. Friendship is then built, and a trusted relationship develops, thereafter yielding lasting rewards.

Kindness and friendliness have become a cultural distinctive of the Ghanaian people, and this characteristic is aptly described as “proverbial Ghanaian hospitality.” This cultural norm is something all Christians are commanded to do. Scripture exhorts us to show kindness to everyone who comes our way, including strangers. One such Scripture text is in Hebrews 13:1–2:

Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

Hospitality is a great Christian virtue that must be inculcated into our daily lives as Christians. When we show kindness to people, especially strangers, we win the hearts of the people we witness to and bring them to the saving grace of God. We also receive rewards from God.

In Genesis chapters 18 and 19 Abraham received three strangers and showed them kindness. The three visitors who received such warm hospitality from Abraham were on a mission to announce that God's promise to give Abraham an heir would soon be fulfilled. They also warned Abraham about the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and God's plan to punish the two cities. Abraham's kindness to the visitors brought him rewards.

1. God not only confirmed His promise to give Abraham an heir, but He also told him he would have a child within a year. The promise was fulfilled when Sarah gave birth to Isaac one year later.
2. Abraham had the rare privilege of having advance knowledge of God's plan to pour out His wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah. Because God told him what was to happen to the two cities, Abraham was able to intercede for God's mercy for his nephew Lot, who was living in the region.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for the Ghanaian church to develop a missions vision for the unreached villages of the north and beyond.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all deeply influenced by our culture. We may hear our neighbors, coworkers, or fellow church members say bad things about people of another background, tribe, or skin color. How deeply are we influenced by such negative ideas? How do we react when someone makes fun of our nationality or some part of our culture?

In the Book of Ruth, Boaz went to inspect his fields during the harvest, and he noticed Ruth, a foreign woman from the land of Moab. Boaz became concerned about Ruth's situation as a foreigner. Boaz showed respect and hospitality to this woman and eventually married her. God rewarded Boaz's kindness to a stranger. After Ruth and Boaz were married, she gave birth to a son named Obed, who was the grandfather of King David, who was in the lineage of the Messiah. (See Ruth 2-4.) God honored Boaz's kindness and brought honor and fame to him and his family.

Like Boaz, we must respect the rights and dignity of the poor and strangers. And when we are kind, we may be able to help all sorts of people learn the truth and see that God loves them very much. One powerful way to proclaim Christ is to take a stand against practices in our communities that disrespects and ignores strangers.

We can show kindness to strangers by warmly greeting them in the spirit of akwaaba and showing them the love of God. God will in turn show His kindness to us and reward us as He rewarded Abraham and Sarah, Boaz, and many other persons recorded in the Bible.

Come and Have Breakfast



When you think about Australia, what comes to mind? Perhaps it's our beaches and our food. There's an oft-quoted figure that 85 percent of Australians live within 50 kilometers of the coast. We certainly love the beach, especially in summer, and if you ever try to set up a meeting or run an event in January, people look at you like you're a bit crazy and might say to you, "Mate, it's summer; I'll be at the beach!"

I've often been asked by overseas friends what our national cuisine is. That's a hard question to answer. Maybe it's some snaggers (sausages) and steak sizzling away on the outdoor barbeque with the mouth-watering odor wafting across the neighborhood. Or perhaps it's pizza. But we also love our pasta, our Asian-inspired cuisine, and Mexican food. And don't forget our English-influenced love of fish and chips!

Actually, we just love food.

If you go to one of our beaches on a summer evening, you'll always find groups of people eating fish and chips as seagulls hover close by, sneakily trying to steal a hot chip or two. This familiar scene reminds me of one of my favorite "Jesus stories," which is found in Gospel of John in the New Testament. A group of Jesus' close friends have decided to go fishing as they try to come to terms with Jesus' death a few days prior. These "professional" fishermen go through the whole night without catching a single fish in their nets, and as dawn breaks they hear a voice calling from the beach asking if they've caught any fish.

I often imagine how I would have responded to that question if I were in their shoes. They graciously replied that they hadn't caught any fish, to which the distant figure suggests they drop their nets on the other side of the boat. They do this, and their nets become full of fish to the point of it being in danger of ripping. We read these words in verses John 21:11–13:

So Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore. There were 153 large fish, and yet the net hadn't torn. "Now come and have some breakfast!" Jesus said. None of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Then Jesus served them the bread and the fish.

Those simple words, "Come and have some breakfast," are an invitation to share a meal but not in a fast-food way. Rather, He was calling them to eat together in a long, unhurried way that is more about the deep, rich conversations than it is about the food itself.

Australians pride themselves in being portrayed as laconic, relaxed, easygoing people, who never get too stressed and respond to challenges and hardships by saying, "She'll be all right, mate." But the truth is much darker. Suicide rates for fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds is at its highest rate in ten years¹, and suicide is the leading cause of death among young Australians.² Roughly forty-one thousand young people between

¹ Jessica Longbottom, "Suicide Rates for Young Australians Highest in 10 Years, Researchers Call for New Prevention Strategies," ABC, November 29, 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-30/system-for-suicide-prevention-rates-highest-10-years/8076780>.

² "Deaths in Australia," Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, July 17, 2019, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/life-expectancy-death/deaths-in-australia/contents/leading-causes-of-death>



the ages of twelve and seventeen have made a suicide attempt, and a third of all deaths among young men is due to suicide.³

There are myriad reasons we have this crisis in Australia, and one of them is the loss of community. We are a lonely people who are crying out for authentic relationships, for someone to say to us, “Come and have some breakfast.” That invitation from Christ is just as powerful today as it was for the disciples. We, the church, must be a people who will sit and listen to others and invite them into a relationship with Christ. This is what we must be doing.

³ Longbottom, “Suicide Rates for Young Australians Highest in 10 Years, Researchers Call for New Prevention Strategies.”



Facts About Australia

- Australia has almost three times as many sheep as people.¹
- Three percent of Australians have never heard of Jesus.²
- At 5,614 kilometers (3,488 miles), Australia’s Dingo Fence is one of the longest structures in the world.³
- Forty-nine percent of Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas.⁴
- The highest kangaroo jump ever recorded is a whopping thirty feet in a single leap!

¹ “Interesting Facts About Australia’s 25,000,000 Population,” Australian Bureau of Statistics, August 7, 2018, <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/Interesting+Facts+about+Australia%E2%80%99s+population>.

² Faith and Belief in Australia (Baulkham Hills, Australia: McCrindle Research Pty Ltd, 2017), 42; accessed November 24, 2019, https://mccrindle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Faith-and-Belief-in-Australia-Report_McCrindle_2017.pdf.

³ “Dingo Fences,” Wikipedia, accessed December 4, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dingo_Fence#cite_note-UNL-1.

⁴ “Census Reveals a Fast Changing, Culturally Diverse Nation,” Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 27, 2017, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>.

Prayer Requests

- Pray that the church in Australia would model what it means to be a community of caring.
- Pray that believers would be a listening people who draw others into a relationship with a God who loves them and wants them to understand the bigger story they are a part of—a story that can give their life meaning and significance.



India: An Expression of the Diversity of God's Creation

Vast skies, majestic mountains, crystal waters, rugged terrains, hot deserts, and gorgeous plains—a myriad of stimulating sights, sounds, and smells encompass the essence of India. But the highlight for many visitors are the vibrant cultures, languages, food, attire, and character that emanate from India's 1.3 billion people. India is a country where love is the essence of life. It is a country with a variety of nationalities and religious beliefs, and that boasts more than 121 languages spoken by ten thousand or more people.¹ Yet despite the vastness of the nation, people still live together in unity and peace.

