

A dark blue background featuring a stylized, light blue map of a city grid with various street patterns and a river winding through it.

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## Missionary Resiliency: Thriving on the Field

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## Missionary Resiliency: Thriving on the Field

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## Editor's Note

**Zane Pratt, IMB Vice President for Training**

What does it take to keep missionaries on the field? Missionary life is challenging. These challenges extend to every aspect of life. From the very start of life overseas, culture shock and the task of learning a new language put stress on new missionaries. Very few people find it easy to go from being a competent adult in their home country to being less functional than the average preschooler in their new setting! In many places, missionaries also face physical challenges. These range from weather conditions (either extreme heat and humidity, or severe cold), to unreliable utilities, to unfamiliar foods, to constant sickness, to the necessity of walking and climbing stairs far more than they are accustomed. Team conflict is frequently cited as a major stressor in missionary life. Loneliness and discouragement beset many overseas workers. On top of all these, spiritual warfare takes a severe toll on many missionaries. The enemy of our souls is real, and he is utterly opposed to the work of spreading the gospel where it has never been heard before. He readily exploits every weakness, either to render missionaries ineffective or to take them out of service entirely.

For all these reasons, missionary resilience is a critical issue for everyone engaged in the sending task. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Missionary recruitment is vital to the work, but it is equally important to keep gospel workers on the field, healthy in every area of life and effective in their work. It usually takes several years for missionaries to hit their stride in effectiveness, so missionaries whose careers are cut short due to lack of resilience play a diminished role in the work of the Great Commission.

This edition of the Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions addresses this issue of missionary resilience from several angles. Missionary preparation must build up candidates physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually if they are to thrive on the field. Missionary candidate assessment processes need to be honest about areas needing development before going overseas. Once deployed, missionaries need support to remain on the field and to be effective in their work. It is our prayer that the articles in this journal will be used by God to prepare missionaries better, to keep them on the field longer, to increase their joy in the life God has called them to live, and to enhance their gospel impact.

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# FEATURE ARTICLE

# 1 Peter, Perseverance, and Missionary Resilience

Jonathan Martyn

The idea of missionary longevity has become an important topic. Mission-sending organizations often consider the best ways to train and support missionaries so that they stay on the field for many years. The book *Worth Keeping* studies the issue of missionary retention and finds that globally, missionary attrition falls between 6.4-7.1%, meaning that on average, a missionary organization will lose one out of every fifteen missionaries it has sent each year.<sup>1</sup> A variety of reasons for attrition exists, and the editors of *Worth Keeping* separate those reasons into unpreventable and preventable causes.

This kind of practical research is invaluable to missiologists, but it is also important to return to Scripture to examine how to encourage missionary resilience. While Scripture does not speak directly to the issue of how missionaries should overcome the challenges of cross-cultural living, it does have much to say about how Christians can persevere in a sinful world. One place that speaks to this issue is the letter of 1 Peter. In this article, I want to show that Peter encourages all believers – including missionaries – to persevere by focusing on the return of Christ. In other words, one of the ways

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1 Rob Hay, Valerie Lim, Detlef Blöcher, Jaap Ketelaar, and Saray Hay, eds., *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Best Practice in Missionary Retention* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Publishing, 2007), Ch. 1, Perlego Edition <https://www.perlego.com/book/3295076/worth-keeping-global-perspectives-on-best-practice-in-missionary-retention-pdf>. They separate sending organizations into traditional sending fields (which they call Old Sending Countries) and more recent sending fields (which they call New Sending Countries). The percentage for Old Sending Countries was 7.1%, and the percentage for New Sending Countries was 6.4%.

that missionaries can be resilient and persevere through many obstacles is by consistently meditating on their future reward in Christ. I will examine this topic by first looking at several key themes of 1 Peter and then by considering specific mission and mission-sending applications.

## Saved in Christ

Where should missionaries find their identity? Language proficiency, cultural insight, numerical success, and general competence in aspects of the missionary task all potentially define a missionary, and each is important in the way it contributes to missionary longevity. Yet, Peter defines the identity of believers in relation to Christ. For example, in 1:1 he addresses the recipients of his letter as “chosen” and then goes on to state how and for what they are chosen: “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ” (1:2).<sup>2</sup> It is in Christ and for Christ that believers are elected and restored to a right relationship with their Creator. Their entire identity – who they are and what they do – takes its shape from their relationship with Christ.

Salvation is a core theme in 1 Peter. Salvation includes deliverance from sin while also highlighting the Christian life and future hope; believers are to rejoice in their salvation, follow Jesus in their daily lives, and live with hope of future glory. Each of these is relevant for the resilience of believers and missionaries.

One place where Peter conveys this idea about salvation and the identity of believers is in 1:3. Here he states that God has “given us new birth” and this new birth is “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” In 1:18-19, believers have been “redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors” through the “precious blood of Christ.” And again in 3:18, Peter states that Christ suffered “that he might bring you to God.” As Jobes explains, Peter understands “Christ’s suffering to death as a unique sin offering that provides access to God, making it possible to be born again into

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2 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Christian Standard Bible*.



the living hope that Christ's resurrection to eternal life has accomplished (1:3)."<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to believers understanding their identity as being in Christ, Peter not only speaks to this issue in terms of the initial salvation of believers, but he also relates this idea to other aspects of the Christian life. In 1:14-15, Peter commands believers to pursue lives of holiness, and he roots that command in the nature and character of God. Believers are to pursue holiness because they desire to be "obedient children" who live out the will of their heavenly father since "the one who called you is holy." In the same way, he also speaks to fear/reverence (1:17-21), love (1:22-25), and growth (2:1-3).

Suffering in various ways is also the norm for the Christian life (1:6). I will examine this theme in more depth in the next section, but for now, it is worth noting that Peter helps believers see that they are a suffering people primarily because they serve a Messiah who suffered. In 2:20, he writes that believers have favor with God if they endure suffering while doing good. He then explains why, "For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps" (2:21). In almost the same wording in 3:17, he writes that it is God's will for believers to suffer while doing good. Then he explains the reason in verse 18: "For Christ also suffered . . ." Then in 4:1 he commands, "Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding." A believer's identity is shaped by his or her relationship with Christ – believers suffer because Christ suffered.

Finally, when Peter writes of the future glory of believers, he does so by relating it to Christ. The clearest reference to this idea is in 5:10, where Peter writes that believers are called "to [God's] eternal glory *in Christ*" (Emphasis mine). Elsewhere, though, Peter paints a picture of believers walking a similar path as Jesus. One example of this theme is in 3:18-22. This text is a complicated one; but, for our purposes, we have already seen that in 3:17, it is God's will for believers to suffer while doing good, and verse 18 states the reason is that Christ also suffered. The ὅτι (for) in verse 18 provides the connection, emphasizing the ground or reason for the content in verse 17.

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3 Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 238.

Peter concludes this text in verse 22 by describing the exaltation of Christ and the fact that he is now “at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” Then in 4:1-6, he transitions back to the suffering of believers, using the conjunction οὖν or “therefore.” This inference helps us make the connection between Christ’s suffering and subsequent exaltation and the suffering and future glory of believers. As Schreiner explains, “The connection between the two sections is this: since Christ’s suffering is the pathway to glory, believers should also prepare themselves to suffer, knowing that suffering is the prelude to an eschatological reward.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, just like Christ suffered during his earthly life, believers also suffer, but in the same way the faithful, covenant-keeping Christ was exalted, believers too, if they are faithful and persevere until the end, will enter into glory.

Finding one’s identity in and seeing all of life shaped by Christ are important concepts for missionaries. The missionary life is often a transient one. Locations of service, types of work, and even our teammates or partners can all change. They often change quickly and unexpectedly. If one’s identity is found in being an expert in navigating cultural dynamics in one context, but then the door closes to living among those people, the loss of identity may severely affect that person’s ability to stay on the field. Alternatively, suppose one’s sense of self-worth is found in knowing how to answer one specific people group’s common objections in evangelistic conversations. What happens when that person shares the gospel with a different group, whose questions he has never considered? Similarly, what happens to the self-worth of people who become missionaries after being in an established ministry (e.g., pastors) or a successful career and then are shredded by the humiliating process of language learning? In all of these situations, such experiences may negatively impact the missionary’s sense of self-worth and leave him or her feeling like a failure who contributes little to the work, unless they see all of life shaped by their relationship to Christ.

Peter desires all believers to find their identity in Christ. Regardless of whether they serve in cities or in rural areas, in a monocultural or multicultural context, whether their work is among a people who primarily need to hear the gospel for the first time or if it is focused more on leadership development, missionaries should find their sense of self-worth in Christ. To state it

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4 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, Christian Standard Commentary (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 226.

a different way, the primary calling of the missionary life is to know Christ and be found in him. This enables the missionary to press on in the face of the challenges and losses inherent in life and ministry.

## Suffering as Sojourners

One question that we may wrestle with at times is if missionaries are called by God and are faithful in walking with Christ, why must they face so many challenges in their work? 1 Peter is helpful here since he addresses similar questions. In fact, biblical scholar Andrew Mbuvi argues helpfully that the motif of “exile” is foundational to understanding the epistle.<sup>5</sup> This motif speaks to the place of Peter’s original audience in society – that is, they were outsiders or even outcasts because of their relationship with Christ.

We have already seen that in 1:1, Peter refers to his recipients as chosen, but then he further describes them as “living as exiles.” Instead of seeing the recipients as literal exiles, though, it is better to understand that Peter uses this term to describe the Christian life during the “already but not yet” period as they wait for the return of Christ. As Keener explains,

Jewish people dispersed outside the holy land recognized themselves as God’s chosen people, but often lived as resident aliens in the predominantly gentile cities where they settled. This was true in Roman Asia Minor (where all the named Roman provinces are located). They were the Judean Diaspora, those dispersed beyond their ancestral homeland. Peter, however, refers to a spiritual rather than ethnic diaspora, and he transfers these images to all who now follow Israel’s God in Christ (1 Pet 1:17; 2:11). They are God’s people residing as aliens in a culture foreign to their divine origin.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding Peter’s use of this term enables his readers to understand the place of suffering in the letter. As Brooks explains, “These believers were societal outcasts because of their faith in such a sense that Peter could use

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5 Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Temple, Exile and Identity in 1 Peter* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 28. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/803998/temple-exile-and-identity-in-1-peter-pdf>.

6 Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 45. Emphasis his.

the metaphor of exile to describe them. As a result of their commitment to Christ, they faced trials (1:6) that could be described as ‘fiery’ (4:12) and were insulted (4:14), slandered (2:12; 3:16), and misunderstood (4:4).<sup>7</sup>

While these ideas of suffering and sojourning (that is, living as exiles) are intertwined, Peter orients his recipients’ thinking about them by explaining them through a Christological and eschatological lens. In the previous section, we examined the Christological lens, namely that believers suffer in their earthly lives because Christ suffered in his, or as Peter puts it, they “share in the sufferings of Christ” (4:13). At the same time, Peter also labors to help his readers understand that part of the reason they live and suffer as exiles is because they are waiting for Christ’s return.

One place that displays this perspective is found in 1:6. Here, Peter explains that believers rejoice in the living hope (1:3) and the future-oriented nature of their salvation (1:5), “ready to be revealed in the last time,” which has been brought about by their new birth. Then Peter introduces a concessive idea stating that they rejoice “even though” they suffer, and he describes this suffering as happening “now for a short time.” While it may seem that Peter means the kind of trials these believers are facing only last briefly, in reality, he means they last a short time when compared to eternity.<sup>8</sup> The “short time” here likely points to the entirety of the Christian life, a time frame supported by the fact that the result of the trials comes about not in the near future but rather is revealed “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7).

Peter then builds off this idea in verse 13 by commanding believers to “set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This final phrase in verse 13 is the same as the one in verse 7, and thus, believers can endure suffering in this life because of their confidence that God will fulfill his promises. As Job explains,

The fact that the addressees have already experienced suffering for the name of Christ suggests that Peter is exhorting them to continue to hope even though it may at times seem futile. . . . Peter therefore orients his readers to a future eschatology of a

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7 Will Brooks, “Evangelism in 1 Peter: The Verbal Proclamation of a People Awaiting the Return of Their King,” in *Reading 1 Peter Missiologically*, edited by Abeneazer Urga, Ed Smither, and Jessica Udall (Forthcoming).

8 Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, 65.

grace that is fully present but not fully realized in their lives, a grace that is fully guaranteed by the past event of the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

One additional text where we see this future orientation is in 2:11-12, where Peter once again refers to his readers as “strangers and exiles.” Not only does Peter refer to them as exiles in this passage, but he also points to the persecution they face as a result of this status, stating that unbelievers will “slander you as evildoers” (2:12). Amid this situation, Peter commands them to live honorably and do good, and this command has an eschatological purpose, namely that “they will see your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.” Peter’s hope is that unbelievers will see the good deeds of Christians, listen to the gospel, and come to faith in Christ before he returns to judge the world. As Jobes states, “The winsome way of life of Peter’s readers even in the midst of a difficult social situation is hoped to be the witness that would bring unbelievers into the Christian community so that they too might glorify God on the coming day of judgment.”<sup>10</sup>

While the situation of believers is difficult, the command is simple. The believers are living as exiles and slandered by unbelievers. Yet, Peter’s command is not to worry about these matters but only “conduct yourselves honorably.” We can combine this command with the one in the previous section of the letter that states God has chosen believers and formed them into “a people for his own possession” (2:9) so that they might “proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.” In that sense, regardless of the situation missionaries find themselves in, God’s will and his calling for them are clear – they are to do good and proclaim the greatness of God.

