

World Missions

A man says his prayers with turmoil in his heart. He has been preparing for this day for months, perhaps years. His family will be honored for what he is about to do. His religious community is proud.

The man is careful to stay focused on his task so that he does not think of the sacrifice he is making, the people he will leave behind.

When the moment comes, he and several others work together with one purpose.

The plane he has taken over crashes into the Twin Towers. Thousands die.

Have you ever wondered why? Why would a man be willing to end his own life in what the Muslim world calls “jihad”?

Many immediately think it must be because the man was a fanatic, brainwashed, crazy, or just so filled with hatred that he was willing to sacrifice his own life if it meant destroying others.

Perhaps, however, there is more to the story than what we might assume.

That man was purchasing something by giving his life. He was told that in becoming a martyr, he would gain instant access to heaven and get to advocate for seventy of his relatives to come to heaven as well.

This is significant for a Muslim. Muslims believe that God will choose who goes to heaven or hell based on their good or bad deeds. No one can ever know whether he is going to heaven. No one can ever be sure—unless (they believe) you die in jihad. It is the only way in Islam to be assured of heaven.

Imagine you are a sinner (which you are) and desperately want to be accepted by God. You know, however,

that your heart is “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9) and that all your efforts “come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

What can you do to attain the holiness required by God? You may try to do many good works, but your own heart will tell you they will never be enough.

It is understandable, then, why so many Muslims have given up their own lives thinking it will earn them heaven.

This desire for acceptance and forgiveness from a holy God is felt all over the world. God has placed it in the human heart, but many rely on their own efforts to try to attain it.

In India, hordes of people try to cleanse themselves in the filthy Ganges River. In America, people give to charity and say, “I’m a pretty good person.”

Only God is holy, and we who have come to know Christ as Saviour know that this holiness cannot be satisfied with our meager good deeds. In fact, all our efforts are “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6) in comparison to God’s holiness.

We, however, have not just the hope of heaven but the surety of it. God gave us eternal life—forgiveness and acceptance through the death of His own Son, who cleanses us from all unrighteousness, creates in us a clean heart, and robes us in His own righteousness.

Sometimes we take for granted what a beautiful and precious gift this is. However, seeing others giving their time, efforts, and even their lives in attempts to attain it should remind us of the need to share this good news.

As the Lord said in our Isaiah passage this week, “Who will go?” (6:8). Will you, like Isaiah, reply, “Here am I; send me”?

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

When I lived in a third-world country in South Asia, one thing that was disturbing was the water situation. Lack of knowledge about sanitation caused terrible sickness and even death.

One person might be using the river as a bathroom while another person might be collecting water to cook with. It is no wonder disease was an ever-present problem.

One way missionaries reach out is by providing the physical felt needs of people as a bridge to reach toward their spiritual needs. This is a biblical principle, as shown in James 2 and in Jesus' teaching to do to others as we would have them do to us (Matt. 7:12).

A great way to open doors to ministry is through clean water. Missionaries dig wells or provide the resources for wells, and suddenly a village that once only knew contaminated, filthy water now has clean water to drink.

Women at Risk International is one ministry that has used well-digging as a way to reach out to the lost. Their efforts were resisted in one place, but a little God-given creative thinking had great results.

The founder of Women at Risk International (www.warinternational.org) tells the following story.

"In this village, our savvy national partners made a vital decision. They drilled a well at the Hindu temple. Yes, you heard me. Downright shocking? Downright brilliant! Before, there was a lot of complaining about all the Christian widows and talk of kicking them out. 'Feces' were put in one of our 60 wells. Then our 'few good national men' offered 'clean water in the name of the Christian God, Jesus' to the local Hindu shrine. So, the whole village gathered for the drilling and

dedication by Christian male leaders, who spoke and prayed (read: preached) about the God called 'Living Water' and how he wants even Hindu men and women to know him. Next time there were complaints about Christian widows, the Hindu elders told the complainers to shut up or move out themselves."

What a beautiful example of how the gift of clean water can give an opening to tell about the Living Water!