India has a strong sense of mystical history, and of all we cherish so deeply is the blessing that is unity within such a vast diversity in this country. In the same way, we as the body of Christ need to be faithful to our calling to demonstrate unity in diversity. We must learn to unite as one to bring forth God's kingdom on earth.

This is how we will fulfill the purpose He has for us and for the world. We must stand united in the truth that we are growing into people who are helping make this world more meaningful and Christlike. To do this, we must set aside our everyday patterns of thinking so we can look at things from an entirely new perspective.

The apostle Paul contrasts Christian and non-Christian responses to the gospel. He writes that there is a distinct difference between the one who perceives the goodness of God and the one who perceives the wrath of God in all he does.

But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing.

—2 Corinthians 2:14-15



¹ "General Note" in "Data on Language and Mother Tongue," Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, accessed November 23, 2019, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/General%20Note.pdf>.

The peculiarity of “Indian-ness” can be compared to Paul’s reference to the aroma of Christ in all of us. We come from different walks of life, but the one thing that will define and unite us no matter where we go is the aroma of Christ. Are we spreading the fragrance of Christ? Are we being the influencers in our societies? When Christians come together in one accord, mighty miracles are bestowed on nations. The God of all creation set forth His love to have His kingdom come through His chosen people. Be that “fragrance.”

The Bible says the unity of the church in the last days will be a sign of Christ’s coming. So let us not fail to recognize that we are all different yet united under our God-given purpose. God always leads us in triumph and through us diffuses the knowledge of Himself in every place, for we are to God the fragrance of Christ. So, how can we diffuse the fragrance of Christ? We must diffuse God’s love in a gentle, loving way and not be overbearing with our presentation of Christ. We need to be fragrant, not flagrant.

God sits back and looks at His creation and still says, *“It is good,”* just as He did in the beginning. It is good because He gave His Son to die for us to right everything that was wrong, and now there is hope. Let us lift up our eyes and see what God sees—1.3 billion people in India alone with a potential to live in the light of truth. *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). India beams with pride, flying the flag of modernity, democracy, and religiosity, yet the search for the true Savior and life eternal is constantly on their mind.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the truth of the gospel to reach the youth. Almost half of India’s population is under the age of twenty.¹
- Pray for an end to social injustice and oppression. India is a land of tremendous need. People suffer from caste discrimination, female infanticide, bride burning, slavery, human trafficking, child labor, and more. Pray for an end to these injustices.
- Pray that India’s unreached will be encounter Jesus. There are still thousands of people groups in India that have never heard the name of Jesus, making India the most unreached nation in the world.
- Pray for strength amid persecution. India is ranked in the top twenty-five countries where Christians are facing the most persecution.

¹ “Age Structure and Marital Status,” Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, accessed November 23, 2019, http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/age_structure_and_marital_status.aspx.

Facts About India

- Most people are shocked to discover there are 140 million orphans worldwide¹, and at least 25 million of them are here in India.²
- India is home to over 30 percent of almost 385 million children living in extreme poverty.³
- Millions gathered at the 2013 Kumbh Mela religious festival,⁴ which has been described as the “world’s largest congregation of religious pilgrims.”⁵ The crowds have ranged from 30 million to 120 million pilgrims.⁶

¹ “Orphans,” UNICEF, updated June 16, 2017, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_45279.html.

² Aakanksha Sinha et al., “Exploring Factors Associated with Educational Outcomes for Orphan and Abandoned Children in India,” *Global Social Welfare* 3, no. 1 (March 2016): 23–32, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4830269/>.

³ “Ending Extreme Poverty: A Focus on Children,” UNICEF and World Bank Group, October 2016, https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Ending_Extreme_Poverty_A_Focus_on_Children_Oct_2016.pdf.

⁴ “Kumbh Mela Festival,” BBC, February 13, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21443282>.

⁵ “The Maha Kumbh Mela 2001,” Embassy of India, accessed November 24, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20100403014350/http://www.indianembassy.org/new/maha_kumbh_mela_2001.htm.

⁶ “Prayag Kumbh Mela,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prayag_Kumbh_Mela.

Ukraine: The Breadbasket of Europe

Ukraine is Europe's second-largest country and has a rich history, great food, and people with a survival spirit. Numerous wars, slavery, and the absence of national independence could not stop Ukrainians in their fight for a meaningful life. Ukraine became home to the first university in Eastern Europe in 1576, and in 1710 it became one of the first nations in Europe to create a state constitution. Ukrainian folk songs became the national heritage because of its melodic language. One such song is widely known under the name "Carol of the Bells."

Ukraine was once a breadbasket of Europe because it produced 25 percent of all agricultural output in the former Soviet Union. For Ukrainians, bread was always a symbol of well-being and prosperity; it was considered a gift from God.

There is a common ancient tradition in Ukraine where a guest is offered bread and salt as part of a welcome ceremony. The guest breaks off a small piece, dips it into the salt, and bows his head in thanks before eating the bread. The significance of bread also is reflected in the Ukrainian national flag, which is blue on the top and yellow on the bottom. The blue stands for the sky, and the yellow is the symbol of the many wheat fields.

While Ukraine has great, fertile lands, it is a shock to realize that almost four million Ukrainians died because of a famine. Bread became the main symbol of life when millions were starved to death.

Ukrainians survived and faced another national disaster sadly known as Chernobyl, the world's worst nuclear power plant disaster. It caused disastrous pollution over the agriculture lands, affecting the health of the whole nation.

National independence brought peace and stability, but from 2014 to present day, Ukraine struggles. The cost of a loaf of bread became the marker of economic downturn.

Bread often symbolizes life and prosperity. Jesus also called Himself the Bread of Life, using this metaphor so people would realize that He is the only source of life. People often struggle to obtain an abundance of food and meaning in life. But the greatest need of every nation is not physical or economical wealth but rather spiritual prosperity. Jesus says:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. —John 6:35

For many years, God, by His grace, has been at work restoring the Ukrainian nation—restoring the land and restoring the hearts of people. During the years since its declaration of independence in 1991, Ukraine has become the Eastern European center of spiritual growth and evangelical outreach, having the highest overall number of evangelical Christians with vibrant faith in the region. A large number of missionaries in Russia and Central Asia are Ukrainians.

Ukraine displays an incredible religious freedom despite the many years it endured atheist propaganda. God is challenging Ukrainian Christians to be "*the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden*" (Matthew 5:14) by spreading the good news.

In the nearly thirty years since Ukraine's independence, a great number of churches have been planted, seminaries and Bible colleges have been opened, missionaries have been called, and Christian books have been printed. Nowadays, Ukraine resembles the Antioch church in the Book of Acts, being the missionary center for the surrounding countries of the former Soviet Union. But God is not done yet. He is still at work raising up new generations of ministers and building up the Ukrainian nation.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for Ukraine to seek God as the only way to satisfy their spiritual hunger—to treat God’s Word as their daily bread, the only source of life.
- Pray for God to bring peace to Ukraine and to stop the conflict in the east of the country so Ukrainians can experience the true, biblical shalom.
- Pray for Ukrainian Christians to continue to be a light for the nations and to partner with God in building His kingdom.

Prayer Can Change a Nation!

South Africa has only been a democratic nation since 1994. For the past twenty-five years, the people of this beautiful country have had to learn how to live and work together toward a better future for all. It has not been easy, but we “live and strive for freedom,” as our national anthem declares.

During our transition into democracy in 1994 there was a lot of fear; tensions were running high, and there was a real concern about the possibility of a civil war breaking out. Many would agree that the peaceful transition could be attributed to prayer. Churches throughout the country— from all backgrounds and denominations— came together to pray despite the chaos, uncertainty, mistrust, and politics, and all that the enemy intended for evil, God used for good.