Missionaries will likely have little difficulty understanding the exile motif in 1 Peter since they live outside their homeland among people with different worldviews and cultural norms. Personally, I remember when I first moved overseas. I was a Westerner living in a small city in Asia with only a handful of other foreigners, and every time I walked down the street, people would stop and stare. I started to think, “I am strange.” This type of strangeness is exactly what Peter wants his readers to reflect on – though not because they

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9 Jobes, *1 Peter*, 110.

10 Jobes, *1 Peter*, 173.

are Westerners living in Asia like I was, but because they belong to Christ while living in a world set in opposition to his kingdom.

While missionaries may understand the theme of exile, it may still be difficult for them to accept the idea of suffering. When trials, challenges, setbacks, or disruptions to the work occur, it may be difficult for missionaries to understand or embrace them. Such events may also negatively affect the longevity of missionaries as they question whether they are actually contributing to the work or even if they are really living out God's will for their lives.

Peter's teaching, though, addresses these concerns in a few ways. First, understanding suffering through a Christological lens helps them to see that trials are not only a normal part of the Christian life but are also a means by which they "share in the sufferings of Christ" (4:13). Second, viewing trials through an eschatological lens helps missionaries to understand that their trials are only "for a short time" (1:6) during their period of sojourning and that eventually these trials will produce a faith in them – and hopefully in others – that will result in "praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7).

## **Anticipating Future Glory**

Now that we have seen that missionaries have been saved in Christ and suffer as sojourners, we might consider what it is that missionaries should anticipate. Should they look forward to specific and measurable results like conversions, churches planted, or reaching a point in the work when they can exit? These are all worthy pursuits as Paul says in Romans 15:20, "My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named." At the same time, though, we have already seen that Peter commands believers to "set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:13). In this section, we will look at several other texts that show that the promise of an eschatological reward should be the missionary's overarching goal and one that encompasses and influences every other goal in mission work.

In 1:3, Peter explains that God, in his mercy, has given us new birth. He then goes on to unpack in verses 3-5 the results of that salvation for believers, with each introduced by the preposition *εἰς* and with each of the results being future oriented. The first is the living hope in believers, which points believers

forward to the consummation of God's saving promises in Christ. This hope is "living" because Jesus has risen, and as believers walk with the risen Lord and trust him in the midst of various trials, their certainty of the consummation of future promises grows. The second is their inheritance (1:4), which Grudem describes as "their portion in the new creation and all its blessings."<sup>11</sup>

The third result, "a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5), emphasizes the glorification aspect of salvation. The adjective "ready" reminds believers that though their salvation is yet to be consummated, God has already purchased, completed, and confirmed their salvation through the covenant faithfulness of Christ. Given their current suffering, such a reminder would have been a great comfort to Peter's original hearers.

We have already examined verses 6-7, where Peter introduces the theme of trials. Whereas many commentators see the purpose of suffering in these verses as producing better character, Liebengood makes an important distinction here that in the text, the goal is eschatological. He writes that "the motivation for enduring trials is the certain outcome – eschatological salvation, an incorruptible inheritance for those who maintain faithfulness."<sup>12</sup> The analogy in verse 7 supports Liebengood's explanation. Though gold is purified by fire, Peter does not praise the post-purification quality of gold. He uses the analogy to say that even though gold has been purified and is high quality, it still perishes. The faith of believers, on the other hand, is even more precious because it will never pass away.

In that sense, Peter once again points his readers forward to their future rewards. In verses 3-5, though, the future rewards were a result of being born again, but here in verse 7 they are the result of a genuine faith. This testing process results in "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." As Schreiner notes, the verb "may be found" points to the future judgment "when God examines the life of each person."<sup>13</sup> For faithful believers, this judgment is not to be feared since they are promised a reward for their perseverant faith.

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11 Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 61.

12 Kelly D. Liebengood, *The Eschatology of 1 Peter: Considering the Influence of Zechariah 9–14*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 157 (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 179.

13 Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, 68.

Of these three promised rewards, glory is one of Peter's favorite terms, which he uses ten times in a variety of ways. Of those ten, eight are especially eschatological in nature: one refers to the fleeting nature of glory in this life (1:24), two point to the glory Christ received for his covenant-keeping faithfulness (1:11; 1:21), two refer to the revelation of this glory at Christ's return (4:13; 5:1), and three refer to the reward for believers who persevere until the end (1:7; 5:4,10). What is interesting here is that Peter uses the same term to speak of Christ's reward for his faithfulness and believers for theirs. This relationship and similar trajectory of Christ and believers are common themes in Peter. Both Christ and believers are rejected by this world and suffer, both are called to persevere until the end, and both are rewarded with glory for their faithfulness. Honor is used similarly both here and in 2:7.

Peter's emphasis on future reward and a coming judgment is not limited to 1:3-9, but these themes are at the heart of the epistle's message. Believers are commanded to pursue honorable lives (2:12) and have reverence for God (1:17) since a future judgment is coming (1:17; 2:13). Enduring suffering while doing good "brings favor with God" (2:20), and this favor points to an eschatological reward.<sup>14</sup> The ones who persevere in faith will receive honor (2:7) and will "inherit a blessing" (3:9) in the same way Christ was honored (2:4). Believers rejoice in sharing Christ's sufferings "so that [they] may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed" (4:13). Elders are pointed toward sharing in "the glory about to be revealed" (5:1) and for those who shepherd well, they are promised that "when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (5:4).

For missionaries, then, it is important to consider how this promise of future reward and coming judgment should affect all other goals within the missionary task. This relationship is important in the light of the epistle since Peter "imparts an ethical quality of life now by setting present Christian experience within an eschatological perspective."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the promise of future reward is not something believers just sit around and wait for. Instead, the reality of the future has an impact on how we live today.

In light of their future inheritance, missionaries must give as much attention to their own spiritual growth and walk with the Lord as they do the work.

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<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, 154-156.

<sup>15</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 49.



They must be growing in Christ as they set their hope on his return, trusting in him and depending on him in ways that help them persevere until the end. Doing so, while necessary for their personal spiritual growth, also leads to missionary resilience as they see challenges not just as setbacks to the work but as opportunities to “share in the sufferings of Christ” (4:13).

At the same time, though, the future judgment speaks to the urgency of the missionary task. In Peter’s own words, “The end of all things is near” (4:7). Thus, missionaries are right to labor so that unreached peoples and places can hear the gospel. It is right for them to be intentional in crossing cultural boundaries, learning the language, and studying culture so that healthy churches are planted and leaders are trained for those churches. Future judgment, though, not only reminds us that the work must be done, but it also points to how it must be done. It means that missionaries do their work with a recognition that, in Paul’s words, “the fire will test the quality of each one’s work” (1 Cor 3:13), and thus, they do the work with the ambition that those they lead to faith and the churches they plant will persevere until the end.

## **Application**

As we have examined these three themes of being saved in Christ, suffering as sojourners, and anticipating future glory, we can see how interconnected they are. Since Christ has saved believers, their entire lives take shape based on their relationship with him, which leads them to be sojourners and exiles in a world opposed to his reign. As sojourners, believers constantly face trials and suffer along the journey, which leads them to set their hope on Christ’s return and the promise of eschatological reward. And, this promise of future reward leads them to persevere by trusting in Christ and to glorify him by doing good. This interrelationship and, in fact, the message of the whole letter can be summarized by 4:19: “So then, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

In reflecting on these themes, we can make a few final statements in relation to missionary resilience. In their study on longevity, Hay et al. found that organizations from both Old Sending Countries and New Sending Countries reported a clear sense of calling to be the most important factor in reducing

missionary attrition.<sup>16</sup> Missionaries tend to define their calling narrowly or specifically as associated with a specific place or people, which can be very helpful for missionary longevity as missionaries desire to live out that calling by committing to those people for the long term. One challenge, though, is that if the situation changes, missionaries who only understand their calling in this way may end up questioning their calling.

Peter's teaching in 1 Peter is intended for all believers, but he defines God's will as simply doing good and proclaiming the greatness of God. Missionaries may be more resilient if they balance their specific calling with this broader calling given to all believers. All believers should all seek to walk with Christ and glorify him in whatever context and among whatever people they find themselves. We daily seek to know Christ, to do good to others, and to find ways to proclaim the greatness of God to a lost and dying world. When trials or setbacks arise that affect the work or reduce access to some specific location, balancing this broader calling for all believers with their specific one can help missionaries to adjust, persevere, and press on.

Additionally, missionary resilience increases when missionaries labor for their future reward in Christ instead of focusing on the need for immediate results. Some dangerous trends in recent missions history include focusing solely on social needs, watering down the claims of the gospel to make it easier to accept, or using strategies that lead to quick decisions without any plan for discipleship. In contrast to these approaches that focus on immediate results, Peter's emphasis on honor being due to those who persevere until the end reminds us that missionaries must labor for results that stand the test of time. They must seek to impart a perseverant faith to all those they lead to faith.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, 1 Peter encourages missionaries to persevere by focusing on the return of Christ. Seeing themselves as sojourners who are united with Christ leads to missionary resilience and will enable them to persevere through many obstacles by consistently meditating on their future reward in Christ.

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<sup>16</sup> Hay, *Worth Keeping*, Ch. 1.

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# PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

# Resilience and Perseverance:

## My Story

Rebekah Naylor

It was noon Saturday. The neighborhood police constable sent a message to a hospital colleague to come to the police station. The setting was Bangalore Baptist Hospital, and I was the hospital CEO. We had faced months of labor union difficulties, threats, and negotiations. My effigy was hanging over the front gates surrounded by posters and pickets. The constable informed me that a non-bailable warrant had been issued for my arrest.

This policeman locked up the warrant and said he would not serve it for two days to give us time to go to court. He did not want to put me in jail. In front of the court, a close friend and co-worker stood surety for me. I was free, and months later the case was dismissed. Eventually, the union activity died away, never to recur. During that very stressful and traumatic time, I learned to count it joy when facing this situation because I knew that this testing of my faith would develop perseverance (James 1:2-3) so that I could continue what God had sent me to do in India.

Resilience is the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties. There is stretching but then springing back into shape. It includes dealing with adversity in constructive ways, adapting, and becoming stronger. Resilience includes flexibility. A key to resilience is purpose. The resilient person, motivated by the purpose, perseveres toward the goal.

Having defined resilience, it is evident that this is something that should characterize Christ-followers sent out to serve and address lostness cross-culturally. In facing overwhelming need, cultural stress, isolation, sickness, and danger, how can we be resilient people, persevering in our work? I will share some things I learned during fifty years of active engagement in healthcare missions.

I was a teenager when God spoke to me about becoming a medical missionary. Over an eighteen-month period, I tried to understand what God was saying and even resisted it. It seemed impossible that I could be used like that. But when I told God I would obey and go, I felt complete peace. This for me was a specific call to service. I knew no details and would not know for years to come. But the purpose and goal were set, and I did not waver from that. I trusted God to direct my way, and He surely did. And over all the years that followed, it was this call that allowed me to be resilient and persevere. I did not go just because there was a great physical and spiritual need. I went because God sent me.

After I completed my education and surgical training, I arrived in India ready to begin and full of excitement. In those early years, I encountered some unexpected things: conflicts in our small missionary team, clinical responsibilities beyond the scope of training, and job assignments for which I was not prepared. There was the separation from family and almost no possibility for direct or immediate communication. I realized so acutely my dependence on the Lord and the need for time in His Word and prayer. Abiding in Christ and remembering His call to me to serve sustained me, and I persevered. Even on hard days, I was grateful for the privilege to be where He had placed me to see God at work.

I had been in India almost seventeen years when I learned that I was required to have a specific license to practice medicine. My visa clearly stated that I was a surgeon at Bangalore Baptist Hospital. When I realized this situation, the authorities were no longer licensing American doctors and did not recognize US qualifications. My application to the central government was refused. At that point, I had to stop all clinical work and avoid even being around patients. I appealed the decision, and that was also refused. I thought perhaps God was telling me to go elsewhere, but then doors both overseas and in the US closed.

I waited and prayed. In a time of prayer regarding submission to God's will, God showed me that submission might include leaving medicine altogether. Submitting skills might include giving them up. I told God I would obey. Within ten days, the license was granted for two years. We never knew how this happened. It was a definite answer to the prayers of countless people, but I learned valuable lessons about submission and waiting on the Lord. In the ten years that followed, granting the license was delayed multiple times and I would stop work. There were many encounters with hostile government officials as I pled my case. Resilience and perseverance grew.

Resilience was also important in the hospital. In the 1980s the IMB was divesting itself from ownership and management of institutions. As the CEO of the hospital and the only worker then assigned to the hospital, I was instructed to sell Bangalore Baptist Hospital. I was shocked and shaken but went all over India trying to sell it. That proved impossible because of its value.