We have been given a much greater gift than just clean drinking water. Those of us who have accepted Christ have been given the living water of salvation. This water is not like the water of the world, which promises to quench our thirst but never satisfies. The world's water carries within it the disease of lust and sin. It offers pleasure when tasted, but it ends in death for eternity.

We, however, have life-giving water for this life and eternity. Having been given such a gift, why are we not telling others about it?

If we were sick from bad water and someone built us a well, would we not tell people about it? Would we not be praising the person who built it?

We who have the living water should be sharing it with others. As this week's passage says, we should be drawing water out of the wells of salvation with joy (Isa. 12:3) and praising our God for all the great things He has done!

People are drinking deeply of the water of this world and not finding sustenance. Let us bring them to the Master, the One who once sat by a well and offered something greater than the water within it (John 4). Let us offer them a drink of the water that satisfies forever!

—Kimberly Rae.

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In Brazil, a missionary watches with sadness as devoutly religious people light candles in the hopes of sending loved ones to heaven through their efforts. They used to light real candles. Now, with the arrival of technology, they can simply put a coin into a slot and watch a virtual candle be lit on behalf of the dead.

If you were to talk with such a person, someone whose “fear toward [God] is taught by the precept of men” (Isa. 29:13), he would likely want to talk about the similarities between him and you—how religious you both are, how devout.

However, there is an important difference between being religious and being saved—a difference that decides eternity.

True Christianity is the one faith that is not man-made, that does not rely on human effort to gain access to heaven through good works. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

The person who lights candles, or goes to church, or sings in the choir is exactly the same as the murderer or adulterer or thief in his greatest need—all are sinners in need of salvation.

When evangelizing, we need to consider the assumptions a lost person might have when thinking of salvation.

Those who think they can look and act religious to attain heaven need to hear of God’s holy standard and how all our good works are “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6) in comparison.

On the other hand, if we are talking to someone who is a “sinner” (we all are, but we often see certain people as bigger sinners than others), we need to

be careful not to communicate merely that he needs to “straighten up” before we (or the church, or God Himself) will accept him. If a lost person begins thinking that he has to start acting like a Christian before he can become a Christian, he may end up looking outwardly religious without ever encountering salvation.

As a smart person once said, “You don’t get cleaned up to take a bath!”

This is not to say we should talk only about warm and fuzzy things and never speak of God’s standard of holiness. No, a recognition of our sinfulness is essential for repentance and salvation.

The problem comes when an unbeliever gets the idea that acting in outwardly religious ways, rather than having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, is what saves him.

When it comes to evangelizing, convincing people that specific things about their lives need to be changed is not the first priority. As Isaiah 29:16 says, it is turning things upside down.

The first and most important thing a lost person needs is not to stop stealing or to stop lighting candles or to stop having an immoral lifestyle. Those changes are a *result* of God’s salvation and saving grace, not a *prerequisite*.

The first thing a person needs is salvation! God will then give the lost a new heart. And within it He will give the Spirit and the strength to make the changes that please Him.

Let us always remember that, first and foremost, people need a relationship with God. Our actions are the fruit of that relationship, not something we do to earn it.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

When God creates the new heavens and new earth, do you suppose He will begin His creation and then leave it to finish itself over millions or billions of years? Will the lion begin by hunting the lamb but then gradually soften and change his appetites until they can rest together without conflict?

This is a ludicrous thought. Yet many Christians have accepted that God did just that when He created the earth the first time. These Christians are willing to edit their faith to look intelligent before their current society's ideals.

This is not a new idea—compromising beliefs to match society. Many cultures have done it, combining new religious ideas with ancient superstitions.

Many Americans have collected philosophies from multiple belief systems to create their own brand of “spirituality” that answers to no one but themselves.

Brian T. is a Christian man who teaches in a high school in North Carolina. Two of the other teachers, who claim to be Christians, teach theistic evolution. They care very much about scientific “research.” As he sees it, they care about making God look good in the face of modern science.