I believe God’s promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 made the difference: *“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land..”*

Fast-forward twenty-three years after the advent of democracy. On April 22, 2017, the body of Christ united once again to cry out for our nation. One million believers came together on a farm in the middle of the country to intercede—and God listened!

Since then, there have been two more similar prayer gatherings. One





was in Cape Town in 2018. There we asked God to bring rain to the drought-stricken region because the city was set to completely run out of fresh water. At the time of this writing in 2019, dams in the area were close to 80 percent capacity. It's a miracle. Our God is the one who hears!

The second historic event was in October 2018, when a massive prayer meeting was held outside Pretoria. We asked God to intervene because corruption had reached alarming levels and was crippling the country's economy and growth. With unemployment at its highest, the nation was once again on its knees. Two months after the prayer event, the then president was ousted, and many initiatives have been taken to move the country forward.

Seeing South Africa move from apartheid to democracy, from drought to sufficiency, and from corruption to integrity hasn't been easy. But as a nation we have learned that our God hears us, even—or especially—when times are hard.

Once again, we find ourselves crying out to God for our nation—for the countless lives affected by violence and oppression against vulnerable people. But we are encouraged by this promise found in God's Word: *"The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results"* (James 5:16).

Prayer Requests

- With South Africa having such a rich and multicultural population, please pray that God will open doors to appropriately bring the good news to the different ethnicities, generations, and socioeconomic groups represented in our diverse nation.
- Pray for healing, hope, and support for those affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Pray for Christian ministries working with children at risk, jobless young people, prisoners, and the police force. Pray that the spirit of violence—both physical and sexual—would be bound under the authority of Christ.

Facts About South Africa

- South Africa has eleven official languages.
- The Kruger National Park is about the same size as the whole state of Israel. In this piece of paradise, animals roam free in their natural habitat.
- For the adrenaline seekers, Western Cape, South Africa, is home to the world's highest commercial bungee jumping bridge, the Bloukrans Bridge, which is 709 feet (216 meters) high.

A Country of Peace

Since colonial times, Costa Rica has been characterized as a country of peace, as it was primarily made up of land workers who didn't dispute with their neighbors. The Constitution of Costa Rica, still currently in use, was written in 1948 under the political command of José Figueres Ferrer, and it officially abolished the military. From that time, Costa Rica has been known for resolving its internal and external conflicts in a peaceful manner through discussion and diplomacy. This has been done in an effort to create a culture of peace, in which young people are educated to seek dialogue in the face of conflict. Costa Ricans take pride in their peaceful nation.

As Christians, we can learn from this example in Costa Rica. Jesus said:

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

—John 14:27

God is the author of peace; He is peace. We must learn that God has control over every situation. Although it may seem difficult and impossible, the problem has not gone beyond the reach of the Lord. God is a lover of peace. He loves peace among people, but He also loves it when we have personal peace—a peace that develops in the heart despite difficult circumstances. This is the kind of peace the Bible is speaking of in the following verses.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can



understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:6-7

Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.

—Hebrews 12:14

Jesus Christ is the only effective mediator in the midst of any conflict we have. He calls us to be peaceful, to seek to be at peace with all people. We cannot allow the enemy to bring lawsuits and discord to our family, friends, or work. The Bible says:

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called children of God.

—Matthew 5:9

Let us not forget that every time we share Jesus with a child, youth, or adult, we become messengers of the good news of salvation. We are emissaries of the peace of God, helping people experience His peace in their hearts. So go ahead. Do not be discouraged. You are doing something good for the kingdom of God. Seek peace...and follow it!

May today be a new day in which the peace of God fills your heart, regardless of the situation or the problem you have to face. May Jesus be the One you trust.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the economic stability of the country, which has been in a financial crisis for some months.
- Pray for dynamic outreaches for the youth, which comprise two-thirds of the nation's population.

Faith and Deeds

The Cambodian people are very spiritual. They believe deep down in their hearts that there is a God. They know there is heaven and hell—to them, it is very real. Of course, no one wants to go to hell; everyone wants to go to heaven after this life.

Cambodians are shown from a young age how to worship Buddha, and they are taught that respecting and worshipping the monks and burning incense on altars will benefit them. They believe that when they worship monks, they are worshipping Buddha. And they believe the offerings they present at the Buddhist temples and the good deeds they do help their spirit and soul escape from hell and go to heaven after they die. They seek to do good deeds for Buddha in order to go to heaven or to stay in hell a shorter time.

But God’s Word presents a different path to heaven, and this truth needs to be shared with the Cambodian people.

It is written in the Holy Bible that there is only one way to heaven, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ alone. In John 14:6, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”* Acts 4:12 says, *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”*

Salvation and a way to heaven are found only through Jesus Christ. And it is only through faith in Him alone and by His grace that we are saved. We can’t be saved by good deeds or by doing good work. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8–9, *“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”*

However, I believe that even though we are not saved by good works, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ to do good work. Good work is the proof of true faith in Christ. True faith in Jesus Christ produces good fruit.

James 2:14 says: *“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?”* And we read in verse 17, *“So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.”*

Therefore, as followers of Jesus we have to let our light shine through our good works all the more. People need to see that by preaching salvation by faith in Christ, we are not putting down good deeds; we are lifting up good deeds to a higher level. We are called to be the light and salt to the world, and that is through our words, our actions, and our good deeds.

Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.” This is what’s in my heart—that all followers of Jesus Christ will keep their true faith in Jesus Christ, with a strong commitment to let His light shine through our good needs everywhere we go. Then people will be able to testify that we are His disciples.

Prayer Requests

- Youth make up a third of the population of the country. Around 30 percent of Cambodians live below the poverty line making children susceptible to malnutrition and marginal life conditions.
- Dropping out of school early is a problem in the country due to the quality of education, the cost of education for poor families, limited prospects for good jobs after secondary or tertiary education and the lack of vocational training and second chance programs.
- Cambodian youth in rural areas are exposed to a variety of issues: Physical and mental weakness, violence and abuse, sexual exploitation, trafficking and drugs and alcohol and HIV/AIDS. Street children and those who have migrated from a rural area are the most vulnerable.



The Power of the Divine Word

In the story of creation in the Book of Genesis, the expression “And God said ...” is significant. It denotes the authority and creative power embodied in the word that comes out of the mouth of God. He spoke, and nonexistence came into existence; nothingness became palpable reality. What incredible power there is in the divine word of God! Throughout the Bible, the powerful manifestation of God’s Word is clear to see. We read in Hebrews 4:12:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

God’s Word was powerful then, and it is just as powerful today. I know this is true not simply because I have unfailing faith in the Bible but also because of the many times I have witnessed the unbelievable power of God’s Word as I have ministered in West Africa. One particular example comes to mind: the radical transformation of two young men who were headed toward a dangerous future.

I was in my car returning from a teaching session at the Full Gospel Bible Institute, located in the city of N’Gaoundéré, Cameroon. At that time, the Islamic sect called Boko Haram was terrorizing the region, having decimated villages in Nigeria, Chad, and northern Cameroon. As I drove through a great forest, two young men sprang from the bush. Both looked to be around seventeen years old—and they were heavily armed. One of them stood in the middle of the road, waving his hand; the other was standing at the edge of the road ready to shoot. I stopped my car, and the two young people came to each side of my car.

With respect, I said hello to the young man closest to me. I was surprised to receive nothing in return but a disturbing silence. His face was tattooed in black, and all he did was stare at me with his cold, red eyes. It was the most horrible face I've seen in my life.