Ultimately the IMB worked out a management agreement with a national Christian hospital. We then had a new governing board. Financial support from the IMB was being withdrawn. My national colleagues and I felt abandoned and overwhelmed. It was my job to instill hope and to lead them forward. We were committed to the mission of physical and spiritual healing. We prayed much and identified our core values. We began to raise funds for support. Plans for growth were put in place. We determined to take what seemed negative and to make it positive. And, we trusted God's promise in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good of those who love Him. Now Bangalore Baptist Hospital is still a light for Jesus Christ and has become a nationally recognized medical center and academic center. With the purpose of the institution firmly in mind, we were able to be resilient and persevere through such adversity.

The Bible teaches us much about resilience and perseverance. While I was completing my residency in surgery, I was privileged to know a missionary doctor who had been years overseas as a single woman. She told me that often she was able to keep going because of the promise in Isaiah 40:30-31. These verses state, "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Though we may be tired and even fall, if we hope in the Lord, He will renew our strength so that we can keep going, even soaring.

Correct focus on the Lord is essential to perseverance. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Moses persevered because he saw Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). Then he goes on to say in chapter 12 that we should run the race set before us with perseverance with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Paul told the Corinthians not to lose heart because inwardly they were being renewed daily. He told them to fix their eyes on the unseen which is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Faith and hope are foundations for being resilient and persevering.

In Scripture, we read about wonderful results of resilience and perseverance. Hebrews 10:36 encourages us to persevere so that when we have done the will of God, we will receive what He has promised. We will be blessed when we persevere in difficulty and will receive the crown of life that God promised those who love Him (James 1:12). Peter included perseverance in his list of qualities we should have. He said these qualities in us would keep us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 1:5-8). Paul admonished us not to become weary in doing good because we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9). At the end of his life, Paul said he had fought the good fight and kept the faith and was anticipating the crown of righteousness that the Lord would give him (II Timothy 4:7-8).

Fifty years have passed by all too quickly. God has kept every promise. He has given so much joy. He enabled me to be resilient and to persevere in the calling He gave me. I close with these words by the apostle Peter: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:10-11, NIV).

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# Resiliency and Expectations

Shelly Scott

When hiking in the jungle near my home, I look for a young tree to help me navigate down a steep slope. Its supple trunk will give way, allowing me to lower myself; its roots dig deep enough to steady my descent sans foothold. The green trunk bends to let me down and then pops upright as soon as I let go. This experience proves more pleasant than the times I grab an old branch, rotted on the inside, or an old dry tree with no bend left in its branches. Those latter decisions land me in the mud at the bottom of an incline with a handful of crumbled bark.

The first tree is resilient; the second is most definitely not. The difference was in the makeup of the tree itself. One had the inner strength to withstand the pressure and pull, returning to its normal state afterward; the other was destroyed by the strain. Resiliency. That's the difference.

"Resilient" is defined as: "able to recover quickly after something unpleasant such as shock, injury, etc." and "(of a substance) returning to its original shape after being bent, stretched, or pressed."<sup>1</sup> Cross-cultural workers need to be resilient. There is plenty of bending, stretching, pressing, and more than enough shock in the lives and ministries of cross-cultural workers. What is the cause and what do we do about it?

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1 "Resilient," Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/resilient?q=resilient>.

## **Our Expectations Challenge Our Resiliency**

Much of the stress of life and ministry in our cross-cultural contexts boils down to unmet expectations. No matter how many books we read or seminars we take and no matter how many seasoned mentors advise us to “leave your expectations at home”, cross-cultural workers arrive on the field and discover that we inadvertently brought along expectations.

We expect to stay healthy on the field, learn a new language, enjoy team life, and fall in love with our new home. What happens when we battle illness, struggle in language study, experience conflict on our team, or find ourselves irritated by the culture we now live in?

Reality suddenly doesn't match what we expected. Can we be resilient, or will we crumble?

When my husband and I waved goodbye to our families and flew away for our first overseas assignment, I mostly focused on our own adventure. I assumed the people and place I'd left behind would stay the same. I didn't expect to receive news from my sister, several months later, that she was pregnant with her first child. My sad emotions knocked me over when I realized that I would miss her whole pregnancy and the birth of her first child. My expectations did not match up with reality.

In that first year of cross-cultural work, we expected culture shock and the feeling of helplessness as we struggled to communicate while learning a new-to-us language. When it happened, we persevered. We expected that after gaining basic knowledge of the language and culture, we would grow in our ability to navigate our new life and ministry. This proved to be true also, and we went along swimmingly . . . until we didn't.

Part way into our second year, we hit a wall. We felt the stress of culture, life, and ministry, and we suddenly didn't like our mission assignment after all. Discouragement wrapped its tendrils around us. We dragged along, wondering what had gone wrong. How would we continue to serve overseas when our expectations were so different than our reality? How could we be resilient to bend when we felt we were going to break?

During those difficult days, we sought advice from seasoned workers, and we read some helpful books. The most effective thing we did, though, was turn to God's Word.

## Scripture Calls Us to Resiliency

Scripture calls us to forsake our idols. In Philippians, Paul encourages us with the promise that God will supply our needs (Phil 4:19), but we often misdefine our needs. We want God to supply our desires, our expectations. After all, we've given our lives in service. We tell ourselves it's only fitting that at least our expectations be met. When we take this attitude, we are left holding unmet expectations in one hand and disappointment over how things are turning out in the other. Edward T. Welch in his book *When People are Big and God is Small* encourages us to consider our felt needs from a biblical perspective. He asserts that "many of our needs are more accurately called lusts, and the objects of these needs are called idols."<sup>2</sup> We may find that we have yet to conform our desires to God's desires and that we need to let go of these idols that we hold in our hands.

Secondly, God calls us to have faith in his presence. Moses' life was dotted with scenes where his expectations did not match up with reality. As a royal youth in Egypt, Moses expected to come to the rescue of "his people" (Exod 2:11 ESV), but in reality, he had to flee for his life. Years later, after Moses built a life for himself in Midian, God called him to return to Egypt for the task of rescuing His people. Moses' expectation was that he was not the guy after all. "Who am I?" he asked (Exod 3:11). And later he said, "they will not believe me" (Exod 4:1), and "I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exod 4:10). Nevertheless, God commanded him to go.

The author of Hebrews references these two scenarios in the "Hall of Faith" chapter (Heb 11:23—28). How did Moses grow from the self-sufficient to the self-deficient to the subject of a significant portion of Hebrews 11? The answer is found in God's promise to be with Moses (Exod 3:12) and Moses' eventual maturity to put his faith in God (Heb 11:23). Like Moses, we are called to have faith that God is present in our lives.

Thirdly, God calls us to nourish ourselves in Him. In Psalm 1, David describes a godly person as one who does not feed himself on the "counsel of the wicked" (Ps 1:1) or plant himself in ungodly company, but instead spends time in God's Word. Like a tree planted by a stream of water, the godly person is

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2 Edward T. Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997), 169.

planted by the Water of Life. A hydrated tree can bend with the wind, while a dry tree will snap. The same is true for the child of God. Where we find nourishment will affect our substance and that, in turn, determines our resiliency when we face a challenge.

## Conclusion

How can we be resilient cross-cultural workers? We should prayerfully consider whether or not our discouragement is coming from unmet expectations. If we find this is the case, we can rely on God's Word to guide us. Are we trusting God to supply our needs? Are we cultivating an active faith in Him? Are we nourishing ourselves in Scripture so that we become hydrated in Truth? One expectation will stand up to our reality: God's presence. It's a promise. Isaiah 41:10 says, "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." When our expectations are unmet, we can find strength in God. As the hymn writer wrote, "And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace."<sup>3</sup>

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3 Helen Howarth Lemmel. "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus," Baptist Hymnal (Nashville: Convention Press, 1975), no. 198.

# Pioneer Plowing

## Staying Resilient in Tough Fields

Matt Grayson

Luke 9:26 Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

It was the winter once again. We, along with our small team, had spent the last decade living among an unreached Muslim background people group in a Siberian city where the winter temperatures could dip to -40 degrees Celsius. It was a gray, cold Soviet-era city where communists had exiled famous writers and political dissidents.

At the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, our focus people group of several million had only a handful of Jesus followers, no churches, and only a small portion of the Scriptures in their native language. From 1991 to its peak in 2005, that number had grown to an estimated 25,000 followers of Jesus in over 600 churches throughout our country.<sup>1</sup> Some were calling this the beginning of a Church Planting Movement.<sup>2</sup>

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1 International Mission Board Research Department. “ASR Stats, Historical Stats Stans report’ obtained 07 February 2023. (Note: These numbers have since been lowered based upon further research.

2 David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2004), Kindle Version, Location 1530.

On our city-focused team, we had been a part of several churches started during those early years. And yet, now, as winter descended after over 10 years of ministry, only one of those churches still existed and it too would eventually dissolve. Several of the main leaders of these house churches had either departed from our town or worse, departed from the faith. We were tired and needed a change of scenery. Our strategy coordinator agreed, and soon thereafter we moved to another city among our people group.

It has now been over 25 years since my wife and I first moved our lives to Central Asia. The “fruits” of those early years have slowed to a steady trickle, and at times it has even seemed like the work is going backward. So, what keeps us plowing forward in the task? What is it that helps cross-cultural workers be resilient? Merriam-Webster defines resilience as “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change . . . it derives from the Latin verb ‘resilire’, meaning ‘to jump back’”.<sup>3</sup>

As many mission organizations focus upon tough-to-access and even tougher-to-reach unreached (UPGs) and unengaged (UUPGs) people groups, cross-cultural workers need biblically grounded truth and principles that can help them survive and thrive amid opposition, wars, relocation, lack of evident fruitfulness and discouragement. We need to hear from Jesus. So, what do I think Jesus, based upon His Word, wants to tell his ‘sent ones’ who labor in tough fields? There are many foundational principles that help cross-cultural workers honor the Lord and serve well. A vibrant relationship with God, a clear sense of calling, and a deep and humble love for the people you serve likely top the list. Likewise, the importance of going deep in language<sup>4</sup> and culture learning,<sup>5</sup> empowering and equipping local leaders,<sup>6</sup> discipling our children and nurturing our relationship with our spouses cannot be overstated. However, in this article I want to focus on four faithfulness-sustaining-truths that I hope can encourage you to keep your hand to the plow.

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3 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>.

4 Preston Fidler, *1000 Cups of Tea: Gospel Fluency Across Cultures* (Language 180, 2020), Kindle Version.

5 Elizabeth and Thomas Brewster, *Language Acquisition Made Practical: A Comprehensive “How-to” Book for Learning Any Language* (Colorado Springs: Lingua House, 1976).

6 Kanat Yesmagambetov, *What’s Wrong With Western Missions?: The Perspective of a Local Believer* (Leeds, West Yorkshire, England: Emerald House Group, 2021), 128-144.

## Truths to Foster Resilience in Tough Fields:

### 1. Trust Jesus' Pace

We live in an unprecedented age of speed and busyness. Christian medical doctor Richard Swensen warns that we live in an age of unequaled exponential change (and he wrote this in 1992 before the internet and cell phones even existed!) which is affecting us more than we can imagine: “Meanwhile, largely unnoticed by us, history has shifted to fast forward. If linear still best describes our personal lives, exponential now best describes much of historical change. The significance of this is incalculable . . . (we) consistently underestimate it.”<sup>7</sup> He provides graphical illustrations of the exponential growth over the last 100 years of such things as debt, cost of a home, health care costs, divorce, prisoners, birth to unmarried women, advertising, new books published, air miles traveled, foreign travel, world population, . . . and hypothetical graphs of the exponential explosion of information, complexity and change.<sup>8</sup>

There are few that would doubt that rapid change is now a constant in our lives. There are several consequences to this exponential change. Firstly, we can become exhausted and experience “change fatigue.” If we are to be resilient, we must acknowledge the effect of unceasing rapid change upon our souls and according to Dr. Swensen, create “margin” in our lives. Physician and Christian counselor, Dr. Mike Emlet, in his article “Persevering in Ministry” likewise summarizes his advice for avoiding burnout in ministry as “The underlying theme is slow down. Or as Psalm 46:10 says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’”<sup>9</sup>

The unbelievable pace which many of us cross-cultural workers live at borders on unhealthy and might be evidence that we trust our hard work more than God’s life-changing Spirit. A relentless, unceasing, hurried life may be a sign that we need to slow down before we have an emotional, mental, or physical breakdown. Depression and anxiety can be the fruits of an ungodly, unsustainable pace. Christian counselor Dr. Archibald Hart notes that

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7 Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: Navpress. 1992), 44-45.

8 Swenson, *Margin*, 247-254.

9 Michael R. Emlet, “Persevering in ministry,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 31, issue 3 (2 January 2018): 25.

In fact, a hundred years ago, panic anxiety disorder was very rare. But with industrialization and urbanization, it has become increasingly common. Remember, there were no jets, electric lights, or concrete jungles until recent times. The pace of life was slow. Camel speed was about as fast as you could travel for long distance. Lots of recovery time was built into the natural cycles of life. No late-night Tv or football games could eat up your leisure time. Why, I can vaguely remember times of such boredom even in my own lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

A second consequence of exponential change is that we in turn expect rapid change. Our global digital culture is becoming more and more of a results-now-society. As cross-cultural workers, we must not allow the world's pace to guide our expectations of the God of all time's pace. We must learn to trust God's pace and His timing. This can mean patience, perseverance, avoidance of shortcuts, a 'long haul' perspective and not becoming unhealthily focused on the data of conversions, baptisms, and new churches.