But “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. . . . The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain” (1 Cor. 3:19-20).

God has no interest in mixing the truth of His Word with current societal beliefs. He wants His children to be willing to look like fools before a world that considers itself wise.

Brian struggles with frustration over the influence these other teachers are having in his school. “I see the impact of teachers saying they believe God but they don't really believe His Word

. . . kids seeing someone saying God's Word doesn't really mean what it says.”

How does mixing the biblical account of Creation with modern science undermine our witness?

- It denies God's glory in creation.
- It exalts man's knowledge over God's wisdom.
- It robs the beauty of God's creation and credits it to chance.
- It undermines the authority of God's Word.
- It encourages the separation of religion from other aspects of life.
- It makes Christianity irrelevant to most of the world.

Brian says, “We live in a culture that, rightly so, appreciates genuineness. It appreciates the lack of hypocrisy. It's looking for people who are real. And when someone says they believe the Bible, and then bends over backward trying to squeeze something unbiblical into the Bible, then people recognize that it is not real, not genuine, and they're not drawn to it.

“Study the Word of God to know what God says about the issue,” Brian says. “And if God is clear, ‘let God be true, but every man a liar’” (Rom. 3:4).

Science continues to change, but God's Word has not changed. We can place our confidence in Him, and this confidence honors Him better than trying to appease the world. The world does not need appeasing; it needs the truth.

God deserves glory and praise for what He has made. We should encourage people to see God's hand in the beauty of creation all around them. Our confidence in God, against current opinion, is genuine and stands strong. This is not just appealing; it is right.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

As missionaries in South Asia, we were blessed with many Muslim friends. Some of our Muslim friends wore head coverings; some did not. Some followed the strict prayer times; some did not.

I asked several of them whether they had read the Koran, their holy book. Each told me he had read some but not all of it.

I was stunned. How could they say they were Muslim if they did not care about doing what was required of them? As I got to know them better and asked more questions, I came to the conclusion that many of my Muslim friends were following only the rules that would keep them in good standing with their family and their religious community.

Many of them were not seeking God—either to please Him or know Him. They believed He could not be known. They also believed they could never be sure of going to heaven. I think many of them today are living with the uncertain hope that, in the end, God will look at their good works or their good intentions and decide they were not bad enough to send to hell.

This is a very interesting viewpoint considering that, according to one Muslim belief, missing even one of the five prayer times condemns a person to eighty years in hell.

Considering all of this, one must conclude that their true beliefs about God are different from what their taught belief is.

For Christians, it can be the same. There are many, many people who come to church only on Christmas and Easter, who say they are believers, but who, in the end, are hoping that God will decide they are not bad enough to send to hell.

A person like that cannot be a good missionary—not on a foreign field and

not in a workplace in America.

Like the Israelites in Ezra's time, we need to prioritize keeping the commandments in God's Word foremost in our lives. These should be obeyed—and all the better if they are obeyed with joy.

Also, our love for God and our gratitude to Him should overflow, so that we offer more than just what is required. Like those who gave freewill offerings in the Old Testament, we too can give extra to our God.

Our freewill offerings could include giving money above the required tithe, performing ministry beyond regular worship, taking a missions trip during the summer, or giving up a lunch break to talk with a lost person or a discouraged believer. It is a great witness to others to see people who are giving beyond what is required out of love for their Saviour.

Had I been a seeking lost person in Indonesia, my relationships with those nominal Muslims would never have inspired me to look into Islam. In the same way, how we live is important to our witness.

Joyful obedience and genuine devotion to a true and living God may be the salt that makes a lost person thirsty to find out more. When he sees that you would rather serve at a church activity than join him at the bar on the weekend or that you enjoy worshipping rather than sleeping in on Sundays, it speaks of your Saviour in a way that gives power to the words you speak in His name.

So let us be Christians that serve and give "not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). Through our living testimony—our devotion that is based on love and not just duty—others may come to love our God too.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

To have something new, like a new foundation (Ezra 3:10), something former must have gone. Often it means something was destroyed.

