

May Mission Month

2016



**“He has shown you, O man, what
is good ...”**

Introduction

If we love God, we are on mission ... the mission to see others love Him too. Some of us are called to be 'tentmakers' as Paul was at the beginning of his time in Corinth, working at his trade to support himself, and living for God's glory and the extension of His kingdom. Some of us are called to be 'full-time workers' as Paul was later in Corinth and for much of the rest of his life, focussing all his time and energy on Jesus' mission while being financially supported by others. As Paul's life shows, God may call us to either style of mission at different stages of our lives – but one thing is certain, He has called us all to mission.

We *are* all called to mission, and we would make a much greater difference in the world if we all, very deliberately, thought of ourselves as 'full-time Christian workers', as *missionaries*. But for the sake of space, in these notes I have reserved that term for those intentionally trained and formally commissioned for a specific ministry.

In our early days in Fiji, embarking on a ministry that was too big for us, in a world that was strange to us, among people we didn't know, it was very plain that we needed God's help. One of the passages we clung to was (and still is) 2 Peter 1:2-11. This begins with the declaration that God's power is sufficient to give us 'everything we need for life and godliness'. It ends with the assurance that as we continue to grow in godliness, God will continue to ensure our lives and ministries are effective and productive. Isn't this wonderful?!

Much of the material that follows has been written with a threefold application in mind: for ourselves - because our mission is vital to the extension of God's kingdom here; for the missionaries – that they would teach and model not just 'salvation', but saved lives; to the 'missioned' – that they would go on to fulfil their own mission, not to be content to be merely the recipients of grace, but also the bearers of it.

We all have stories of how God has led us on mission. The stories in these little devotions are mostly stories from my life, because these are the stories I know. I trust they will be a blessing, and that God's Word will be living and active in all our lives.

Lindy Taylor

1. Empowerment - physical and spiritual Acts 1:8

Our theme as we come to Mission Month this year is “Empowerment” and we’ll be hearing from God’s people involved in empowering others to escape poverty, slavery, ignorance and oppression. This is wonderful and in line with God’s care for the whole person and His command that we demonstrate His care to the world.

Our partnership with these and other missionaries involves financial support, so they have the physical resources to do their work, and prayerful support, asking God to intervene on behalf of them and those they serve. In praying for the many and varied needs of our missionaries, we can’t do better than to pray that God will empower them – missionaries and missioned - with His Holy Spirit, the source of all wisdom and true strength.

As we prepared to head out to Fiji, a veteran missionary from that field visited us in Sydney. We asked if he had any advice on how to prepare for life in the Pacific. He did. “Get some practice casting out demons if you can.” (I had been wondering about whether or not to buy a water filter ...) We were taking our little family into a truly foreign country, and we were very definitely going to need God’s help.

One thing that amazed us in Fiji, that was truly foreign to we Sydney-siders, was how eager people were to be prayed for. I once had a young hindu girl, a total stranger, ask me to pray for her in the middle of a busy coffee shop. A muslim friend who asked for prayer said it was because Christians don’t expect to be paid for their prayers(?!) and because the Christian God actually answers prayer. We heard many stories of hindus and muslims coming to faith through the miraculous power of Jesus to heal their diseases and release them from the hateful power of demons. Living in a country where sickness is rife and demonic oppression is common, we wished we had been taught more about these aspects of spiritual warfare at Bible College.

Jesus promised His disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, power to demonstrate His Lordship and be effective witnesses to His glory in a hostile world.

What do the following passages tell us about the power of God that is available to us? What can we be praying for our missionaries, those they serve, and ourselves, as we seek to live out the mission Jesus has given each of us?

Acts 1:8

Acts 4:33-35

Ephesians 3:14-21; 6:10-18

Luke 9:1-2

Colossians 1:9-12; 28-29

2 Timothy 1:7-8

2 Peter 1:2-8

Romans 15:13

2. Judgement Day – a day of rejoicing? *Psalm 96*

Before I was married I lived and worked in PNG with Wycliffe Bible Translators for a couple of years.

Early in my time there I met a woman called Noa. She & her husband lived in a very remote village up in the highlands. The reason I met her was they had been staying at the mission station I was visiting because they had been cast out of their village. Noa's crime was having twin baby girls and keeping them both alive. Her people lived in awful fear of twins, believing one was actually a devil and would bring famine or war to the village. What Noa should have done was leave the smallest of her daughters out in the forest to die, ridding her people of the danger. (If the twins had been a boy and a girl, it would have been the baby girl disposed of.) But Noa had learned from the missionaries that babies are made by God, not the devil, and that both her daughters were truly human and truly precious. Because of the new truth she had learned, she persevered in protecting both her babies despite the censure and rejection it brought. In time her husband and eventually her whole people accepted her and her babies back into the village community. Twins are no longer killed in that place.