Without a doubt, God is moving in unprecedented ways among the unreached, as many missiologists document.<sup>11</sup> "Rapid reproduction" is even one of the ten characteristics of a Church Planting Movement.<sup>12</sup> One of the praiseworthy aspects of current missiology is that cross-cultural workers should thoughtfully consider the reproducibility of their work in light of multiplication. However, as Tyler<sup>13</sup>, a colleague of ours in Central Asia, recently noted, reproducibility should not be equated with speed. Similarly, the International Mission Board's *Foundations* document also states that, "rapid reproduction is biblically possible, but is not biblically promised."<sup>14</sup> A

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10 Archibald D Hart, *The Anxiety Cure: A Proven Method for Dealing with Worry, Stress, and Panic Attacks* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), Kindle Version, 14

11 David Garrison, *A Wind In The House Of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims Around The World To Faith In Jesus Christ* (Monument, CO: Wigtake Resources. 2014). According to Dr. Garrison's research, as of 2014, there were over 70 current movements (defined as at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms that occur over a two-decade period) of Muslims to Christ happening in 29 nations with an approximate two to seven million Muslim background followers of Jesus. (page 15). By contrast, before 1979 there were only 2 or possibly 3 known movements of Muslims to Christ over the 1300 years since the death of Muhammad. (page 27).

12 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, Location 255.

13 Name changed for security reasons.

14 International Mission Board, *Foundations* (Richmond, VA: IMB, 2018), 111.



study of God's pace from Scripture can help to give us a bigger perspective on how the God of history seems to work.

### Is God in a Hurry?

One of my close Central Asian friends used to remind me of a local proverb: "Hurry is the work of the devil." In contrast, Scriptures teaches that "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NIV).

### God's Timing in History

Starting with God's promise to make Abraham into a great nation (Genesis 12), dated approximately the 19th century BCE, the Hebrew people had to wait approximately 600 years for this promise's fulfillment and Joshua's conquest of the land.<sup>15</sup> In the meantime, the Jewish people waited in Egypt as slaves for over 400 years and then another 40 years in the Sinai desert (Exodus 12:40, 16:35). Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NLT) states, "Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Character is important to the God of Scripture, and building character takes time. A significant number of the requirements for being a church leader in Timothy and Titus are centered upon character more than skills (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) and these Scriptures warn us to "not be hasty in the laying on of hands." (1 Timothy 5:22). Foundations speaks of the importance of 'being' in the life of the disciple and also points out that, "The most obvious characteristics of these [leadership] qualifications have to do with character and family life."<sup>16</sup> The churches, leaders, and disciples we hope to develop need a God-pleasing foundation of character that often only long-term persistence, endurance, and perseverance can produce.

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15 Dean Phillip Bell, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Jewish History and Historiography* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge Printing, 2018). <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429458927-50/timeline-dean-phillip-bell>.

16 International Mission Board, Foundations, 114.

At our church here in Central Asia, recently our local pastor, while preaching from Malachi, asked us, “How would you like to wait over 400 years for a promise to be fulfilled?” He was referencing the promise of the Messiah from Malachi 3 and the 400 “silent” years between the Old and New Testament. It is also clear that the first-century Jesus followers believed that Jesus would return “soon” (Revelation 22:7,12). We have now been waiting for over 2000 years for our Lord’s return. So, we have to ask ourselves, “Is God in a hurry?”

This point is not to undermine the reality of thousands dying each day without knowing our Lord and the urgency of fulfilling Jesus’ command in Matthew 28, nor to ignore the Spirit of God at times moving in rapid movements. The Bible teaches that we must be alert and labor as if He will return at any time (Matthew 24:44). However, adapting modern culture’s need for instant gratification and results must be balanced with the reality that God’s timing and pace are often much different than ours. We do well to often remind ourselves of the Lord’s words to the prophet Habakkuk, “This vision is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.” (Habakkuk 2:3 NLT)

## 2. Trust Jesus’ Leading to Help You Prioritize

Amid an ever-changing, all-access, information-overloaded world, one of the greatest skills in ministry is knowing how to set healthy boundaries, say “no,” and manage the urgent with the important. We do well to trust God’s Spirit to guide us as He promised in Psalm 32:8 (NIV) “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.” If we are to learn to slowdown as Dr. Emlet advises, then we need to grow in the skill of prioritizing. The needs and the challenges of working in tough fields are overwhelming. Biblical counselor Alasdair Groves, speaking on burnout in ministry at the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation 2023 national conference, shared that a sense of obligation in relationships, the inability to say “no” and the dread of disappointing people are three of the sinful root causes of burnout in ministry.<sup>17</sup> The sense that “I must keep people happy with me” might reveal thoughts grounded in an unhealthy fear of man (Proverbs 29:25).

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<sup>17</sup> Alasdair Graves, “Weariness in Ministry: Conversations on How to Combat Burnout,” conference presentation October 19, 2023. <https://store.ccef.org/conference/2023-national-conference-sessions/>.

As Cloud and Townsend point out, God is the ultimate example for us in having healthy boundaries: “He [God] defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes and dislikes...He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards his house and will not allow evil things to go on there. He invites people in who will love him.”<sup>18</sup> Scripture shows us that God rested (Genesis 2:2) and also communicated his boundaries to people like Moses (Exodus 3:1-6), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-8) and Aaron (Leviticus 10:1-3). One has to follow certain requirements to have a relationship with God (John 14:6, 1 John 1:5-7; 4:7-8). Jesus would leave people and even said “no” to some so he could say “yes” to others (Mark 1:35-38), but Jesus also showed that some of His boundaries had flexibility (Mark 6:30-34). Jesus had to spend time hearing from the Spirit about where to prioritize His time and ministry focus and when to say “no” to other demands.

### Where to prioritize?

Serving for many years in Central Asia, we have new and old friends and acquaintances in many places all around the planet. One of the great aspects of technology and globalization is that we can maintain those relationships. One of the difficult aspects of technology and globalization, though, is the ability to maintain those relationships. There are a few principles we have learned over the years for discerning where people might be responding to God’s Spirit in these relationships. The first is gently placing upon others, instead of upon ourselves, the onus of staying connected. The person who writes, calls, or makes extra effort to meet with us may be the person we need to invest in.

Another way of filtering where the Spirit might be at work is to, as quickly as appropriate, ask others to study Scripture and see their response. This is especially true of people who not only meet with us and others to study Scripture but also study it on their own. “K,” a young student who came to the Lord early on in our time here in Central Asia read the whole Bible within a few months of getting his hands upon his first copy. “K” has served faithfully in the church here for over 20 years now.

A third sign of God’s Spirit at work is where people are willing to confess sin and show humble repentance. Humbling oneself through confession and

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<sup>18</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to say yes, when to say no, to take control of your life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 32-33.

repentance does not often come naturally, but is usually evidence of people who are open to God's leadership. These are people with whom we should invest our time and efforts.

A final filtering principle of discerning where we should say "yes" is investing in others who are willing to share the good news with their families and relatives. We seek to invest in those that will also invest in others themselves. (2 Timothy 2:2).

Although there is no simple formula for knowing where to focus our lives, learning to say "no" even if to some good things while building God-honoring boundaries can help. We must continually examine our hearts and motives for why we may have problems setting boundaries. If we are to labor faithfully in demanding pioneer fields, we must realize our limitations. Struggles in this area may reveal that we have an unbiblical understanding of God's sovereignty balanced with our responsibilities, which leads us to our third faithfulness-sustaining-truth.

### **3. Trust Jesus to Build HIS Church**

A healthy understanding of God's sovereignty in building His church and the peace that comes from knowing that He is the one who draws people to Himself can balance the weight of an unengaged and unreached lost world. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18) and "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them" (John 6:44). Holding the delicate tension between the very real role we play in fulfilling the Great Commission with the wonderful truth that ultimately it is God who saves and builds His church is a balance that comes with spiritual maturity.

It is such a beautiful thing to know that our lives matter. It is equally wonderful knowing that even if we leave the field or leave this life, God's kingdom will still advance. Paul reminded the first-century believers of Corinth, "So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:7-9, NIV).

### **4. Walk (literally and figuratively) with Jesus.**

With the move toward urbanization and digitization of our lives, being in God's creation, getting physical exercise, and having time to sleep, think,

pray, and meditate can be very challenging and require intentionality. In some of Jesus' final words to his disciples he stated, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5 NIV) Nurturing one's relationship with the Lord is with little doubt the most important way to remain resilient in tough fields. There are many tools and methods to help us "remain in Him", but the simple task of walking (literally) has proven invaluable for a wide array of reasons. Walking has even been called the closest thing we have to a "wonder drug."<sup>19</sup> Likewise, being outside is a significant factor in promoting emotional health. Christian psychologists Winston T. Smith and J. Alasdair Groves note that "In an increasingly digital age, it bears repeating: you probably need to get outside more than you currently do...It's hard to overstate the value of regularly reminding your body that you live on a larger stage and in a larger story than your messy house or the four walls of your office that surround you hour after hour."<sup>20</sup>

Here are just a few of the benefits that we can experience by making walking, especially in God's creation, a regular part of our life rhythms: 1. Walking forces us to slow down our pace of life. 2. We can talk to God while walking, and He can talk to us. 3. Walking is a low-stress exercise with an abundance of health benefits.<sup>21</sup> 4. Walking can facilitate the calming of our thoughts

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19 Dr. Thomas Frieden, *5 Surprising benefits of walking*: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/5-surprising-benefits-of-walking>. 25 Aug 2022. Dr. Frieden is the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

20 Winston T. Smith and J. Alasdair Groves, *Untangling Emotions: 'God's Gift of Emotions'* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 127-128.

21 Some sources on the benefits of walking: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthy-living/walking-for-good-health> (accessed 22 Nov 2023) "Walking is low impact, requires minimal equipment, can be done at any time of day and can be performed at your own pace. You can get out and walk without worrying about the risks associated with some more vigorous forms of exercise." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/walking/art-20046261> (accessed 22 Nov 2023) "regular brisk walking can help you: Maintain a healthy weight and lose body fat, Prevent or manage various conditions, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, cancer and type 2 diabetes, Improve cardiovascular fitness, Strengthen your bones and muscles, Improve muscle endurance, Increase energy levels, Improve your mood, cognition, memory and sleep, Improve your balance and coordination, Strengthen immune system, Reduce stress and tension." <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/11/defeating-depression-naturally> Tori Deangelis. "Defeating Depression Naturally." *Monitor on Psychology*, 53, number 8. (1 Nov 2022), 80. - 25% lowered risk of depression among adults who got the recommended amount of physical activity per week—about 2.5 hours of brisk walking. 1 in 9 Cases of depression that could potentially be prevented if all adults did just 150 minutes of physical activity per week, the minimal amount recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/mental-benefits-of-walking> (accessed 22 Nov 2022) "Walking helps boost your mood because it increases blood flow and blood circulation to the brain and

and souls by helping us get away from distractions at home and work and into nature and fresh air. 5. Walking allows us to see people and places as we go, which can help us better pray for and understand life and the culture where we live. 6. Walking is environmentally friendly compared to riding in transportation. 7. Walking means less driving, which can mean fewer opportunities for road rage and traffic stress. 8. While walking, we can still do things on the phone (listen to music, podcasts, text, make calls) while being outside and getting exercise.

## Conclusion

There will be “Siberian winter seasons” while we serve, times when the fruits and harvest of spring and summer seem to have been swallowed up by the bitter cold of death. Maybe the work you are part of has always seemed like a fruitless winter. Let us remember that God’s sovereign timing is perfect for all peoples and tribes, that He wants us to depend upon His guidance daily and not solely on our hard work, and that as we walk with Him, times of refreshing and strength will sustain us. May the relevant truths we hear from our Lord help us keep our hands to the plow and empower us for what Eugene Peterson calls, ‘A long obedience in the same direction.’

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body. It has a positive influence on your hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which is your central nervous response system. This is good because the HPA axis is responsible for your stress response. When you exercise by walking, you calm your nerves, which can make you feel less stressed.”

# Spiritual Formation

## Essential Disciplines

Susan Lafferty

A few years ago, a seasoned servant of the Lord in South Asia asked, “Do you want to seem holy? Or be holy?” She warned against the lukewarm state of seeming—the problematic practice of keeping up outward appearances instead of living with integrity.

The Lord instructs us to be holy. Wholly. In real time. And we want to run this race well. But how? Living a life holy and pleasing to God seems impossible until we remember what is necessary for life and fruitfulness: abiding in Christ. He is the Vine and we are the branches. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

We *depend* on Him and we *discipline* ourselves. We *trust* the Lord and we act in obedience. Spiritual disciplines offer a framework for spiritual formation in this moment-by-moment walk with Him.

Paul pointed to discipline as a necessary part of living a holy life. He said to Timothy, “But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8 CSB).

## Spiritual disciplines

Lists of spiritual disciplines are many and varied. These habits and patterns for growth have been tested and tried through the ages.