After a few seconds one of the young men broke the silence with a hello, preceded by a deep sigh. When I asked how I could help him, he answered by saying, "Drop us in the next town." Without hesitation, I invited them to get into the car. A terrifying silence lingered in the car during the journey until I decided to break it.

As usual, I had a few OneHope resources in my car, so I offered a copy of the material to each young man. I noticed that they started reading them, so after letting them enjoy their reading, I engaged in a conversation with them. They were surprisingly open to the talk. Even more surprising was that after we spent some time discussing the gospel, these two young men agreed to give their lives to Christ! I stopped my car, invited them confess Christ, and prayed for them. I then directed them to a church in the nearby town.

I inquired a few months later and was filled with joy to learn that these two young men were baptized and were now committed participants in the church. What an incredible manifestation of the power of God's Word! OneHope founder Bob Hoskins often says, "The Word of God is alive!" This is so true. Built around OneHope's *God's Word. Every Child.* vision, our mission is to affect destiny by providing the Word of God to every child and teenager on our planet. We long to see each one become liberated captives who are transformed by God's Word and prepared for their eternal encounter before the throne of God.

Our efforts to sow God's Word into the lives of young people and children are not in vain. They bear fruit and always will, because God's Word is always relevant. It has incredible power. So let's continue to sow it—and sow it even more!

Facts About Togo

- Togo has more than eighty forest reserves.
- Togo is one of the smallest countries in Africa, and it borders Ghana, Benin, and Burkina Faso.
- The country's official language is French.

Prayer Requests

- There is a growing number of children in the churches of Lomé, Togo. Some churches report that children make up more than half of their congregations! Please pray that these children are discipled and grow deep roots in the Word.
- Bible translation remains a major ministry challenge. The whole Bible is completed in Kabiye, one of two indigenous languages used in schools across Togo. Pray that we will be able to train more national translation workers, which is now one of the ministry's greatest priorities.



Syria: The Cradle of Civilization

On August 23, 1993, excavators discovered fossilized Paleolithic human remains in a cave near Aleppo, Syria. The almost-complete skeleton belongs to a child who lived there two hundred thousand years ago. Other remains found in the area date back roughly seven hundred thousand years!

Greater Syria is recognized as the cradle of civilization. Throughout ancient times, it was occupied by several empires, including the Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, Sumerians, Amorites, Canaanites, Greeks, Phoenicians, Persians, and Romans. Today it is home to two of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world, Damascus and Aleppo.

Syria is significant throughout the Bible too. Syrians can trace their heritage back to King Aram, Noah's grandson. And who doesn't know the famous road to Damascus, where Jesus met Paul? According to the Book of Acts, believers were first called Christians in ancient Syria. The nation is also important because of the relationship it has had with the nation of Israel.

Although Syria is one of the most ancient inhabited regions on earth, it is now a forsaken home for millions. Since the beginning of Syria's civil war in 2011, more than 6.7 million people have fled Syria and sought refuge in other countries. Another 6.1 million had been internally displaced as of 2018. Children make up nearly half of the affected population. Tragically, this is what the majestic region is currently known for.



Prayer Requests

- Millions have been affected by the war in Syria. Pray for physical and emotional healing, reunions for separated families, restoration of homes, opportunities for good education, and job opportunities.
- Pray for peace in this region.
- There are around eight hundred thousand Christians currently living in Syria. Pray for their strength, hope, and protection. Pray that the Lord continues to draw new people to Him

Neighboring and distant countries host millions of traumatized souls with confused minds, broken hearts, and crushed spirits. Fleeing in the middle of bombings, families don't have the luxury of taking their possessions. They arrive in refugee camps lacking basic necessities, including their identification papers. The only thing these people have is the hope of one day returning home.

Jesus said, *"My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life"* (John 10:10). In the midst of confusion and uncertainty, the all-loving Father is at work. Even though grieving refugees may not get to fulfill their dream of returning to their homeland, thousands are finding an unfailing hope of an eternal home. Like light in the darkness, Jesus comes to the rescue!

As Jesus was having a heart-to-heart conversation with the disciples before His crucifixion, He comforted them by promising He would return to take them to the Father's house (John 14:1-14). Paul also says, *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands"* (2 Corinthians 5:1, NIV). You might be suffering right now. You might have lost a loved one, or maybe you're facing harassment, suffering mentally, in conflict with someone close to you, or challenged in your marriage. Whatever you're struggling with, it is not the end! You can find peace today, knowing that by His blood, Jesus has written a new start for all who believe in Him!

Philippians 3:20 says:

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

We tend to hold on to that hope when life is beating us down, but how about when everything is going well? Do we still yearn for our promised home? Whether in times of war or peace, this world is not our eternal home. Understanding that our life on this earth represents a tiny part of our existence can shift our attention away from the temporary things that might consume us to what is eternal. Positions, possessions, work, degrees, opinions, religion, appearance, decisions—none of these are eternal. But God, His Word, and your soul are. Invest your time, energy, and resources in things eternal.

A Love for Christ—and Rugby—in Fiji

Fiji is a country located in the center of the South Pacific. It is an archipelago consisting of more than three hundred islands and has a diverse population of more than nine hundred thousand people. It is the most economically developed South Pacific island; however, it still is a developing country. The economy relies heavily on the agriculture sector and the growing tourism industry. White sandy beaches, blue seas, bright sunshine, and friendly people attract tourists from all over the globe, making Fiji as a popular vacation destination.

Fijians love to watch and play rugby. Our sevens rugby team won our first gold medal in the 2016 Olympic Games held in Brazil. Rugby players face obstacles when pursuing the sport professionally. Some come from poverty-stricken families, but that does not limit the drive and motivation they have to accomplish their big dreams.



The team undergoes intensive training, which includes running on the sand dunes of Sigatoka to help increase their stamina, fitness, and endurance. But in addition to their rigorous physical training, the team focuses on something even more important: pursuing a relationship with Christ.

The team's motivation is based on Philippians 4:13: *“For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.”* It reminds each team member to rely on Christ—on and off the field. Most players write the verse on their hand straps before a rugby game as a reminder of God's faithfulness in their lives. This Scripture allows us to have faith and develop dedication, endurance, patience, and focus in Christ. God wants us to meditate on His Word day and night, no matter what our reality looks like.

God's Word reminds us of His faithfulness. The apostle Paul wrote, *“The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the*



temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure” (1 Corinthians 10:13). The devil will always want us to quit, but Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the heavenly hosts are readily available to take us through our journey. They will always provide an exit point in every difficult situation. If we trust in God through the difficult times, He will see us through.

Our walk with God will not always be an easy journey, but I guarantee you that the process is worth it because it produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is found in Galatians 5:22–23, *“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”* We should be grateful for the process we go through, as it molds our character to God’s likeness.

Prayer Requests

- In Fiji, 31 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. As much as 15 percent of the Fijian urban population lives in squatter settlements. Pray for a government that will help alleviate poverty and improve the economy.
- Child labor is not uncommon. Various jobs are carried out by children, who are usually employed as domestic servants or as laborers on farms and in the fields. Pray for families to be restored and for children to live in caring environments and have access to education.
- Pray for churches to work together in reaching out to the next generation in the community.



Knowing the Heavenly Father Better

Nepal is a small country situated between China to the north and India to the south. The total population of Nepal is about 30 million, from diverse tribes and tongues. The rooftop of the world, Mount Everest, is also located in Nepal.

A common Nepalese greeting is to clasp your hands together and say, “Namaste,” meaning, “Hello” or “Nice to meet you.” However, Christians greet one another by folding their hands and saying, “Jai mashi,” meaning, “Praise Jesus.”