While living in PNG I was blessed to be adopted as 'small sister' by a Christian man called Simeon. He lived in a nearby village and was concerned that I didn't have my own brothers to look after me. My village 'sister-in-law' was called Janka and we became very close. She told me one day, "When I am lazy, my husband doesn't beat me like these other men would. And if I'm sick and can't go to the river to collect water, he doesn't beat me, he takes the bucket and collects the water himself, even though the other men laugh at him. He tells me that the Bible says a man must sit down well with his wife and be kind to her ... he is a good man!" Janka & Simeon's marriage was very different to the tribal highland norm.

Working in a country with over 800 different languages and many different cultures and religions, I had wonderful opportunities to see and hear stories of the saving and truly empowering nature of the gospel over the works of the devil. One story has never left me – it was about an old man from a very remote area who had come to love Jesus and to see his people and his community truly turned 'from darkness to light'. He once asked 'his' missionary if her father and grandfather had known these great things. She answered that, yes, like many people where she came from, they'd both known and loved Jesus. On hearing this the old man wept and wondered why, if so many people knew these things, no one had ever come to tell his father and grandfather. It broke his heart that it was too late for them to know that God is good and that He loved them.

Psalm 96:11-13 tells us that *all of creation* should be able to rejoice in God's coming righteous judgement.

What stands in the way of that happening? What do the following passages say?

Luke 10:2

Romans 10:13-15

Ephesians 6:10

3. Powerful Religion – appropriate worship *Isaiah 58:1-12*

One day, early in our time in Fiji when we still lived in Suva, Tim was very late coming home from the Bible School. Maddy and Merran kept a lookout for his return and finally I knew he was back safe and sound when Merran called out, “Daddy’s home! ... and he’s carrying aunty! ... and she’s only got one leg!” ‘Aunty’ turned out to be a young Indian woman who had lost a leg when run over by a truck. She had been in hospital for many weeks having lost her near-term baby as well as her leg in the accident. Tim had come across her & her husband at the bus stand in Suva on his way home from work. It was apparent that she was unwell, and that as he was about to come home to food and family and comfort, they were going to spend the night on a wooden bench in the bus stand. So ... he brought them and their few belongings home with him. They stayed with us for a few days, recovering her strength and looking for somewhere to stay. A week or so later they were back, all smiles, with a gift of vegetables, so grateful for Tim’s kindness to them at such a desperate time in their lives.

Most of us are familiar with the idea that Christianity is not a religion but a relationship. This helps us to focus on the reality that our interaction with God isn’t based on our performance of certain rites and rituals, but on a living knowledge of the Person who made and sustains us.

The Greek word translated *religion* refers to ‘external expressions of worship’. This word is only used on two occasions in the New Testament, and only once in relation to we Christians. In James 1:26-27 the Lord’s brother speaks of appropriate religion, the ‘external expressions of worship’ that God accepts. What is really striking is that James doesn’t speak in terms of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, or faithful preaching or powerful prayer; he speaks of disciplined speech, social justice and counter-cultural living.

James’ focus reflects that of Micah 6:8 in the Old Testament, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly.” God’s heart has always been for the poor and marginalised – and His expectation has always been that the lives of His people would reflect that.

I’m not sure that bringing homeless strangers into our homes is always how God expects us to deal with poverty, but I know ***He does expect us to deal with it***, in His Name - for the sake of His reputation in the world and for the sake of the people He has made and whom He loves.

Groups like World Vision, Baptist World Aid etc work hard to expose the unjust work practices of various multi-national corporations, for example in the garment industry. As a result, we know so much more than previous generations about the injustice we are party to in the course of our daily lives. ***How are we to ‘do justly, love mercy and walk humbly’ in the face of this knowledge?***

Re-read Isaiah 58:1-12. What is the people’s complaint in v.3a and how does God answer it? What is the promise of v.8-9a? Is this something you hope for in your relationship with God? What is the context of this promise?

v.11-12 speak of God’s guidance and provision, and of the success of our efforts to turn people back to Him. What context do v.9b-10 provide? What does it mean in v.10 to ‘spend yourself’?

In what ways do you think this Old Testament exhortation no longer applies to we New Testament believers? In what ways do you think it is still applicable?

Read James 1:26-27: What three characteristics of acceptable religion does he give? What are some specific examples of these? Are you in the habit of expressing your worship of God in these terms?

4. Powerful Lives – making a day-to-day difference 1 Corinthians 10:31

When we were preparing to leave for our new life in Fiji, people sometimes asked us why we had to go overseas to be missionaries, declaring that they could be missionaries right here at home. This is entirely true and is the message of much of the Bible.

The advantage of going overseas is that it's extremely difficult to forget your purpose. Every day, waking to the knowledge that you are far from family and friends, you remember WHY. At every gathering where languages other than your own are spoken, you remember WHY. The food you eat is often strange, the clothes you wear are not necessarily what you would choose, the weather is hotter/colder/wetter than you are used to ... Each day the shape of your life reminds you that your life has a very specific purpose. We have found it much harder to live out Jesus' mission since returning to Australia – comfort and convenience can so easily woo us into forgetfulness, the demands of the daily grind can so easily distract us. God's view of our purpose hasn't changed, but ours often gets hidden by the fog of normality that can so easily shroud our lives.