We read about them in the Word of God. We see them practiced in church history. Classical works and more recent books provide insights and truths about incorporating them into the daily rhythms of our lives (see *Spiritual Formation Resources* below).

But there are some disciplines that inform everything else we do as we abide in Christ. They are essential parts of a daily walk with the Lord and the first things we teach new believers.

Submission. Prayer. Word of God. Silence and solitude. These disciplines don't stand alone. They depend upon each other as we practice them.

## Submission

Spiritual formation begins with submission to the Lord and His ways. Every day. Jesus says, "If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23 CSB—*emphasis mine*). He calls his disciples to deny themselves and take up what they know is the instrument of death.

Dying to my rights was excruciating during our first term. Selfish pride and a sense of entitlement surfaced like never before as we navigated a new culture and field issues. Team dynamics challenged my full surrender to His path. I questioned our calling, place of service, and field leadership.

The Lord spoke to me one morning through Psalm 86:11 and this became a persevering prayer of my life during that first term.

Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and I will walk in Your truth;  
give me an undivided heart,  
that I may fear your name. (NIV)



God faithfully revealed the ugly sin that was dividing my heart. Through confession and surrender, I entered what became a joyful submission to His sanctifying work.

Paul gives a startling image of submission in Romans 12:1-2 CSB. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” The bodies (plural) in the Body of Christ are presented as a living sacrifice (singular). Together we learn to give all that we are to Him in absolute surrender. We submit to His transformation for the purpose of obedience to His will. Sometimes we learn the necessity of obedience the hard way, but submission to Him is worth it all.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is the breath of our spiritual growth. It puts words to our submission. And reveals our dependence on the Lord as we take in His Word and live out His Truth.

During a difficult season for our family, I cried out to the Lord for help. One of His directives through Scripture was, “Be devoted to prayer. Pray continually” (from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). So, I asked, “What does that mean, Lord?”

Over the next two years, during daily times with Him, I began to see the “always” of prayer in His Word. In the Old Testament, Nehemiah prayed in the midst of various situations, moving between telling what was happening and talking with the Lord (e.g. Nehemiah 2:1-5; 4:1-9; 6:8-14). In the New Testament, Jesus told a parable to teach His disciples “the need for them to pray always and not give up” (Luke 18:1).

In Ephesians 6, Paul describes the spiritual forces believers are struggling against in this world. He says to put on the full armor of God in order to resist evil and stand firm. Then he focuses on prayer, beginning with: “Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. Pray also for me...” (Ephesians 6:18ff CSB).

In his January 2nd devotion in *Morning by Morning*, after noting “how large a portion of Scripture is occupied with the subject of prayer,” Charles Spurgeon says the following: “We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If He has said much about prayer, it is because He knows we have much need of it. So deep are our needs that, until we are in heaven, we must not cease to pray.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Word of God

In Exodus, the people of God gathered manna daily (Exodus 16:4-5, 21-22). The Lord provided just enough to meet their need that day. But He was teaching them an important life lesson in the wilderness, as later detailed in Deuteronomy 8:3 (CSB). “He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

We need the Word of God daily. His Word instructs us in the way we should go. It corrects our thinking, and it helps us grow in understanding who God is and what He does.

We are privileged to access Scripture through various disciplines: hearing, reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing. Beginning the day taking in His Truth is only part of the daily rhythm. Throughout the day we can pray the Word. We also repeat it as we share the gospel, make disciples or train leaders.

Today, more than ever, we must carefully listen to and obey His Word.

## Silence and Solitude

When I was young, my parents had a hard time keeping me supplied with books. I was a voracious reader. Every spare minute I wanted my eyes on a page and my mind engaged in a story. Some books on our shelf included

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1 Charles Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2001), p. 10. Used with permission. All rights reserved. [www.whitakerhouse.com](http://www.whitakerhouse.com)

Scripture in the text. And, well, I skipped those parts to get back to the author's words. Sometimes I felt frustrated because the Scripture verses were there. "I already know that," I thought.

Maybe the author's insertion of Scripture seemed out of place, or preachy. But in the end, what I was really doing was rushing past the Word of God. Rushing past the gospel. Rushing past the truth.

Sometimes in the middle of our busy lives, surrounded by distractions, we fail to stop for the Word. We may read it quickly, perhaps to check it off a list. But in our hurry, amid all the noise, we can fail to hear His message in the only Word that will remain and never fade in relevance or authenticity.

Jesus set the example for rising early in the morning and finding a place of quiet (e.g. Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35, 6:45-56). Jesus, the Son of God, sought time with the Father alone. How much more do we need a place of silence and solitude?

When we had small children, the silence and solitude looked a little different. One time in my angst over not having alone time, the Lord spoke ever so clearly, "Let the little children come to Me" (Luke 18:16). I learned to pull a child into my lap and read aloud. And often practiced taking short moments of silence throughout the day to be still and acknowledge His Lordship.

Today, distractions seem to only increase. But our need for ears to hear His Truth as we sit in His presence remains the same.

## **Conclusion**

"Do you want to seem holy? Or be holy?" And how does "seeming" begin? The drift can be ever so subtle.

I learned the danger of subtle drift one summer break during college. Our family vacationed at a favorite beach. Early one morning, Dad and I rode the large waves this beach was known for. After a while, he said, "Let's move back to the right." We were no longer in line with the spot where the rest of the family was playing in the sand.

We tried to stand up in what we thought was waist-deep water. Our feet couldn't reach the ocean floor. Undertow began carrying us out to sea. For the

first time in my life, I remember thinking, “We’re going to die.” In the end, we needed expert help getting back to shore and safety.

Daily we encounter the currents and undertow of this world. Without ongoing spiritual formation through basic spiritual disciplines, subtle drift can take us off course.

In his correspondence with family members, missionary William Carey referred to the importance of spiritual disciplines in one’s walk with the Lord. In a letter to his son, Jabez, on February 7, 1816, he included the following advice:

“Above all things live near to God. If personal religion be in a lively flourishing state in your heart everything will go well and your work will be an enjoyment, but on the contrary, if personal religion be low, your work will be a burden and your situation unhappy and disagreeable. So great an influence has this one thing upon all we do and say that it may be always considered as the life blood of all our enjoyments and all our usefulness.”<sup>2</sup>

Missionary steadfastness and resiliency matters. Therefore, abide in Christ daily, submitting to His transforming work. Pray always and sink your roots in the Word of God. Seek times of silence and solitude to sit in His presence and hear His voice.

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2 Terry G. Carter, ed, *The Journal and Selected Letters of William Carey* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), p. 253.

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# Missionary Resilience in a World in Constant Movement

J. Guy Key

We are humbled by the way God has blessed us and our family over several generations of missionaries serving through the FMB/IMB for over 100 years. We both have a rich missions heritage—Elena is a third-generation missionary, and Guy is a second-generation missionary.

Elena's grandparents graduated from seminary in Fort Worth in the class of 1919. They were appointed with the FMB in 1920. They stayed on the field, having a full and meaningful ministry until their retirement in 1960.

Our parents' generation (post World War II) went to the mission field planning on staying their whole careers with the mission agency. God honored their commitment, and they served faithfully until retirement.

We, too, have had the joy of serving in many years on the mission field. We were appointed to Brazil in 1984 and served there for 40 years. In this article, we reflect on our experiences about resilience and persistence on the mission field. We have seen the IMB's commitment to TCKs, healthy missionary life, healthy relationships, mentoring, and discipling. We have also seen a commitment on the part of the local church which contributes to staying long-term on the mission field.

## **Commitment to TCKs**

The first thing that comes to mind is a commitment on the part of each missionary to invest in Missionary Kids (MKs)/Third Culture Kids (TCKs). Thankfully, IMB culture values this highly as well. We are grateful for the variety of schooling options IMB offers to parents. We are also helped by their focus on our teenagers through various spiritual and college preparation retreats. We do not know of any other organization in the world that values missionary children like the IMB. We as ATCKs (Adult Third Culture Kids) can attest to the fact that part of the persistence evidenced in our lives is a result of the positive experiences we had as children and adolescents on the mission field.

This commitment is not just for missionaries who have children in their families. Not everyone on the mission field have children, but all of us have the privilege of interacting with TCKs. We have many fond memories of missionary “aunts” and “uncles” who influenced our lives, spent time with us, and continue to do so until this day. We can recall at least half a dozen single missionary “aunts” that influenced us as well as single journeymen, both men and women. We have “adopted” many TCKs through the years, and many as adults today still call us “Aunt” and “Uncle.” As a missionary, making it a priority to adopt and influence at least one TCK will help their family stay on the field and may influence that TCK toward future missionary service.

## **Healthy Missionary Family Life**

Having a healthy missionary family is another key element to “staying the course” on the mission field. We have noticed that many Christian workers have a hard time finding balance in their lives. Our first ministry is to our family. Through stories we have read in missionary biographies and even through personal observation of other TCKs, we have seen that many of these parents tried to “bargain” with God—expecting him to take care of their families while they did mission work. This is always a recipe for disaster.

Missionaries need to spend time with their families: playing together, praying together, talking together, playing table games, watching TV, sharing movie nights, picnics in the parks, family outings to the beach, taking hikes, etc.

We tried to create an atmosphere where our TCKs felt comfortable enough to talk about anything with us. We were not perfect, but we made spending time and communicating with our children a priority.

Many task-driven missionaries put ministry before family responsibilities. Most missionaries are self-starters, and their worst nightmare is for somebody to think they are lazy and do not pull their weight in the missionary task. We tried to balance ministry and family time. We also involved our kids in our ministry, by taking them with us when appropriate. They had opportunities to be translators when we had volunteer teams as well.

## **Healthy Relationships**

### **With IMB colleagues and leaders**

One of the values of working with our company is the spirit of family and belonging. Probably one of the hardest things to deal with is to say “goodbye” to missionaries who leave the field. Some of those relationships continue. With one missionary couple who resigned after their first term, we have continued our friendship and see them every time we are on stateside assignment.

To stay the course, we always would get to know our supervisors and drink coffee together. We tried to hear and understand their hearts. We never expected that we would agree 100% on everything, but we worked on what we had in common. In 40 years, we never had a bad supervisor, and we have always tried to get along well with everybody. We had the practice of praying for a good supervisor – everything in your mission life hinges on this relationship. Pray that your supervisor will be more of a leader than a manager.

We have also made it a goal to spend time with younger workers, such as millennials and Generation Z. We try to listen to them and learn from them and try to speak into their lives. As a couple, we have adopted missionaries all through our careers, older ones at first and then younger ones later on.

### **With other Great Commission missionaries**

In addition, it is important to have friends (at least one) among other missionaries. These may not necessarily be from the same mission-sending agency. We are stronger and more resilient when we have others with whom we can exchange ideas and experiences. We have found that the isolated “lone wolf”



missionary will probably not stay many years on the field. Depression can set in, and before you know it, that person has left, and loneliness was often the critical factor.

### **With nationals**

Another contributor to resilience is strong relationships with nationals. Through our years of service, we have been in many homes of nationals, both believers and non-believers. This requires intentionality, but it is important to resilience. We have also hosted many people in our own home, including those who were friends of our children. We loved learning from them, and we believe they also learned from us. These friendships have helped us develop a deep love for our people and their culture.

As a family, we planted three churches in our home. The couches in our living room and our dining room table and chairs were all resources used in our ministry as a family. We planted one church when our children were small, attracting families with small children. We planted another church when we had teens and ended up attracting families with teenagers and college students. They participated in everything and saw some of their friends come to faith in Christ. Then, we planted a church after the children were grown. God used our relationships with Brazilians to advance the missionary task. We have planted other churches since then, but these that were planted with the family are very special in our memory bank. The furnishings in our home provided a tangible reminder to us that all our resources are God's to be used in ministry.

Because we served our years in a legacy field, we had strong national leadership and a national Baptist convention. We always tried to represent our company in convention meetings as well as national seminaries. We built strong relationships with national leaders of the convention as well as with GCCs by inviting them to coffee. We always tried to care for them and their families. We developed relationships of trust with pastors of small churches and large churches. We have learned to coexist with Baptists of different stripes by always developing relationships of trust. ; however, we have observed that some of our colleagues have little interest in the relationships with their national partners and thus are forgotten by them.

## **Mentoring and Discipling**

Through the years, we have also had mentors who helped us stay faithful. Some have been from our company, and others from other walks of life. We have had also Brazilian mentors throughout our years of service. These men and women have poured their lives into ours and have helped shape us into the people we are today. We are forever grateful for their influence. We often tell people, “We are rich people not because of money, but because of the friends we have.”

Actually, being a mentor is another element of resilience. In our 40s, suddenly we were no longer the “young missionaries.” People around us began to think we were seasoned workers and began to listen to us. What an honor, to be heard! The longer one stays the course on the mission field, the greater the possibility of their influence. We have always tried to model discipleship and mentoring to new believers.

## **Commitment to Local Church**

Not only is involvement in a local church important on the field, but being a fully participating member was essential for our resilience. In every move we made, we prioritized becoming members of a local Baptist church as soon as possible. We were always involved in a larger ministry than in just one local church, so we had to set some parameters with the local pastor and leaders because they had many expectations for us to help lead the local church. When our kids were younger and still at home, our family would choose one local church where Elena and the kids were very involved. Our ministry often required that I (Guy) traveled to other churches, but I would try to be there at my local church with my family at least one Sunday a month.