In Nepal, 81.3 percent of the population practices Hinduism, and only 1.4 percent is believed to be Christian. Nepal’s parliament declared it a secular country in 2006, but there is still great persecution for Christians. Church arson and unnecessary detentions of Christians frequently make the headlines in local newspapers.

¹ “National Population and Housing Census 2011,” Government of Nepal National Planning Commission Secretariat Central Bureau of Statistics, November 2012, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wpnc/Nepal/Nepal-Census-2011-Vol1.pdf>.

Prayer Requests

- Please pray for spiritual breakthrough for Nepal and for the leaders of the country. Pray that laws that forbid evangelism will be abolished.
- Pray for those who convert to Christianity. They often experience persecution and are at risk under the law.

Discrimination among local villagers grows day by day, as the country is determined to make Nepal a Hindu nation so it would become the first in the world. However, despite the strict laws that ban religious conversion, the number of Christians in Nepal has rapidly grown, and many people are coming to know the one and true Savior. But there is still a long way to go.

Christians in Nepal are seeking to know our heavenly Father better and better. They do this despite all the challenges and opportunities, the failures and successes in life and ministry. Jesus said in John 14:6, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”* Knowing the Father better and helping to make Him known to others is the ultimate goal of life and ministry. (See John 14:1–14.)

As friends of OneHope, we are reaching the next generation of Nepal with God’s Word in order for them to learn that true salvation can be found only in and through the blood of Jesus Christ. Children and youth make up 40 percent of the population². In the years to come, these youth will change the face of Nepal into a God-fearing and God-serving nation.

² “Children in Nepal,” UNICEF, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/children-nepal>.

Reaping the Harvest

Jesus gave this instruction in Luke 10:2: *“The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”*

Jesus said this almost two thousand years ago, and the workers are still few to this day. Where are the workers for the harvest?

Thanks to modern technology, when a great international leader dies, the whole world knows in a matter of hours. But it has been two thousand years since Jesus, the Lord of lords, died on the cross, and not everyone knows about this episode of history, which changed the world!

People all around the world, and in Cape Verde, have yet to hear the good news. Cape Verde, also called Cabo Verde, is a beautiful archipelago with picturesque beaches and paradisiacal landscapes. It is made up of ten islands in the North Atlantic, but only nine are inhabited. The islands, which have a combined population of 568,000 people, belong to the African continent, being 620 kilometers (385 miles) from Senegal. Cape Verde is a strategic region, as the islands are between Africa, Europe, and America.

Nearly half of Cape Verde’s population is under the age of twenty-five. Despite the country’s beauty, the nation faces many problems, including the abuse of children. This is why we cannot stop. We must reach the nine islands. We have the Word that transforms! We have the saving truth. We know the real liberator. We have the power of the Holy Spirit in us. We have the guarantee of victory. We have what no one else can offer to suffering people. And all this makes us even more responsible to reach the lost in the world.

May we have in our mouths the same words as Isaiah: *“Then I heard the Lord asking, ‘Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?’ I said, ‘Here I am. Send me’”* (Isaiah 6:8).

May the Lord trouble us with the burden to bring in His kingdom harvest!

Facts About Cape Verde

- Cachupa is Cape Verde’s national dish. It is a stew principally made of mashed corn, cassava, sweet potatoes, onions, green bananas, squash, and yams.
- It is estimated that the islands have one goat for every two people.

Prayer Requests

- Pray that the Lord will provide coordinators for each island, people who can help the youth recognize the importance of the Word.
- Pray that the church will be in love with Jesus in such a way that winning others is a natural part of their daily lives.
- Pray that more missionaries will come to Cape Verde. Pray that new workers will arise from among the nationals.
- Pray that these islands will know the great love of the Father.

It's Time to Shine for Jesus

Religious discrimination is a serious issue in modern-day Pakistan. The religious minorities are victims of violence, persecution, and terrorism. Women who belong to religious minorities have been known to be victims of kidnapping and forced to convert to Islam.

If Pakistan's many challenges have caused the morale and confidence of the people of the majority community to fall, where can one place the religious minorities in this gloomy picture? They are weak and the battle is gigantic; the forces against them are crude, diverse, and destructive. A handful of Christians can't combat these forces of darkness with their human efforts. The situation seems hopeless.

But when we turn to the Word of God, we see that the state of the first church in the Book of Acts was no better than the situation Pakistani believers face today. God has a special purpose for those of us born in this country. He wants His light to shine in the darkness through us.

As the days get darker, it is vital that our lights shine brighter. Unfortunately, many churches, pastors, and everyday



believers are wandering around with empty lamps. Do you know what an empty lamp will do for a lost and dying world? Nothing. Without oil, there is no light. Without light, there is no revelation of sin and the need for a Savior. Without the revelation, there is no direction of repentance. Without repentance, there is no hope.

The lamps can only burn with the pure and simple gospel. Children and youth today are media obsessed, wealth hungry, and open to learn practices of other religions without knowing their dire consequences. Unless these young people are reached, they cannot be rescued. We must speak the truth about eternity—that only followers of Christ will be in heaven and everyone else will be in hell. We must proclaim the need for repentance for sin and an acknowledgment of the holiness of God. This is how lamps can be filled and people can be prepared for eternity in the precious time that is left.

If the church is losing our new generation, it is not the world's fault; it's ours. They are in the darkness; we know better. We need to stop waiting for someone else to take action to turn our community back to Christ. As followers of Christ, we need to get together and act today.

We can use these five instructions from 2 Timothy to help fill our lamps with the oil needed to light our paths to reach the lost for God's kingdom.

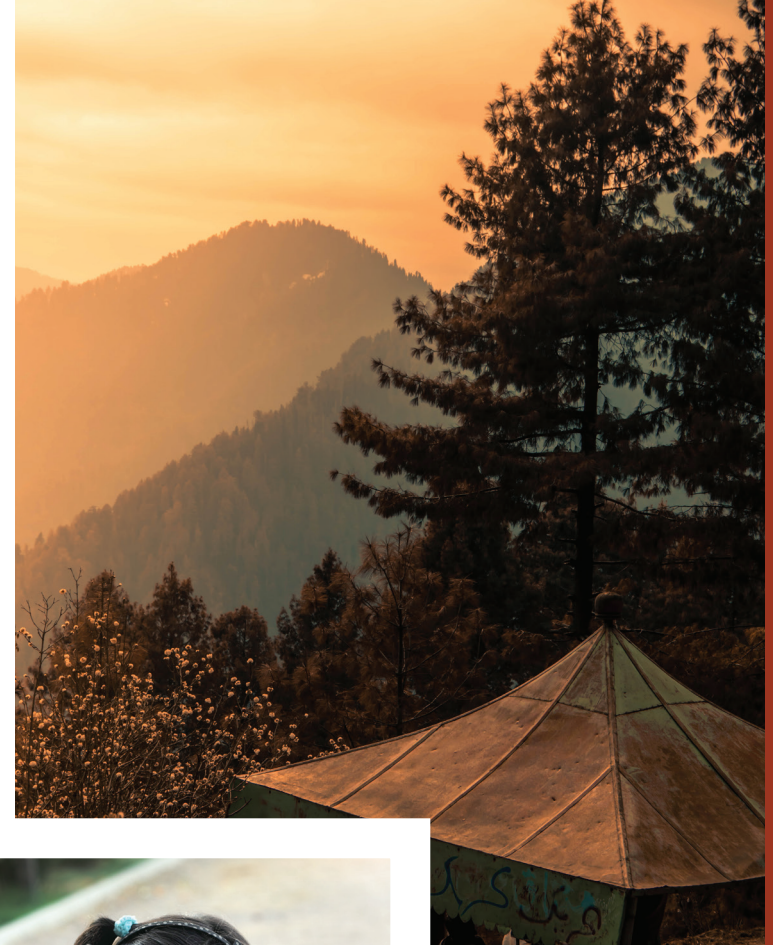


1. Prayer and Bible study must be the center of our lives, our families, and our ministries. (See 2 Timothy 1:13.)
2. Our teaching and preaching must be based on the pure and life-changing gospel of the Lord Jesus. (See 2 Timothy 2:15–17.)
3. We should not tolerate and compromise with darkness. (See 2 Timothy 2:19.)
4. We must be bold to call evil out and have no connection with it. (See 2 Timothy 3:1–5.)
5. We must live and share the truth of God’s Word. (See 2 Timothy 3:16–17.)