In Acts 18:1-4 we see that Paul was a tentmaker and that he began his mission in Corinth in the context of his normal, busy life as a tradesman. But he didn't always do this. In verse 5 we see that after his colleagues arrived in town he relinquished his trade and focussed his attention on full-time ministry, using all of his time and energy on the mission God had called him to. Most of the people who became Christians through his ministry weren't in the position to follow his example in this: slaves and soldiers certainly didn't have this privilege.

Not many of us are called to 'full-time' ministry. Most of us are called to be 'tentmakers'. But as Ephesians 5:15ff tells us, we're all called to make the most of every opportunity, every day, to live godly and counter-cultural lives that will make a difference to the people around us, for Jesus' sake. This is regardless of where we live, how we are financially supported or what our primary occupation is.

Titus 2:9-10 contain some pretty startling thoughts about the power of day-to-day godliness. Paul tells us we are here so that people will look at us and know God is wonderful, regardless of the prestige or drudgery of our lives. He goes on in vv.11-12 to point out that the missionary message about grace – God's undeserved power at work in our lives – is not just about how to get to Heaven when we die, but how to impact the world for Jesus while we live. If even slaves can do this, so can we!

Consider the following examples of the powerful lives to which we have all been called. What are they? In what situations might it be especially difficult or counter-cultural to live like this?

Matthew 5:14-16

1 Peter 3:15

Ephesians 5:21

Titus 3:1-2

1 Peter 2:9

1 Peter 3:1-2, 7

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

5. To Khazakstan or Kelso ... Empowering those who go. *Romans 10:15*

“Do you know the colour of bird wee? Do you know if New Zealand birds wee the same colour as Fiji birds? If you do, feel free to send the answer to Matelita ... we’re afraid we couldn’t tell her.” Matelita is Maddy’s Fijian name and I would like to point out that I now know a bit about bird wee.

When we were in Fiji, our letters home to our supporters weren’t always terribly ... deep. We did, naturally, talk about the progress (or otherwise) of our ministry at the Bible School, but we also just ... talked. A colleague once told me, rather sadly, that she could never write such letters, that their supporters weren’t interested in their lives, only in their ministry

The love and trust and sacrificial support of our people back home was one of the most empowering things in our lives. The knowledge that we weren’t out there on our own, that people actually cared about us and our kids, and believed in us to be doing our best, and loved us even when it seemed our best wasn’t good enough – these things were wonderful and were a great part of the privilege of our overseas service. To have tried to live as we did, without that support, would have made both life and ministry much more difficult.

We were sent to Fiji to be Bible teachers, and naturally our knowledge of the Bible and our ability (or otherwise) as teachers were vital to our ministry. However our effectiveness (or otherwise) didn’t depend entirely upon these things.

Read the following passages and consider some of the things that impact the ministry of God’s people regardless of the kind of work they do or where He might call them to do it:

2 Peter 1:2-8

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

1 Peter 3:7

1 Timothy 3:4-5

Philippians 2:25-28

Philippians 4:14-16

What is your daily occupation? What opportunities does it give you to help extend God’s kingdom? What encouragements and discouragements do you experience in doing this? How can your Christian family best support you?

How about the people around you? What has God given them to do with their lives? How can you empower them in their ministries?

Appendix:

Conversation starters – Questions for missionaries:

From time to time we invite people to come to church and tell us about the work God has given them to do. Some people love doing this and some find it very difficult to speak in front of a group of strangers. It is often, however, the time after the service that is the most trying – it's awful to be left standing with a glassy smile on your face as people studiously, or thoughtlessly, avoid you and your display table. It's equally difficult to find yourself with nothing to do but hold your coffee cup & feign interest in the church noticeboard.

Many of us also find it difficult to talk to people we don't know, but as the hosts, it's our responsibility to be hospitable. Below are some questions you might use to open up conversation with visitors to our church. They've been written with foreign missionaries in mind, but many would be suitable for people whose ministry has led them to relocate within Australia.

1) Ministry:

What do you do? What's the best part? The worst? How long have you been there? What were you doing before? What made you decide to make such a big change? What training did you have to do? What training do you wish you had done? What's one thing you'd tell a prospective missionary?

2) Family:

Any children? Where do they go to school? What's the schooling like? Have they made good friends? What are the medical facilities like? How old were they when you left Australia? How have they coped with the changes in their life? When are their birthdays? (only if you're likely to actually send a card)

3) Cross-cultural living:

What are some of the local customs? Are there any you particularly like? Any you find particularly difficult? What's the food like? What's your favourite vomit story? (most foreign missionaries have a stack of these!) How are Christmas/Easter/birthdays celebrated there? Does it feel like home yet? What do you miss most about Australia? What are you glad to have left behind? Have you made good friends there? How is friendship expressed there? What do you do for relaxation? How has living there changed you? What about language? Are there things your new language expresses better than English does? Things your new language can't express as well as English? What's church like there? Do you have people you can fellowship with? Is it hard to be a Christian there? What about new converts – do they have any problems?

You can probably think of more, but any of these would get you started – and you never know where you might end up 😊