## **Final Considerations**

Here, then, are a few final considerations on resilience as cross-cultural workers. First, to stay the course, be faithful daily in your spiritual habits like Bible reading and study, prayer, intentional witnessing, tithing, participating in a local church and cell group (if possible), and in being accountable to others. For those who are considering missionary service: faithfulness in the basic

spiritual disciplines is critical to resilience in any type of ministry. For those who are equipping others to “go and serve,” make it a matter of prayer that those who embrace this calling will focus on these priorities.

Second, where possible, join your IMB mission strategy with the national partners’ strategy. Be an advocate for your national partners. Help them gain the vision of their part in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Help send them to go to the hard places of their own countries and to the nations. We have been involved in global engagement for many years and have seen many Brazilians going to the nations. We have invested not just in training them, but more personally in the lives of the next generations of those who continue to invest in others and expand the Kingdom.

Third, do your best to learn the language. Listen to local TV, read your Bible in the local language out loud, and write out your prayers. Your national partners appreciate a foreigner who is constantly trying to improve communication by learning more of the local language. We also have continued to study culture and language, valuing the region where we have served. In fact, we have tried to continually be learners.

Fourth, make accountability a priority in your life as a missionary. Both of us have willingly chosen to have accountability partners of the same sex. It has strengthened us, encouraged us, and helped us to be resilient.

Finally, a passage that has been especially meaningful to us over the years is 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: “To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.” Remember this verse, and never forget your calling. During difficult times (which we experienced many times), we always went back to our calling. We encourage you to do the same.

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# Missionaries and Biblical Friendships

Aaron J. Stormer

## Introduction

Friendship can be defined in many ways. The definition and necessity of friendship are shaped by context, culture, and life experiences. Hunter says “Our experiences of friendship shape our understanding of friendship. The friends we have influence what we think friendship means.”<sup>1</sup> The definition by Haykin, Croft, and Carroll will be used here with an added qualifier; biblical friendship is “an intimate relationship of love, trust, and loyalty” based on a common faith in God.<sup>2</sup> Friendship is often taken for granted or even pushed aside as something of lesser value in life. The truth is friendship is not optional. In fact, it is part of what we were created for.

In the context of missions, friendship can be one of the most important factors in ministerial durability. Many missionaries confirm that, for them, longevity and stick-with-it-ness are directly linked to having friends where they live and serve. Johnson reinforces this idea when he writes that “on-going contact with genuine Christian fellowship and community is the primary key to missionary longevity. True Christian fellowship is what urban missionaries, pastors, and church members need above all else to survive and thrive in the

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1 Drew Hunter, *Made for Friendship: The Relationship that Halves Our Sorrows and Doubles Our Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 77, Kindle.

2 Michael A.G. Haykin, Brian Croft and James B. Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship: The Forgotten Piece in a Persevering Ministry* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2022), intro., Kindle.

rigors of urban ministry.”<sup>3</sup> As noted by Beeke and Haykin, “the privileges and responsibilities of biblical friendship are rooted in mutual covenantal love, intercommunion, and personal investment in another.”<sup>4</sup> Biblical friendship is a God-given gift that empowers and encourages believers and serves as a reflection for the world of the love of Christ.

## Designed for Relationship

From the beginning, God designed people for relationships. Haykin, Croft, and Carroll write that “In addition to His relationship with Himself, which points us broadly in the direction of friendship, God wove this attribute into human beings as displayed by His relating to Adam and Eve.”<sup>5</sup> Humanity was made and created to be in relationship, both with God and with one another. Lane and Tripp note:

In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is not good for man to be “alone.” This statement has more to do with God’s design for humanity than Adam’s neediness. God created us to be relational beings because he is a social God. God lives in community within the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit, and he made humanity in his image.<sup>6</sup>

Mankind was created to reflect the unity of the Godhead. As noted here, relationships were not created to meet a need as much as it was God’s intention and design for mankind.

Biblical friendship is based on common faith and belief in God. Believers share a common faith and life with one another in Christ and it is based in relationships. I have my closest friends where I serve, first and foremost because we have a common faith and belief in God. God’s design is for his

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3 Wendal Mark Johnson, “Reaching the Secular City: A Practical Model for Brazilian Urban Missionaries through the Lens of Lesslie Newbigin” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 133.

4 Joel R. Beeke and Michael A.G. Haykin, *How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), Friendship in the Holy Scriptures, Kindle.

5 Haykin, Croft, and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 4.

6 Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 9.

church to live in community, and true community can only be accomplished through biblical friendship. Beeke and Haykin aptly state:

Though we must be patient in developing Christian friendships, we must not be passive. Christians are called to do life together. Contrary to the individualism that is glorified in Western culture, we need to realize that the Christian life has not been designed to be lived in solitude. Real Christianity is not a solitary life, but one lived in community. And friendships are to be a part of this experience of community.<sup>7</sup>

Believers must practice biblical friendship because it is what they are designed for. It provides a glimpse at the creational intent of God.

The missionary is no different from the believer in the local church. The missionary is designed for and needs to practice biblical friendship. Using Brazil as his context, Johnson notes:

[T]he urban missionary needs a true friend with whom they can have genuine heart-to-heart fellowship. If possible, for the urban missionary serving in a different culture, this true friend (or friends) should be found among the very people with whom the missionary works.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the missionary needs to connect with other believers to take advantage of one of the greatest resources God designed mankind for: friendship. Davison notes, “We cannot fulfill Jesus’ mission without friendship.”<sup>9</sup> Friendship is God’s design for his mission.

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7 Beeke and Haykin, *Biblical Friendship*, Art of Building, Kindle.

8 Johnson, “Reaching the Secular City,” 175.

9 C.J. Davison, *Missional Friendships: Jesus’ Design for Fruitful Life and Ministry* (Littleton, CO: Acoma Press, 2020), 69, Kindle.

## A Biblical Example

A read through the New Testament will reveal a list of several companions or friends of Paul. Paul serves as a model for any believer or missionary who desires biblical friendship. As Dudley noted:

No man ever loved his fellows more passionately for their own sakes. He loved men as men. No man in all Scripture had so many personal friends as St. Paul. None in all Scripture gave expression to such intense affection for his friends. None had friends among such varied nationalities, nor from such extremes of social gradations. None called forth such answering love, nor evoked such unselfish heroism and sacrifice.<sup>10</sup>

Paul, through the New Testament, allows fellow missionaries to examine his life to understand both the necessity of friendship and his commitment to sustaining them.

Merida notes three things that can be learned from Paul's friendships: companionship, comfort, and joy.<sup>11</sup> These three benefits are closely connected with the attributes listed above: companionship/loyalty, comfort/trust, and joy/love. Paul was rarely, if ever, alone in his travels and ministry life. He tended to have a companion with him wherever he went. His companions tended to be people with whom he shared a loyalty. Dudley, on this point, observes :

During his entire ministry his friends were continually as his right arm. Never as far as we know did he labor with marked success any great length of time without the companionship of one or more of his intimate friends. None of his great churches was founded without the assistance of his friends. Never did he undertake a great missionary journey alone.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Carl Hermon Dudley, *St. Paul's Friendships and His Friends* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1911), foreword, Kindle.

11 Tony Merida, "If Paul Needed Friends, So Do We," The Gospel Coalition, February 27, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/paul-needed-friends-so-do-we/>.

12 Dudley, *St. Paul*, chap. 1.



A quick survey of the New Testament shows many companions of Paul. One such companion was Barnabas. Barnabas, whose name according to Acts 4:36 means son of encouragement, was a great companion to Paul. It was Barnabas who defended Paul in Jerusalem to the apostles in Acts 9:27. It was also Barnabas in Acts 13:2, who was set apart with Paul at the church in Antioch for missionary work together. Despite Paul and Barnabas later parting ways, Paul still appeared to hold Barnabas in great esteem as evidenced by his writing in Colossians 4:10 and 1 Corinthians 9:5. Paul understood the design of friendship and cultivated companionship throughout his life, ministry, and travels with Barnabas and others.

Paul also had biblical friendships that provided comfort. Paul serves as an example for missionaries that when trials, difficulties, or heartbreak occur, biblical friendship can provide comfort because there is a common trust. Comfort, for Paul, would have been received from those he counted as close friends. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 7:6-7, that God provided comfort through the coming of Titus and by the comfort that came through him from the church at Corinth. The comfort he received likely sustained him. Johnson noted that in missions, “The urban missionary who has a ‘bosom friend’ will find the strength to persevere and prosper in the midst of the rigors of urban ministry.”<sup>13</sup> Paul had several friends he considered to be his “bosom friend” or “right-hand man” throughout his ministry and life.

Biblical friendship also brought joy to the life of the Apostle Paul. This joy was based on a mutual love that Paul shared with his friends. In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul expresses to the church at Philippi the thankfulness he has in God as he remembers them in prayer. Paul goes on to write that because of the partnership that he shares with this local body, he has joy as he prays for them. In Philippians 1:8 Paul further elaborates that he yearns for this body of believers with the affection of Christ. Paul understood and valued his friends for the enjoyment and refreshing they brought him. Paul also understood that Jesus is the ultimate friend of man and because of this friendship, he needed and wanted biblical friends who could provide companionship, comfort, and joy to offer a glimpse to fellow believers and the world of God’s creational intent for relationship.

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson, “Reaching the Secular City”, 134.

## Need for Community

The saying “many hands make light work” can be used to understand the necessity for friendship in the joys, challenges, and difficulties of life. Having a community allows a person to share the load (be it emotional, financial, physical, etc.) and experience the comfort that can be found only in friends. Community involves what Bridges calls a “common life.” He writes that “the realization that we do in fact share a common life with other believers should stimulate within us a desire to share experientially with one another.”<sup>14</sup> My daughter needed medical care and it was a long boat ride from the city. Who would we leave our boys with? We called a friend in our community. A friend can’t get to the school to pick up her son. She calls us; that is community. Another friend is struggling with uncertainty and calls me, that is community. We all need people to share life with. We all need community.

The missionary needs these levels of friendship to have a community that meets the different needs that will be encountered. Each level of friendship brings a different component to community and a different experience of living. Hunter notes that true life “only opens up and shares its deepest pleasures when we’re in community.”<sup>15</sup> Community in the missionary context must be a priority. Without proper biblical friendships, the missionary may choose to leave their field of service. Johnson noted in his work based in Brazil:

Many of the missionaries who distanced themselves from Brazilian Baptist partners were newer missionaries who inadvertently cut themselves off from their greatest single source of personal friendship and familial and ministerial support as they adjusted to life in a new culture. This could well have contributed to an unusually high attrition rate among IMB missionaries serving in Brazil’s cities. Many survey respondents indicated that a close personal connection to a local Baptist church was a key factor in their personal happiness and missionary longevity. Those missionaries who failed to culturally

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14 Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 44, Kindle.

15 Hunter, *Made for Friendship*, 50.

connect soon returned to the United States, some even before completing their first term of missionary service.<sup>16</sup>

Entering a new or different culture presents the missionary with a unique opportunity to create friendships and community, which can serve as a great resource.

## Belonging and Persevering

The necessity for biblical friendship and the need for community point to the notion that everyone wants to belong. The need, desire, or drive to belong is a strong indicator of the importance of community and friendship. Belonging is more than mere acceptance; it is also an understanding of mutual giving and receiving. People are so vastly different, and yet the desire to belong runs through all people. Part of belonging is receiving love and care. As Bridges notes, “mutual belonging to one another is the thread that ties together all the seemingly diverse elements of fellowship. As we recognize and apply the fact that we belong to each other, we will genuinely love and care for one another.”<sup>17</sup> A sense of belonging provides the missionary experience, acceptance, and fellowship.

Belonging can also help the missionary to persevere. White knuckling it through adversity can last only so long. To increase the ability to persevere, the missionary needs friends. Haykin, Croft and Carroll note that “friendship is a vital tool to help leaders persevere. To this end, modern-day pastors [i.e., in terms of this article, missionaries] need the gift of intimate relationships of love, trust, and loyalty.”<sup>18</sup> Personally, when expectations have been misrepresented or have been held erroneously, it has been friendships with nationals that has carried me through. In some of my lowest moments on the field, it has been my Brazilian family that has sustained me. The best people to persevere with are those that I serve and do life with. We can share the burdens together. Hearing the names Nei, Ronanio, Tiago, Ricardo, Helder, Marcelo, Carlos, and many more brings immense joy and each name also brings a dis-

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16 Johnson, “Reaching the Secular City”, 175.

17 Bridges, *True Community*, 139.

18 Haykin, Croft, and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 1.

tinct memory of persevering together. Often, the main barrier to belonging and persevering is pride. Many people, especially in leadership, do not want to admit they need something from others. To persevere and belong, the leader, or in this case missionary, needs friends. Haykin, Croft, and Carroll again address this:

Pastors [i.e., missionaries] fail to persevere for a variety of reasons, but a few of them—discouragement from ineffectiveness, collapse from exhaustion, stumbling in immorality—are clearly connected to the benefits of friendship. The skill to navigate, the strength to endure, and the protection of shipwreck blossom on the tree of friendship.<sup>19</sup>

Friendship offers the missionary an outlet, support, and guide to persevere when challenges and difficulties come.