This is difficult. It is hard to let go of something that worked or was loved. Yet sometimes God removes the old, good thing to replace it with something better. A method or program that worked fifty years ago may not be the most effective way to minister now.

God cares about our growth in our relationship with Him. It is a temptation sometimes to base ministry on the most effective thing we have done or even to base our spirituality on the time we were closest to God. But living in the past does not bless us or our ministry.

We need to keep learning about God and how He works, and we need to be willing to let Him sometimes replace old “temples,” old ministries and programs, with new foundations.

I remember a church near my teenage hometown of Powder Springs, Georgia, that was having a conflict. Their congregation numbers were expanding (a great thing!), and this resulted in the present church building being too small.

Some of the church wanted to build a new church to accommodate the growth. Others loved the old church building and did not want to change.

They had meetings. They argued. Was the church going to split over this issue? It became a bad testimony to the nonbelievers in the area.

Finally, God intervened. One night the foyer of the old church building was struck by lightning. Charred remains left the church with little option other than to build something new.

The old building was not bad. It had been used greatly. But it should not have been kept at the expense of

God’s continuing work.

The people built another building. Over the years, that church’s ministry has continued to grow. They are now a large, thriving ministry because they did not refuse to build a new foundation when it was time.

This happened on a much larger scale in China. After Hudson Taylor first reached the interior of China with the gospel, more missionaries followed, doing a great work.

When war came, missionaries in China had to flee or face life (and sometimes death) interred in prison camps. After the war, the Communists determined to destroy Christianity in China forever.

China closed. Missionaries were no longer allowed. People feared what would happen to the gospel presence in closed, Communist China.

Finally, after decades, the day came when China opened again. The world was shocked to discover that the Communist takeover and the expulsion of missionaries had not hurt God’s work there at all. Instead, it had brought out the strength of the national believers. God’s work there did not just grow; it thrived.

In 1925 there were thousands of missionaries in China and an estimated 500,000 Christians. Now there are an estimated 50 to 100 million believers in China, many of them risking their lives to go to church, read the Bible, or share their faith.

The destruction of something good was not a disaster. God had a new plan. Now we all can shout in praise to God over this new foundation that has been laid in China.

As hard as it is, do not despair when God removes something good. He may be planning to replace it with something even better.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

The Israelites had been taken captive by cruel Babylon. They endured years of worldly influence (Dan. 1), persecution (chap. 3), and hatred (chap. 6).

Now, suddenly, the king's heart turned, and he sent captives back to restore the temple. Not only that, he funded the entire operation!

God did the impossible. It is no wonder the people rejoiced!

God turns the hearts of kings according to His own purpose (Prov. 21:1). Sometimes He raises up kings who persecute His people, refining and strengthening them. Other times He brings in leaders who support His people, and this also carries with it tests and temptations.

Missionaries and ministers need to train disciples not only for the present but also for how to live when the tide changes.

Any given group of believers will most likely be in one of three categories within their culture:

1. Persecuted and rejected
2. Delivered and restored
3. Enabled and resourced

(There are of course many subcategories within these.)

For a moment, let us look at a rare event in history when people experienced all three categories within their lifetime, just as the people of Ezra's time did. These would be the believers in Rome during the fourth century. For three hundred years after Christ's death, His followers were despised, tormented, tortured, and killed. Then, suddenly, Rome's emperor converted to Christianity. Hallelujah—no more persecution! The emperor then not only endorsed Christianity but also made it the official religion.

Christians need to know how to live a godly life under the specific tempta-

tions of each of these life settings.

1. Persecution and rejection. Believers will struggle with fear and discouragement. They need to know how to live strong, be willing to face pain and loss for the cause of Christ, and be willing to face rejection from their culture as they stand firm in their faith.

2. Delivered and restored. This is a wonderful time, a time many in our present world hope for. When it comes, God's family should rejoice! Then we should spread the news of God's goodness while remaining firm in doctrine and spiritual purity despite the new freedom.