As followers of Christ, we are called to be the light. It’s time to shine for Jesus, the One who gave us the chance to live and serve Him before His return. He needs our lamps full and burning in Pakistan because time is running out.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the eyes of the children and youth to be opened to the dire consequences of other religions. Pray that they would be freed from their obsession with media and wealth.
- Pray for the estimated thousand girls and women who are kid napping and victims of forced conversion each year.
- Pray that the light of the church in Pakistan would shine bright in the darkness.



Sharing and Dreaming Together in Argentina

The Argentine culture is marked by different customs that involve the same action: sharing. The term sharing comes from the Latin *compartiri*; “com” means “with” and “to divide,” so sharing could be said to mean “starting with.”¹ The prefix “with” also indicates something that is done in a global, even common, way. This leads us to the notion of “leaving with those who are close.”

For Argentinians, food is a good excuse to get together no matter where we are in the world, and roast is a typical meal. Sundays, being a nonworking day, are often dedicated to being with family or friends and eating a delicious roast. The particular thing is that nobody eats roast alone. The same goes for *maté*, a tea made of an infusion of traditional herbs and hot water. It is rarely prepared for one person. *Maté* and roast are meant to be shared.

In addition to food, Argentinians share anecdotes, laughter, emotions, and long talks. Most importantly, we share our dreams. A former president once said: “A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.”²

Many dreamers can be found throughout history and in the Bible. In Genesis we read the story of Joseph the dreamer. God spoke to him about his future through a dream, and He gave Joseph a gift to interpret dreams. He interpreted dreams of Pharaoh’s chief baker and cupbearer while in prison (Genesis 40). Because God allowed him to interpret

their dreams, he was eventually called on to interpret a disturbing dream Pharaoh had (Genesis 41), and sharing his gift with Pharaoh changed Joseph’s life.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours.”

—Genesis 41:39–40

God wants you to share the gifts He has given you with others, just as Joseph did. Take advantage of the favor God has placed in your life to be a blessing to others at all times and in all places. Start small, but dream big.

It is important to share the dreams God gives you because that is the way those dreams will spread and ignite in the hearts of others. If He put a feeling, passion, or burden in your heart, it is for you to develop and share it with others so it will be a blessing to many.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the nation’s economy, as it is in a serious crisis, causing rising unemployment and poverty.
- Pray that ungodly laws that affect unborn children, marriage, and the family will not pass or will be repealed if they have been made law.
- Pray that the church will awaken and be marked by greater spiritual vigor and a commitment to the Great Commission.

¹ Define, s.v. “share,” accessed November 24, 2019, <https://definiciona.com/compartir/>.

² David Sheff, *All We Are Saying* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 16.

Our Help Comes From the Lord

From June to October is the typhoon season in Taiwan. There more than five typhoons every year, and some are very strong and threatening. So how does the small island of Taiwan survive in the midst of the strong wind and rain?

It survives because of the Central Mountain Range, which runs from the north of the island to the south and separates the east and west of Taiwan. When a typhoon lands on the east coast and continues toward the west, it will be weakened or destroyed by the Central Mountain Range. Thus, the densely populated west coast can be kept safe.

Psalm 121 says:

*I look up to the mountains—
does my help come from there?
My help comes from the LORD,
who made heaven and earth!
He will not let you stumble;
the one who watches over you will not slumber.
Indeed, he who watches over Israel
never slumbers or sleeps.
The LORD himself watches over you!
The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.
The sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon at night.
THE LORD keeps you from all harm
and watches over your life.
The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,
both now and forever.*



Sometimes storms come into our lives, and when they do, we all desire to have a stronghold or refuge to keep us safe. God promises in His Word that when we lift our eyes to Him, He will give us hope and keep us from evil. He is our help and the keeper of our lives.

Prayer Requests

- Pray that the next generation will lift up their eyes to the Lord and know He is the only true God.

Facts About Taiwan

- Taipei was ranked the city with the best quality of life in the world. ¹
- In Taiwan, 7-Eleven is not just a convenience store. You can pay utility and credit card bills, buy train tickets and concert tickets, and send packages internationally. ²
- Garbage trucks play music like ice cream trucks do. ³
- In Taiwan, umbrellas are not just for rain; they are also used to protect against the sun.

¹ Keoni Everington, "Taiwan Ranked 1st in World for Quality of Life: Survey," Taiwan News, September 7, 2018, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3524715>.

² Todd Blackhurst, "What Can You Do at 7-11 in Taiwan?," Consulting with Understanding, September 7, 2015, <https://www.taichungexpat.com/2015/09/07/what-can-you-do-at-7-11-in-taiwan/>.

³ Matt Hickman, "Taiwan Garbage Trucks: Classical Music Accompanies Collection (Video)," Verizon Media, updated December 6, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/taiwan-garbage-trucks-music_n_1195020



Delighting in the Richest Fare

The United States' Declaration of Independence states; "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."¹

As citizens of God's kingdom, life and liberty are focal points of our faith in Christ Jesus. But for those who reside in the United States or beyond, how much does this "unalienable right" to find happiness drive the rhythm of our lives?

In the pursuit of happiness, it can be easy to be consumed or distracted with temporal things that never truly satisfy. We work overtime to make more money. We spend endless hours on the internet and watching television. We'll purchase certain products for a more favorable status with friends and post things on social media for personal affirmation. It becomes an ongoing cycle.

Americans work longer hours than most workers in other developed countries. It is also well-known that Americans consume far more natural resources and live in less sustainable ways than those from other large countries. A strong work ethic and enjoying the beautiful things in life are certainly not bad in themselves. Yet being driven by them can lead to unhealthy consequences. And will they ever truly satisfy or make us happy?

*God offers a greater invitation today:
Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

—Isaiah 55:1-2

¹ "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," National Archives, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>, emphasis added.

The prophet Isaiah is declaring God's invitation to all those who are thirsty for the things only He can provide. We're invited to enjoy Jesus as the living water, His refreshment and nourishment. We can experience the gift of salvation, grace, joy, and peace—all for free! Jesus paid the ultimate price with His death on the cross. There's no need to expend our labor and finances on the attractions of the world, for they will never bring true happiness and genuine fulfillment.

God calls us to listen closely to Him—to hear what He says and apply it in our lives. He invites us to eat what is truly good—whatever is true, noble, pure—that can come from His living Word. Then and only then will our souls delight in the abundance of who God is and what He provides.

How much of a priority is seeking Jesus and His kingdom? He wants to be your source of satisfaction and provision! (See Matthew 6:33.)

How much do you hunger and thirst for His righteousness? He will satisfy! (See Matthew 5:6.)

How thirsty or in need of God are you today? Do you find yourself distracted by the priorities of this world and seeking temporal happiness, or are you desperate for more of Him?

King David once cried out:

O God, you are my God;

I earnestly search for you.

My soul thirsts for you;

my whole body longs for you

in this parched and weary land

where there is no water.