There are, unfortunately, too many stories to share of missionaries who did not endure or persevere because they did not develop or maintain the biblical friendships necessary to do so. Families leave the field due to several circumstances, but one big reason has been a lack of community with nationals. A husband leaves his family behind in language acquisition and ministry and the family quietly suffers with no community. A missionary has no desire to practice language with nationals, hurting their ability to gain friendships. The need for an “American” community creates a dichotomy with living overseas. The longing for the next furlough because there are no roots established. All of these are lived experiences that have brought people off of the field. Haykin, Croft and Carroll, once again, aptly write that “Biblical and church history prove that no man will persevere well in pastoral ministry without the grace of friends to walk beside him.”<sup>20</sup> Missionaries need friendship to belong and to persevere.

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<sup>19</sup> Haykin, Croft, and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Haykin, Croft, and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 5.

## Application

The necessity for biblical friendship can be seen both in scripture and observation or experience of living life in ministry. The difficulty is not in understanding the necessity for friendship, but more in the practice of gaining and maintaining biblical friendship. Part of this difficulty comes because friendship, like any relationship, is not easy. It must be sought out, cultivated, and tended to. The missionary must be intentional about having biblical friendship and realize that “when you find people with the potential for real Christian friendship, work at being a Christian friend to others and prayerfully seek God’s blessing on developing relationships.”<sup>21</sup> The missionary must be willing to accept that true biblical friendship requires work and effort.

The missionary must start from the position of repentance and understand the sin of trying to “do it alone.” Jesus understood the importance of friends; he had twelve close friends and of those, three were his intimate friends. Jesus also sent his followers out in pairs. As noted by Henry, Jesus sent them two by two:

[So] that they might be company for one another when they were among strangers, and might strengthen the hands, and encourage the hearts, one of another; might help one another if anything should be amiss, and keep one another in countenance. Every common soldier has his comrade; and it is an approved maxim, Two are better than one.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus modeled and demonstrated the need for friendship, and missionaries must remain open to letting others be a part of their world.

Awareness and openness are the first practical steps of practicing true biblical friendship. These two elements are done as the missionary understands that friendship is the gift God gives each worker as they grow in dependence on the Spirit and understanding of scripture. Haykin, Croft and Carroll note that “prayerful dependence on the Spirit and the resources of Scripture provide the most essential tools for our work... we cannot and will not reap the

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21 Beeke and Haykin, *Biblical Friendship*, Practical Steps, Kindle.

22 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1789. Logos.

benefit of them fully without the help of godly friends.”<sup>23</sup> What does it take to be open? It means being vulnerable with others, because you recognize that the process and end result will be for your good. The missionary, often times, must take the first step towards friendship. I have a national friend that I pray with on a regular basis. We share each other’s burdens, pains, joys, and lives. It started when I made the step to be open with him and noticed that he appeared to be needing the same thing I was, a friend to do life with. It started with awareness and openness.

Missionaries must also understand the importance of being available. It is one thing to be open to friendship, but it is quite another to be available for friendship. One is a mental exercise while the other is a practical exercise. Being available means to move past an understanding and begin to make time for others. Being available has meant eating meals together, going on family outings together, praying together, watching futbol late into the night, or helping when emergencies arise. Being available is what allows me to spend time with others and begin to build the relationships needed for ministry and life. Being available has also meant saying yes when I want to say no, because a friend puts the needs of others first.

A third practical step to practicing biblical friendship is the art of intentionality. The missionary will do what they place importance on. The missionary must invest time and energy into friendships. Without intentionality and investment, there are only acquaintances. Every missionary needs an inner circle of friends. As noted by Beeke and Haykin, “Fewer friends with deeper ties will anchor life more securely than an abundance of loosely tethered associations.”<sup>24</sup> Intentionality in friendships aids the intentionality that is given to kingdom work. Intentionality also promotes and supports collaboration with others for the sake of the gospel. Davison notes:

Without genuine relationships, there will not be genuine collaboration. Unfortunately, many Christians are so focused on the mission that they see no room for deep relationships that lead to God-honoring collaboration. Those who fail to connect

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<sup>23</sup> Haykin, Croft and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Beeke and Haykin, *Biblical Friendship, Practical Steps*.

and collaborate are often living for their own small kingdom instead of Christ's.<sup>25</sup>

To see the advance of the kingdom of God, the missionary must engage in biblical friendship.

The friendships I have, lead to the ministry that the Lord wants for me. I now have friends who come to me asking how we can collaborate to see new works started. These opportunities haven't come about because I am a missionary, but rather, because I have friends and we invest in one another.

## Conclusion

The Christian was not created to function alone or in isolation; neither was the missionary called to function alone or in isolation. The Bible demonstrates the importance of friendship through the Trinity, God's design for relationship, and the example of the life of the Apostle Paul. The missionary needs community both for ministry success and for sharing the experiences of life and ministry. The missionary also needs biblical friendship to persevere and to have a sense of belonging, no matter where they live and serve. Haykin, Croft and Carroll rightly note that "We simply cannot take the Bible seriously and avoid friendship."<sup>26</sup> The missionary cannot labor alone and model for others God's design for biblical friendship.

A survey of the Bible and Christian history shows the importance of having biblical friendship. There are few, if any, missionaries that reach any level of sustainable ministry without the aid of friendship. Along with an abiding life, biblical friendship is what helps sustain the missionary in life's ups and downs. Biblical friendship is both God's design and his gift. The missionary who wishes to endure well, serve faithfully, and thrive where they live needs to understand the importance of friendship and then put into practice God's gift of biblical friendship.

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<sup>25</sup> Davison, *Missional Friendships*, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Haykin, Croft and Carroll, *Pastoral Friendship*, chap. 4.

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# Suffering Together and Sharing the Load

## Two key ways missionary teams help build resiliency

Kate Midkiff

Resiliency is a necessarily popular topic in a world plagued with increasing rates of anxiety and mental illness.<sup>1</sup> As we consider the next generation of missionaries, how do we push back against these prevailing winds and grow mature, resilient Christ followers? We want to see missionaries who can maintain the course with faithfulness.

If resiliency is the ability to grow stronger through adversity and to adapt and withstand change over time, the mission field is a place where this will be most likely be tested and grown. For the missionary, a cross-cultural mission context is often ever-changing, unpredictable, challenging, and unstable. The difficulties of cross-cultural work will either be a catalyst toward resiliency or a hurricane-force wind that forces a person off the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Skyrocketing rates of mental illness among youth are analyzed in depth in an ongoing open-source literature review of current research: Jonathan Haidt, Zach Rausch, and Jean Twenge, *Adolescent mood disorders since 2010: A collaborative review*. Unpublished manuscript, New York University, online <https://tinyurl.com/TeenMentalHealthReview>.

Our missionary teams have great potential to build both the resiliency of individual missionaries and the ongoing resiliency of a work in a particular place. This demands something of each member of the team to walk humbly with the others on their team in the slow work of growth and maturity. I would like to highlight two ways teams can particularly contribute to resiliency.

Foundations offers an excellent definition of a missionary team: “an identifiable group of disciples who meet together regularly, care for each other selflessly, and partner with one another intentionally to make disciples and multiply churches.”<sup>2</sup> This is my primary focus when I discuss the role of the missionary team. Missionaries might also have co-workers in their orbit who are not specifically on their team. For that reason, I encourage the reader to also think about ways they can care well for nearby missionaries who might not be on their immediate team.

## **Suffering together: Teammates who bear the load as fellow sufferers**

I grew up in rural, central Florida, where half of our 20 acres were filled with a grove of navel orange trees that produced the most delectable fruit imaginable. Like any fruit tree, those trees required regular care: watering, fertilizing, and protection from pests. This regular maintenance took work, but it was expected and normal. The trees grew hardy over the years, until one year when we had an unusual cold spell.

I remember my parents hauling out our few heaters and covering what trees they could with sheets to protect from several nights of sub-zero temperatures.<sup>3</sup> It was hard, sleep-depriving work. And when it was over, they were able to save only about 6 or 7 of the mature trees.

The weather was too harsh, and the remaining trees without cover died. We replanted the grove, but as it often takes 6-8 years for new trees to bear fruit,

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2 International Mission Board, *Foundations*, v. 4 (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2022), 87.

3 I am pretty sure this is also the year my parents woke us up at 2 am because it was snowing in central Florida!

I do not remember ever getting oranges off what was replanted. The damage was long-lasting and devastating.

Our orange trees had weathered all sorts of conditions: hot and cold, more than one hurricane, threats from pests and drought; but, that week the climate became so harsh that the only way they could survive was through others covering them with sheets. And when the cold passed and the sheets came off, those few protected trees continued to bear fruit.

So, it is with the cross-cultural missionary. The cross-cultural missionary journey is often one of deep suffering. Biblically, we know that suffering produces endurance and perseverance (e.g. Rom 5:3; James 1:3), but we are never meant to suffer alone. Yet, there are often sufferings so deep that we will be devastated without the covering of our brothers and sisters to help us bear up under them. A robust theology of suffering in missions helps broaden our understanding of suffering. We bear with one another in it, and we persist in bearing with one another when the suffering is longer or deeper than we could imagine (1 Cor 12:26).

In Paul's letter to the Philippian church, the main reason that he cites for God extending his life on earth is to walk with them for their progress in faith (Phil 1:24-25). He encourages them in their sufferings, since they are now "engaged in the struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (Phil 1:30). He acknowledged a God-ordained role not only to further the gospel, but also to help his fellow sufferers in their kingdom-building work.

Several years ago, our family was expelled from the country where we were living with no notice. On the heels of years of increasing loss from others having to leave for similar reasons, as well as being in the early days of the pandemic, we experienced one of the deepest losses of our lives. In a day, we lost our community, our team, our kids' friends, our church, channels of communication with our local friends, our home, our pets, and years of investing in a church and ministry in our community. As we arrived in a nearby country with all our worldly possessions on a few airport carts, that grief was deeper than I can describe. But we did not arrive alone. We arrived with a few other families who were experiencing the same loss. The safety, understanding, and help that came from sharing that together was instrumental in helping us endure.

After a season, we began to scatter to other locations, but a group of us met for a few weeks online to pray prayers of lament together while reading *Dark*

*Clouds, Deep Mercy*.<sup>4</sup> This corporate time of crying out to the Lord together did something in my heart that could never have happened in isolation.

Psalms 13 is one of the passages we prayed together, crying out to the Lord and directing our prayers to him. We voiced our complaints to him, “How long will I store up anxious concerns within me, agony in my mind every day?” (v 2). It felt like the enemy was winning, and we begged God to be the one to bring justice, “Consider me....otherwise, I will sleep in death, My enemy will say, ‘I have triumphed over him.’” (v 3-4). And we entrusted ourselves together to God, “I have trusted in your faithful love...” (v 5).<sup>5</sup>

Scripture is full of prayers of lament, and most of these were written as corporate prayers of worship. Crying out to the Lord alongside one another is a biblical model for enduring crushing hardships.

Our sending churches often do pray for and support us, but there is a deeper level of fellowship in suffering that comes from those who are close beside us in the work. Just like a soldier can share understanding of the horrors of war with someone from their unit, so a missionary is uniquely positioned to understand their teammate’s hardship in a special way. We can “comfort one another with the comfort we too have received” (1 Cor 1:4).

As they do the work of evangelism and church planning, teammates do well to remember the call to encourage one another. The sufferings of life can cloud our ability to see and celebrate the good. We have an impossible task, and we face failure daily. Yes, God will accomplish kingdom-sized things, but we do not always get to see results in the day-to-day. Many missionaries live in an encouragement-deprived vacuum. We need encouragement to stay the course through deep hardship. We must look for and celebrate faithfulness, the mercy of Jesus in each other’s others’ lives, and the places where good is happening—no matter how small. We need teammates who encourage one another to press on when language learning never ends or when a local partner we have been working with walks away from the Lord.

I have lost count of the times that others have helped me have courage to stay the course when I wanted to quit. I am not talking about false flattery or an emotional pep rally, but a rich scripture-inspired affirmation of the ways

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds Deep Mercy* (Chicago, IL: Crossway, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> This follows the 4-part lament outlined by Vroegrop in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*: turn to God in prayer, bring your complaint, ask boldly, choose to trust.

we are following in the footsteps of Jesus each day. The sense of isolation or loneliness we often feel on the mission field can lead us to dark places where we believe our sufferings can be faced only by leaving a location.

Sometimes leaving is the right thing to do.<sup>6</sup> Longevity in a place is not the same as resilience. At times, teammates would do well to affirm the wisdom in moving to a new team or place or returning to a passport country. But when going is not the wisest decision, colleagues who listen to the challenges, empathize with the suffering, and then link arms to stand together are like those sheets my parents placed over our orange trees to protect them from the cold. Their support helps endure the challenging environment, building resiliency along the way.

As teammates and co-workers, we can help one another navigate sufferings and grow through them. We can lament all the ways the suffering of a broken world breaks in as we long for our coming king's return.