3. Enabled and resourced. In this setting, it is easy to get lazy and careless in our faith. When believers are accepted or even looked up to, the temptation is to focus on outward appearances, forgetting to maintain a close relationship with God; or to slip downward into nominalism, just going through the motions while letting go of important matters of biblical obedience. There is also the temptation to compromise biblical truth to maintain acceptance of the version of "Christianity" that is currently acceptable.

Where are we in our culture? How do you view the Christian situation under America's present leadership? What specific temptations is the church facing? Can you think of specific biblical instructions or promises that would help believers be strong in their faith during our present time?

As believers who have been given the Great Commission, we should be living by example in our present political climate. We should also be prepared with the truth when the political situation changes.

Are we doing so? And are we preparing other believers as well?

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

When we were missionaries, one reaction we commonly noticed was that people felt sorry for us. When people heard about our lives in third-world countries, they would feel bad for all we were “missing out on.”

It is true that at times we felt we were missing out (when we were feeling sorry for ourselves). However, what we gave up was not even close in comparison to what we gained. As missionaries with “less,” we got to see God at work more.

Being in need was a blessing. It did not seem so at first, but we learned that being in need meant we had to come to God with our impossible requests. Then we got to see Him regularly provide in amazing ways.

Our needs stretched from the huge—like the time we were undersupported \$700 per month and could not return to the mission field unless God did something amazing (which He did)—down to the small—like when we needed diapers.

When our daughter was a baby, we were about to run out of diapers. Finances were tight, and for some reason I sensed I was supposed to wait—God was going to provide. The stack got smaller and smaller. We were down to five, maybe three.

That night we got a phone call from people I had never even met. They said they had a bunch of extra diapers and were going to bring them over that night. They were even the right size!

That incident was so small and seemingly insignificant, but for me it was a beautiful lesson in trust. We need to see that God cares about the smallest things in our lives because He cares for us. I would not trade that firsthand knowledge for any financial security or horde of possessions.

George Mueller was a man God used to show this beautiful concept to the

world. Mueller ran orphanages filled with hundreds of children and never once asked for money. He prayed about all his needs, sometimes sitting at a breakfast table full of hungry children, thanking God for food that had not yet arrived at their table.

And every time—every single time—God provided for them all.

We humans naturally want security. We do not like the idea of being in such great need that we have to fast and pray and plead with God for deliverance. But think of the results of such times!

There is a lesson for all believers in this week’s Ezra passage. We look at current times and fear persecution in the future. We fear that our security might be threatened. We fear that our resources might be taken, our voices silenced.

God does not want us to spend our time worrying about what we need (Matt. 6:25-34) or scrambling to make our world protected and secure (cf. Isa. 43:2). He wants us to humble ourselves, to recognize that everything good comes from Him, not ourselves (Jas. 1:17), and to call out to Him for provision.

For example, right now I am facing the possibility of brain surgery. Has God forgotten me? Should you feel sorry for me? No! On the contrary, this is a beautiful opportunity for God to show His goodness and for me to honor Him by my trust.

Need is not something to feel sorry about. Rather, it is an opportunity for us to cry out to our God and for God to show Himself in mighty ways—ways that will bring Him glory not just in our own hearts but also in our testimony and our witness, drawing others to Him as well.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

God tells us to maintain a standard of holiness, setting ourselves apart. In different countries and different cultures, the concept of holiness may be the same, but the practical application of it can be quite different.

This is very important to consider when ministering in another culture. What is a holy lifestyle in their eyes? What do they see as unholy?

It is important to God that we take another's viewpoint into consideration and conform ourselves for the sake of our testimony (Rom. 14).

This is sometimes more complex than it might seem. Modesty, for example, is just one aspect of holy living. While in Bangladesh, it was immodest to show shoulders, upper arms, or ankles.

In Hong Kong, it is important to cover the neck but not so important to cover the legs.

In Uganda, it does not matter whether the skirt comes to the ankles or not as long as it is a skirt. Only prostitutes wear pants.