—Psalm 63:1

May we have this same deep hunger and longing for God and draw near to His waters today. May we feast on the truth and goodness from His Word. And may we allow ourselves to delight in the fullness of who He is alone.

In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

—Psalm 16:11

Prayer Requests

- Pray that today's youth will be reignited in their passion to hunger and thirst after God and pursue Him and His ways.
- Pray that today's youth will discern the truth of God's Word.
- Pray that today's youth will (re)discover who Jesus is and why the gospel matters, and influence others to know Jesus for themselves.

Facts About Gen Z in the US

- More than forty million youth from Christian homes are projected to walk away from their faith by the year 2050 if the American church does not intentionally re-engage in evangelism and discipleship efforts.¹
- While Gen Z is more interconnected than ever through technology, research has shown an increase in young people saying they feel lonely.
- Forty-three percent of Gen Z defines happiness as financial success.²

¹ The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050 (Seattle, WA: Pinetops Foundation, 2018), 9.

² Barna Group and the Impact 360 Institute, Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 41.

Nothing Will Hinder the Work of the Lord

On a normal Tuesday in January, minutes before a scheduled call, news broke of a potential terrorist attack inside a complex in Nairobi that housed a hotel, banks, and the offices of high-level organizations. ¹ I took the call, but I had a sense of foreboding, and I ended it early.

I joined our church staff in offering prayers for those affected and for the city, although we did not have full information. Hours later, we learned that the families of some of our closest friends and ministry partners had been caught up in the attack. Some survived; sadly, the children and spouses of other dear friends never made it home.

Since this incident, I have reflected on life through the lens of eternity, thinking of how one moment can have such drastic consequences on our lives. These were normal people, living their lives, when a disruption came. In one moment, life as they knew it took a dramatic turn. As we have walked with the families affected by the attack, two tough but important questions have repeatedly been asked:



1. Why? Why did this happen? Why me?

There was a young lady whose life was spared because six male colleagues covered her from the attacker's bullets with their bodies. She alone lived to tell the world of their heroism.

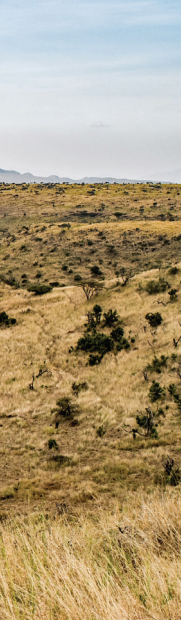
2. What if...?

A friend of mine spoke with his wife a few minutes before the attack. She was supposed to have left her office to visit a doctor, but she lingered a little longer. What if she had left earlier as planned?

Two portions of Scripture have helped me navigate these questions, and I have shared them with families and friends who were processing this traumatic interruption.

The first is 2 Chronicles 20:1–9. King Jehoshaphat heard that his enemies had gathered a vast army to attack his nation. He was alarmed and scared. But there is a lesson to be learned in his response. The Bible says he resolved to inquire of the Lord. He knew the greatness of our God and realized that all power and might are in His hands!

¹ Farai Sevenzo, Faith Karimi and Laura Smith-Spark, "At Least 21 Killed as Kenya Hotel Siege Is Declared Over," CNN, January 17, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/16/africa/kenya-hotel-complex-terror-attack/index.html>.



Although the enemy's army was ferocious, Jehoshaphat knew God had a heart to hear his cry and save his people! When we face disruptions in life, we too must look to our great and mighty God. The enemy wants us to fear, retreat, and change our kingdom plans, thereby glorifying him. Yet even when we don't know how to defeat the enemy, we can say as King Jehoshaphat did: *"O our God, won't you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help"* (2 Chronicles 20:12). I believe looking to the Lord releases God's power to work through us. We may not know why we are under attack, but we know who is capable of saving us and leading us to our promise!

The second Scripture passage is John 11:1-43, the famous story where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Here, Martha says to Jesus, *"Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (v. 21). See, in life and ministry we go through difficult circumstances. When Martha was going through such a season, she expressed her deep disappointment to Jesus. If only Jesus had come earlier. Or as I heard from parents after the terrorist attack in Nairobi, if only their children did not work in that building.

"If only" situations surface often, but we have no way of knowing what will happen in the next minute or where life will lead us. When Mary expressed her doubt, confusion, and sorrow to Jesus, He responded by telling her that Lazarus would rise again, thus giving her hope. But He also directed her attention to who He is, saying: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die"* (vv. 25-26). When He asked her if she believed this, Martha replied, *"Yes, Lord"* (v. 27). In this she demonstrated her faith that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be and that He could do what He said He could do, no matter the circumstances.

Like Martha, I have now found myself asserting that I believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life! This has shifted my focus and that of my friends and colleagues who do the same. A servant of God focuses on Him alone! He is mighty in battle. He is powerful to lead us. He is the resurrection and the life, capable of bringing life and hope even in the toughest circumstances.

Remember, Jesus said, *"I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it"* (Matthew 16:18). I once thought that disruptions such as terrorism and illnesses would hinder the work of the Lord. The year 2018 was filled with such hardship for our staff that I thought the Lord's work would suffer. Yet at the end of the year, as I looked at the number of children reached, I saw proof that God is accomplishing His own work! I remember tearfully telling my supervisor during our annual review that only God could have done so much—not my staff, partners, or myself!

Friends, take courage. Nothing will hinder the work of the Lord! What the enemy intends for evil, God turns it around and uses for His good!

Prayer Requests

- Pray for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit of God, so the church will be strengthened, refreshed, and reenergized to reach the nation, especially the youth, with the gospel.
- Pray for an end to corruption and for righteous leaders who will care for the poor and seek justice for the oppressed.
- Pray that God will continue to build His kingdom in Kenya, doing through the body of Christ what we could never do on our own.

More Than Optimism— Obedient Faith!

We Brazilians are optimistic, and that's how people around the world often describe us. I have to admit that believing things will get better even in successive chaotic scenarios is something not seen everywhere. Sometimes I think that the source of our optimism is being surrounded by such natural beauty and such hospitable and friendly people. But there are certainly many other factors to consider as well.

In the last two decades, Brazil has seen a large increase in the number of Evangelicals. There is a well-known quote in Brazil that says, "After all, God is Brazilian!" In times of high expectation or after a great triumph such as after our soccer team scores a big victory, someone will quote that saying. It represents both Brazil's optimism and the way people are leading their lives.

But for us who believe in the gospel, the reasons for our hope are contrastive. Our optimism is not based on the possibility of improving temporary situations. It is based on the certainty that the kingdom of God is near and on the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as announced by the prophets and confirmed by the evangelist Mark.

This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way. He is

a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the LORD's coming! Clear the road for him!'"

This messenger was John the Baptist. He was in the wilderness and preached that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.

—Mark 1:1-4

To introduce John the Baptist, Mark quoted two prophets to generate true faith in his readers, pointing out what they really should believe. What we see in the Gospels about John the Baptist is more than optimism; it is an obedient faith. He fulfills his role in God's great history, behaves as God's messenger, preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins to a religious people, does not give up in the face of resistance from religious leaders, and remains humble even as his followers grow. And each time he baptizes those who repent and announces to them that Jesus would baptize them in the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8), he fulfills his ministry and achieves the purpose for his existence.

We want our nation to overcome human optimism and reach the stage of obedient faith. May our joy be completed in fulfilling the purpose for our existence. May the gospel be carried to every creature, which for us means prioritizing children and youth. May the evangelical church exist for the proclamation of the true gospel. And may we find in John the Baptist inspiration for the exercise of a complete ministry.