Back to Bangladesh again, their sign of prostitution was wearing an anklet on each ankle. Or maybe it was one anklet rather than two—I cannot remember. Best not to wear any, I think!

It got very complicated and frustrating at times, but we kept analyzing and praying and studying. We wanted to live as a holy presence in each culture so that our witness would not be tarnished.

We failed at this one time in Kosovo by holding hands in public.

We succeeded in Indonesia by never, ever doing so.

Once when we were discussing culture with the Muslim students in a university class in Indonesia, we asked them what parts of their culture they would

keep and what parts they would not keep if they were to move to America.

We then went on to use the opportunity to give our own answers. We discussed the things about American culture that we did not like (partying, immorality, drinking, bad TV shows, and such) and the things about their culture that we appreciated (taking care of the elderly, hospitality, and such).

The students were shocked to find that the unholiness they disliked about Western culture was the same unholiness we rejected. They assumed all Americans were alike, living the lifestyle they saw regularly on TV.

What a joy it was to explain to them our desire to live in holiness to the Lord and to have them believe us because for the past two years we had lived a holy life in front of them!

That day I understood that living a holy life is essential to having an effective witness. Our Asian friends had been trained since childhood to see all Americans as immoral. They were not likely to believe our words the first time we spoke to them. However, because we had lived among them and they had seen our lives, they believed us.

The struggling and trying and asking God about so many small, frustrating aspects of life there were worth it. Asking these questions, especially when desiring to minister to another cultural group, is extremely important. Small things make a big difference! It is worth it to change—no matter what is necessary and no matter how uncomfortable it may be—to fit a culture's understanding of holiness so that when you speak of God, your witness is not hindered by your lifestyle.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

“Kids don’t understand the deep meaning of rituals.”

“Let’s have a separate children’s program so that they won’t distract from the ceremony.”

“Wait until they’re teenagers or older to introduce deep truths.”

We may hear such statements in church, but rarely in the Scriptures do we find a pattern for church, ministry, or growth in the Lord that has groups divided by age. On the contrary, God often speaks of doing things together as families, with the children joining with the adults and having the opportunity to ask questions. For example, during the Passover Feast (Exod. 13:14), the ritual was an opportunity for children to ask questions and for parents to tell the story of God’s faithfulness.

What better way to apply this idea than a fun family campout?

A campout may seem off the subject, but it is exactly what the people of Israel did during the Feast of Booths. They had to collect natural materials, make small huts, and then live in them together as a family for seven days (Lev. 23:33-43). This was not a time of complaining about not having the usual amenities or of wishing they could get back to normal life. No, the Bible says, “There was very great gladness” (Neh. 8:17). They were having fun!

And within the fun, wonderful spiritual lessons were being taught in a noninstructional setting.

Imagine your family having a weeklong campout each summer. The kids would look forward to it all year. When it was time, you would set up camp in your backyard (no big costs for vacation packages that end up with everyone worn out). Your entire family would stay in one tent. There would be fun, active times and also relaxing downtimes.

You would have special moments of instruction that just do not come during the regular hectic pace of modern life. Your kids would ask important questions. They would open up about their lives, maybe even explaining some of the temptations they face. You would have the opportunity to respond to their questions and especially to tell stories of God’s goodness and faithfulness to you over years past.

God intended the Festival of Booths to be a joyous, multigenerational way of remembering His goodness and passing on His truth. This is an important facet that is sometimes missing in churches. We have programs for all different age-groups; often the moment we enter the church building, families split in many directions. God, however, likes to see families worshipping and serving Him together.

Have you ever ministered to others with your entire family? Have you ever considered going on a family missions trip? The lifelong and eternal advantages cannot be measured. Not only do children learn how to serve by following your example, but they also see firsthand that God is using you and continuing to teach you. It is a fun way to pass on a godly heritage from one generation to the next—something that is deeply important to God (Exod. 10:2; Deut. 6:7; Ps. 78:4; Joel 1:3).

Sign up for a missions trip, or set up a tent in your backyard! Take the opportunity to spend real time with your family in a setting that allows for curious questions and God-sharing stories.

Like the Israelites, you will most likely see a “very great gladness” (Neh. 8:17) as a result. You might even hear your children asking to do it again next year!

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

Though we live in the age of grace, God makes it clear that unrepented sin will result in consequences.

This is not acceptable within the bounds of tolerance or political correctness. Our present culture likes the concepts of mercy and understanding love. It does not like the concept of negative consequences in punishment for evil behavior.

Though both sides represent aspects of God, to focus on one and reject the other misrepresents God—a tendency that can creep into even our churches without our awareness.

For example, sometimes with children and teens we want to show compassion for their sins and faults. We thus end up rescuing them from consequences or refraining from punishment out of a desire to show grace.

As a result of this, however, children may grow up within the church feeling no righteous fear toward God and no fear in regard to their sin. They can do whatever they want, knowing they will be “forgiven”—bailed out by their parents or church.

My friend Shelly Lantz was one such child. Though she grew up in a Christian home, she got involved in doing drugs, then selling drugs. Her parents, wanting her restoration, continued to help her. Shelly says their doing so enabled her to continue her life of sin. It did not help her at all.

Shelly ended up in prostitution and worse. Finally, when she was arrested in Turkey, her parents painfully decided they would not pay the money to bail her out this time.

Shelly spent three years in an international prison. There, in solitary confinement, with only a Bible that had been smuggled to her by a Christian couple, Shelly truly repented. She got

right with God and gave her life to Him.

Now God is using Shelly to reach out to others. (If you would like to hear her story, go to www.thechristiancarguy.com, click on the link Podcasts, then click the one titled “Truckstop Trafficking.”) She tells parents to allow their children to suffer consequences for their behavior. Do not enable them to continue in their sins.

As believers and as ministers, sometimes it is easy to pretend away our sinfulness, cloaking it with outward righteousness. But the truth is that we all are desperately sinful. In our flesh dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18). How will the future generation learn to deal with their very real sinfulness if we teach by example that sin is something to ignore, or to cover up, or to resolve as quickly and quietly as possible so that no one knows about it?

This is not God’s way. If we truly humbled ourselves, we could admit our own sinfulness, confess when we do wrong, and ask for forgiveness. Then God would get the glory even in this, as He deserves. Then we could allow our children (or our spiritual children in ministry) to suffer the consequences of their own sin—not worrying how it may look or who may talk—so that they too might see that true repentance is the best way to live.

Our lives will be better if we recognize—personally, as a church, and as a nation—that anything less than hell is grace from God and more than we deserve. Instead of hiding from sin or getting angry that someone noticed we are sinners, we will then humbly admit our true selves and thus give greater glory to God’s grace within us. What a great testimony that will be!

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

This was such a special event. All the people rejoiced—and with good reason. Almost one hundred years earlier, the small group of exiles had returned to rebuild the foundation of the new temple (lessons 5–9). Now the wall was also rebuilt, and they were dedicating their new, hopeful future to God.

It was not just the priests and Levites who came. No, all the people were there, shouting with joy and praising the Lord not only because God is good but also because they got to be part of what He was doing.

There are lessons for us in this passage regarding ministry.

It is worthwhile to note that all the people were involved. When there is a new project to be done in God's work, there is a tendency to have only the "experts," the missionaries or leaders, be involved. Allowing others to help in both the decision making and the carrying out of decisions involves risk. Beginners will make mistakes. The work may not look as professional or run as smoothly.

However, using only the missionaries or leaders to do a work means missing out on a very important part of God's work—a sense of ownership as those in the body of Christ work together, each person doing his part and finding joy and fulfillment in it.

Do you think the people in this week's passage would have rejoiced so strongly if they had been mere spectators while others got involved or if they had been prohibited from joining in the work because of their lack of experience or training?

New believers, beginners, and all age-groups need the gift of being involved in God's work. Just as training children to "help" fix the car takes extra time and effort, so mentoring and guiding new disciples takes extra work and effort.