Facts About Brazil

- We have at least two delicious, iconic foods: coxinha and pão de queijo. The first is a kind of deep fried chicken croquette, and the second is a baked cheese bread.
- In Brazil, the celebration around the World Cup is almost like Christmastime. Everybody gathers with friends and family to watch the matches and eat food.
- On Sundays, most churches have Sunday School in the morning and a church service at night.
- Brazil also has the largest number of Japanese people outside Japan.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for every missionary sent from and to Brazil.
- Pray for our ministry team's health and protection.
- Pray for the Brazilian church and all the pastors and leaders.

The Lord's Search

Cameroon is often called “Africa in miniature” due to the country’s incredible cultural, linguistic, and geographical diversity. Between 1916 and 1960, Cameroon was a colony of both the United Kingdom and France. Though the nation is now independent, the legacy of Cameroon’s colonial past is visible in its selection of French and English as its official languages. Eight out of the ten regions of the nation are Francophone, and the remaining two are Anglophone. Roughly 62 percent of the population is under the age of 25, which is a source of much hope for the nation.

The people of Cameroon are in search of the One who transforms lives, and God is in search of people who will honor Him and be an agent of change in the nations. The opportune time is now, as the Lord of the harvest will soon return. King Hezekiah did something extraordinary during the days he ruled. Second Kings 18:5 says, *“There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time.”* The previous verse says what he did. It was radical and could have backfired.

He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had been offering sacrifices to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan.

—2 Kings 18:4

Hezekiah became one of Israel’s kings to exemplify righteous leadership, and it was a scary road for him to take because he had to go against history. There were kings before Hezekiah, but none thought of destroying the shrines. Hezekiah made certain decisions during his opportune period. He had no template to follow, but becoming “one” pushed him to be the first to love God so much that he destroyed what his elders worshipped.





A “one”—a person who is righteous, set apart, and seeks the Lord—is needed when nations are in pain and thick darkness covers the people. There must be someone who is ready to get rid of practices, even in the church, that do not glorify God. The Lord is looking for people who will scatter stony things kept in the heart that provoke ungodliness, and destroy idols that promote self and separate God’s people. God is looking for a “one” like King Hezekiah, who demonstrated righteousness in destroying idols, or Noah, who was obedient in building the ark, or Elisha, who persevered in remaining near Elijah.

Ezekiel 22:30 indicates that God is searching for a man who can be a “one” but He finds none. He is carrying out the same search in Cameroon and around the world. Will He find a “one”? Men might find excellent people, but God’s criteria is different.

It will take a conscious decision to be different and trust in the Lord. Are you up for the task? Cameroon—and the world—is waiting for you to be different and glorify His name.



Prayer Requests

- Pray for an end to widely held tribal, spiritist traditions among Christians.
- The nation is experiencing a crisis that is nearing civil war. Pray that God will use the crisis to draw men to Himself. We say no to a civil war. We ask God for peace.
- Pray for a moral government system to provide clean water, food, and health care for the people.
- There is a large number of unreached people in the north of Cameroon. Please pray for the church planting efforts taking place in that region.

The Importance of Being Relational

Russians are considered very relational. Along with the indescribable Russian “soul,” being relational is a major part of the national character. Much of this is bred by the history and climate of Russia. Struggle, collectivism, Stalin’s repressions, war tragedies, and hardships have all marked the nation.

Russians like to entertain at home, and they sit around with guests and talk or sometimes sing for hours. For example, in Russia it is important to develop a personal relationship before proceeding to business negotiations. Building trust and understanding enhances the relationship in the difficult current business environment.

It is very common in Russia for friends to visit without any special notice, and they are welcome to talk and share meals. And when in need, you surely get help.

In much the same way—and to a greater extent—personal relationships with God and other Christians are essential in the life of every believer. God’s Word makes it clear that He wants us to share our lives with others.

And don’t forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God.
—Hebrews 13:16

This characteristic was evident from the very beginning of the church. Consider what the Bible tells us about the first century Christians:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.
—Acts 2:42



All the believers were meeting regularly at the Temple in the area known as Solomon’s Colonnade...All the people had high regard for them. Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women.

—Acts 5:12–14

Prayer, worship, breaking bread with fellow believers—this is an example for every Christian to follow, and it is especially needed to reach the next generation. Forming good personal relationships is extremely important to young people. We can help them make these connections by hosting social events, youth group parties, community outreaches, and charity activities.

We know that the majority of Russian youth use the internet daily. But being technological savvy is not the only way to connect with young people. The church has something very attractive to offer to the young generation—true community.

Studies show that children and adolescents are searching for ways to belong and be accepted. They need someone who believes in them, cares, and is willing to listen. They are eager to express their passion and to be useful. All these can be accomplished through relationships. Churches that create such opportunities become fascinating places to attend, make good friends, and grow in Christian faith.

Prayer Requests

- Pray that churches in Russia would focus on discipleship.
- Pray that churches encourage and equip Christian young people to share their faith with their peers and that they make evangelistic strategies intensely relational.

Today's Decisions Could Have a Great Impact Tomorrow

On January 15, 1919, an excellent leader was born in the country of Belize. Now considered the “father of the nation,” George Price was one of the chief architects of Brazil’s independence from Britain. After independence, Price became the first prime minister of Belize, and from the early 1960s until 1996, he essentially served as the nation’s head of government under a variety of titles. Known for being a humble leader who lived simply and freely engaged with the Belizean people, in 2000 Price became the first person to receive Belize’s highest honor, the Order of National Hero, given to recognize the role he played in Belize’s independence.

Price originally planned to study theology in Rome, but that plan changed with the advent of World War II. Price had to instead attend el Mayor Seminario Conciliar in Guatemala City. But after just nine months, he returned home to Belize to be near his dying father, and that simple choice put him on a path that would lead him into politics.¹

The Bible says in Galatians 5:25, *“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.”* A small decision today could have a big impact on tomorrow. Just consider what might happen if you remember to floss tonight or exercise tomorrow morning or attend church this Sunday or spend a special time with someone you love. God can use those simple choices to help you grow in your knowledge of Him and fulfill your purpose in God’s kingdom. The impact of your choices doesn’t always take a long time to manifest, either.

¹ “George Price Belize Biography and Pictorial,” ITM Ltd., accessed November 26, 2019, <https://belize.com/george-price-belize-biography-and-pictorial/>.

Imagine you’re writing the story God wants your life to tell in five or ten years. What does God want you to want for your future? Where do you believe God wants you to be? What changes will it take for you to get there? Write down your thoughts. Your ideas don’t have to be perfect. You don’t have to commit to what you write yet. Just capture on paper the first thoughts that come to mind about what you think God wants for your future.

Based on what you think God wants you to want, what discipline do you need to start walking in the direction God wants you to go? Don’t hesitate to ask Him. Ask the Lord how He wants you to grow. Ask Him for wisdom and insight to know what habits, choices, and routines in your life need to change. Then choose one thing to change. You will be tempted to choose three, four, or even ten. But choose only one thing to change, because if you choose more than one, you probably won’t accomplish any of them. If you select only one, you can start writing the story that God wants you to write.

Prayer Requests

- Pray for an end to the widespread legalism in churches, where appearances and knowledge are more important than being spiritually transformed.²
- Pray for those ministering in Belize. According to Operation World, “Pastors are stretched with 70 percent forced to work bi-vocationally. They recognize a great need for training, but distance and cost prohibit centralized, formal training programs.”³
- Pray that the less-reached people, including include the Garifuna, Mayans, Indians (who are almost entirely Hindu or Muslim), and Chinese, receive clear, culturally appropriate ministry.⁴

² Jason Mandryk, Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation (Downers Grover, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 146.

³ Mandryk, Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation, 146.

⁴ Mandryk, Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation, 146.