But it is worth it. Jesus certainly thought so—He spent His entire three years of earthly ministry mentoring the twelve men He had chosen to follow alongside Him. These men had much to learn and were far from perfect. They argued about who was the greatest; they even ran away in the face of their biggest test.

Jesus patiently continued to lead them, however, and the New Testament is filled with the work His disciples continued to do after their Leader moved on.

High in the mountains in South Asia, the churches are called "Jesus houses." They were built by the nationals, with their building materials and cultural design.

The evangelizing missionaries to that area did not start a work that only they could maintain. They did not create miniversions of their churches back home, full of materials and structures that would imply God was the foreigners' God and could only be reached through the foreigners' culture and methods.

These Jesus houses do not look like typical American churches—no bricks, no steeple, no altar or podium. There are not even pews or chairs.

But they are full of believers who know God personally, who have been redeemed, and who have joined in God's mighty work to reach the nations. They are involved in the work and feel a sense of ownership in it. And their rejoicing is a testament to the world.

Training disciples is not just teaching doctrine. It includes the vital ministry of mentoring, of bringing new believers alongside and getting them involved in what God is doing. As we give them a sense of purpose as part of the body of Christ, the result will be the rejoicing of all.

—Kimberly Rae.

World Missions

Imagine a young, new missionary. He is eager to serve God and wants to reach the lost with the gospel.

He begins visiting churches to raise support. At many, people are kind and excited for him; but at one, someone makes the teasing comment, “I sure wish I could go around asking for money and then take it easy the rest of the week!”

The missionary hates that anyone might think he is wasting God’s money or time. So he works harder to show his sincere desire to honor God and obey the Great Commission.

Finally the day comes when the man leaves for the field. He is already tired by the time he arrives, and the new culture and climate exhaust him even more.

A small church is started. As with all pastors, Sunday becomes his busiest day. He decides to take Mondays off—until one day a visitor comes to his office on Monday. Upon not finding him, the visitor criticizes him for being “lazy,” taking a day off when everyone else is working.

The man does not want people to think he is not serving God with all his might, so he works harder. He gets less sleep. His prayer times are shortened because of urgent needs. In time, his sermons become dry, and his ministry is a drudgery. After a few years, his health deteriorates. His spirit lowers.

Eventually, he leaves the field. He lives out his life labeled by himself and others as a failure. “I guess I wasn’t missionary material after all.”

This man could have been a great missionary, but he had no source of strength left. He denied himself something God wanted for him. God even created him with the need for it—a Sabbath rest.

We have been released from the burden of the law (Rom. 6:14), but the prin-

ciple of a day of rest is still important for believers to follow. God Himself portrayed the example in the Creation account (Gen. 1). God did not physically need the rest, but He set aside time to enjoy what He had created.

We Americans value hard work and strength. We sometimes view the need to rest as a weakness, something to be denied or ignored.

Sometimes we even tend to rate a person’s spirituality by his level of activity for God. However, this can lead to our doing much *for* God but never taking the time to be *with* God. We need to be still (Ps. 46:10), to rest in Him (37:7), to listen to His voice (John 10:27), and to be strengthened (Isa. 30:15). It is not weak to need this—God created us to need rest on purpose.

In the well-known passage of Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd “maketh me to lie down in green pastures” (vs. 2). Interesting, is it not, that the passage does not say “lets me lie down”? What could a sheep possibly be doing that is so important it will not lie down and enjoy resting near its shepherd for a while?

Indeed, why does God have to make us lie down? Why do we not enjoy the gift of a day of rest, a day of honoring God and being with Him?

For missionaries, pastors, and anyone involved in church work, Sunday can often be the busiest day of the week, with no rest at all. Please support these people and help them remember that taking a day of rest, regardless of the day, is something that will help strengthen them for the work rather than hinder it. Your pastor, your missionary, and you yourself will be better equipped for God’s work if you come away once a week and rest with Him.

—Kimberly Rae.