*To consider: How are you comforting or supporting those around you who are suffering? How have others borne with you? How can we lament well together instead of calling others to keep a stiff upper lip and soldier on? Who do you need to offer a word of encouragement to today?*

## **Sharing the load: Teammates who embrace a diversity of giftings**

Working with others is often hard and messy. It requires navigating challenging conflicts and personality differences, and it demands communicating well. Relationships are complicated.

However, a multiplicity of people is the way God wants to accomplish his task. People with a diversity of giftings and skills work better as a whole than they ever could as limited individuals (1 Cor 12).

Perhaps one of the biggest detriments to resiliency among missionaries is the unrealistic expectation that they must be all things all the time. Only God is all-powerful, all-knowing and lacking nothing. We are, by God's design, cre-

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<sup>6</sup> This topic is explored with great nuance and skill in: Sue Eenigenburg and Eva Burkholder, Grit to Stay, *Grace to Go* (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2023).

ated with limits.<sup>7</sup> By his sovereign wisdom, he has given each of us spiritual gifts, but he has not given any individual all the gifts. He has granted all of us not only unique strengths but unique weaknesses as well. He has given us different personalities and experiences to steward, but we were not designed to do so alone.

Team members can help each other build resiliency and resist burnout when they embrace and promote a team culture that encourages people to not only know their strengths, but also celebrate the differences between teammates in strengths and weaknesses. If the goal of our missionary efforts is planting churches which contain a variety of biblical spiritual gifting, age, experience and personality, why would the path from entry to exit not also be marked with a corporate and full expression of gifts and teamwork? Teams do well to seek to honor the various members in the unique roles, abilities, and parts of a greater whole.

Do all the members on a missionary team have a basic understanding of how they are gifted by the Spirit to be strong in the work? Do they have an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of others? Teams can unknowingly carry the unspoken expectation that all members need to look identical to one another as they carry out the work of building the kingdom.

I saw this beautiful diversity play out well on one of our previous teams in East Asia. One of our teammates was excellent and gifted in administration. As a team leader, I often felt guilty that I could not keep the team calendar organized or set helpful systems in place to keep us from getting bogged down in redundant tasks that could be done much more efficiently. But this young woman excelled at it, and would sometimes call me to ask, “Did you mean to schedule two team events at the same time on the same day?” I learned to see her gifting as a wonderful complement to my weakness. When I realized this, I turned many of those administrative duties over to her. Our team functioned much better, I was less burdened, and she was less frustrated with my lack of attention to detail.

A self-sufficient mindset is a recipe for burnout or isolating pride. Paul Ford encourages Christians to ask the questions, “Where are you powerful? Where

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<sup>7</sup> See Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human* (Ada, MI: Brazos, 2022).

are you weak? Whom do you need?”<sup>8</sup> We were created to need the abilities and skills of the other, so that together we could work together to build his kingdom. This requires a humility and confidence that does not crumble when we realize that others will often outshine us. It also requires a gracious awareness that other teammates might not be strong in the same ways we are strong. If I excel at bold, competent, face-to-face evangelism and am a confident up-front leader is, it is easy to think that everyone else must operate the same way. This kind of assumption, especially from a strong team leader, sets everyone up for frustration.

Team members build resiliency in one another when they recognize the unique gifting of each another and seek to encourage people in their strengths. People grow resilient as they learn to function as part of a greater community and become more comfortable with the idea that both their strengths and weaknesses are part of God’s design.<sup>9</sup>

*To Consider: Do you know where both you and your teammates are gifted by God to be strong? Where are you weak? Who do you need alongside you to help in that weakness? To team leaders, are you expecting others on your team to lead or work in the same way you are naturally gifted, or do you allow others to flourish in their own way?*

## Concluding Thoughts

We do not want better, stronger workers to produce a product. We want godly, mature Christ-followers, who faithfully work to build his kingdom with increasing maturity, skill, and wisdom until Christ returns. These are deeply connected to and rooted in the refining work Christ is doing in all of us, especially through the sufferings of life. Scripture has much to say on this topic, and we know that much of how scripture describes growth in the Christian life happens in the context of a community co-laboring on the journey. As

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8 Paul R. Ford, *Moving from I to We: Recovering the Biblical Vision for Stewarding the Church* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2013), chap. 9, Kindle, loc 4212.

9 As a point of clarification, by *weakness*, I mean in areas of personality, giftedness, or natural capacity. I’m not referring to weaknesses of character or sin issues.

fellow laborers of Christ, we are all called to live out the “one-anothers” of scripture.<sup>10</sup>

In this article, I have described some characteristics of a team which fosters resiliency among its members. But it is not a prescription for what a team must look like in all ways, all the time. No team can (or should) be all the things for each other. Attempts to do so would be unhealthily co-dependent and restrictive. Healthy, resilient missionaries will most often have a variety of relationships and connections to community in a variety of places.

Too many teams overlook their own responsibility to one another as they do the kingdom building work set before them. May this article bring into sharper focus ways we can grow in helping our fellow missionaries, our teams, and our work to grow in resiliency as we endure for the long term.

Our teams are places in which we will live closely with other missionaries for a season, whether a few months, years, or decades. As we live so closely with our brothers and sisters on the front lines, we have a unique role in developing resiliency and maturity in Christ. Just like the work that went into protecting our orange trees on that cold weekend described earlier, we too can support our brothers and sisters on the field during great suffering. At the same time, we will do well to celebrate and grow in understanding the beautiful diversity God has designed within our teams.

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Kate Midkiff (MA in Counseling, WTS) has served on the field for 20 years in Asia. She currently lives with her husband and kids in a central Asian city where they lead a team focused on carrying the gospel to young adults.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.challies.com/articles/one-another-the-bible-community/> - One of many excellent summaries of the “one-another” statements presented to us in scripture. We would do well to apply these to team relationships.



# Staying the Course in the Balkans

Randy and Joan Bell

For thirty-one years of our lives, we have been serving in cross-cultural missions. This may seem impressive, but many before us served longer and in more difficult conditions. How have so many stayed the course? The answer is not straightforward, and life is complicated, but we write to share some foundational principles that have helped us stay the course, persevere, and be resilient in missions service.

We start with definitions of perseverance and resilience. Perseverance is defined as “1) steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement; 2) Theology. continuance in a state of grace to the end, leading to eternal salvation.”<sup>1</sup> Resilience is defined as “1) the power or ability to return to the original form, position, etc., after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity. 2) ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyancy.”<sup>2</sup> We believe both definitions apply to missionaries, but how do we cultivate these qualities? What has kept us going all these years? And, what keeps us going even today as we serve in a city and country that many people have never heard of?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/perseverance>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/resilience>.

## **The Call**

Are missionaries a special breed? Extraordinary people? We would say no, they are not exceptional in any way (1 Cor. 1:23-29). They are gifted, of course, by the Holy Spirit and should be trained and prepared for the task to which the Lord has called them, but in our understanding, there is one key factor for becoming a missionary: the call of God. There is no way one could persevere through the unique difficulties of cross-cultural ministry without the call of God on his or her life (2 Tim. 1:8-12).

All Christians are called to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). But some are called to go to the nations (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:1; 10:14-15). We answered that call in 1988 when we both individually felt God pressing upon us to serve overseas, and the Lord used the call to draw us together as a couple before we married in 1985.

## **God's Grace and Faithfulness Throughout the Journey**

Perseverance and resilience are best understood in light of the actual difficulties that were experienced. What follows is our story.

Our first cross-cultural experience was with the International Mission Board as Journeymen in Bangkok, Thailand. Serving in a drastically different culture exacerbated everything we faced: the normal complexities of church dynamics, having the pastor as our supervisor, and our own immaturity. But the Lord grew us through those times and reconfirmed our calling to go to the nations, which we embraced with newfound healthy fear and humility.

Since then, we have served as church planters in three different countries of the war-torn Balkans: Serbia, Bosnia, and Slovenia. The Balkan War was in full swing when we arrived in Serbia in 1994, but our conviction to go was so strong, and we had such peace that we didn't hesitate. We were also very "green" and might have thought twice if we knew what we would face. But as we dealt with these difficulties, God's call kept us there; we never felt the Lord was releasing us from that call, and we believed we would be out of His will if we returned to the USA (Romans 1:5-6).

Settling in a country that was essentially at war with our home country set us on an even more intense path than if we were just in a new culture. Speaking English in public was a no-no for us as a family, and our children became painfully aware of this and even fearful to speak at all. At first, we

had no teammates, but we were very blessed to have a supportive Serbian Baptist church and other missionaries who had previously paved the way. They helped us and taught us so much about navigating a culture and nation that worked in the gray zone—nothing was black and white.

Because Serbia was under sanctions, gas stations weren't open, the small neighborhood stores had little on their shelves, public transportation was overcrowded, medical care was severely limited due to a lack of supplies, and electricity was scarce. The government was also selling the electricity they produced to their enemies, and we went without electricity every day for hours. One day, after returning from Hungary, where we had to go to buy food and do our banking, we walked into our apartment to find it as cold inside as it was outside (-17C). Our windows had ice on them. Our landlord had a generator hooked up, but it powered only a lightbulb and the stove. On other days, the electricity would go out while washing clothes and doing other tasks. We also went without water sometimes, but thankfully, not as often. At this point, we could have easily returned to a country that had every luxury imaginable. But we stayed only by God's grace.

As the years passed, our two children got older, and we added a third to our family while living in Belgrade. We felt a strong conviction from the Lord to stay in the country to give birth, so our third was born under post-war conditions in a "better" hospital. In retrospect, we would not do this again, even though many inroads were made into people's lives because of it. Joan dealt with PTSD from the 5+ days spent in the hospital.

After finally getting wonderful teammates and working with them for a year, we all had to evacuate twice from Serbia. It took us 11 hours to get to Zagreb (in Croatia, normally only 4 hours away). Our family was not in a good or healthy place after dealing with the realities of living in a war-torn culture. The culture wasn't all to blame; we didn't have good boundaries in dealing with the issues we faced.

God used this to clarify our calling. After we evacuated from Serbia, before we headed to Slovenia, we were processing our time in Serbia with our leadership. The feeling of "losing" our people group was a point of real grief for us because we felt called to them. Our Regional Leader's wife shared with us how she had realized that the Lord calls us to Himself, not to a country or a people group, although we do feel drawn to certain places and peoples. This statement not only helped us let go and move on but also showed us that our

faithfulness is “to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Eph. 3:20). He is the One to whom we are all called whether we are missionaries, ministers, or laity in Christ.

In time, we came to believe that the Lord was leading us to Slovenia. We lived on a tourist farm for four months while trying to find a place to live. Even though we were now in a new country, we would face other challenges and trials on different levels from the previous ones. Some of these challenges involved relationship issues. We were told we would have new teammates not long after arriving in Slovenia. We were excited to welcome this new family, but rocky roads were ahead. This proved to be some of the hardest trials we have ever faced, and we have faced this four times in our tenure in Slovenia.

## **Seasons of Fruitfulness**

All missionaries and ministers, wherever they are, face ministry adversity. Seeing those who seem to be excited about a relationship with Christ then walk away, or seeing people apparently repent and walk with Jesus and then have the world (family, friends, status) uproot them is always discouraging. And, we have seen a lot of that through the years. But the Lord has also given us wonderful seasons of fruitfulness that help keep us going to the next harvest and the next!

We did not see a church planted in our five years in Serbia (one later started out of a Bible study we did), but we did see churches start in Bosnia; one is still there while the other died. We considered a fifty percent success rate really good in our part of the world!

In Slovenia, we have led two church plants, started more than 15 Bible studies, and baptized more than 50 people. Thankfully, the two church plants are doing well, but many of those Bible studies died (some due to people not wanting to be part of a local body). Fifty people baptized in almost 25 years may not seem like many, but it is something we regularly rejoice over in this part of the world!

There were times we were ready to throw in the towel. Do we have the strength to endure these things on our own? No way! How could we? We look back in awe and realize it is only by His power. We learned some things early,

and one was His faithfulness amid all these battles. As mentioned above, we need to be faithful to Him, but He is the one who is first faithful and always faithful to us. Only He could give us the strength to endure, the peace to move forward and persevere, and the courage to stand and bounce back.

## **Core Commitments**

Finally, some commitments and values we have had from the beginning have helped us with all the above – to embrace God’s call, to depend on his grace, and to be faithful between and during seasons of fruitfulness. We briefly mention four here.

First, we must have a solid knowledge of God’s Word to follow Christ and find the grace to persevere and engage in every component of the missionary task. Second, a long-term commitment to where God places us is necessary for us to see any gospel impact take place. As we look back on the hard times, we see how much the Lord did that we would have missed out on if we had left when it became difficult. Third, learning the language and culture of the countries we serve is essential to long-term relationships and fruitful ministry. And fourth, we are to stay the course until God changes it. These have been essential to persevering, being resilient, and seeing God truly touch, move, and change lives around us.

## **Conclusion**

There have been numerous times we considered leaving the mission field for various reasons (educational decisions for our children, bilingual challenges, learning disabilities, children going to boarding school, then children transitioning to college in the US, organizational changes in strategies and leaders, losing family members, and dealing with aging parents, etc.), but each time the Lord made it perfectly clear that we needed to persevere. If it were up to us, we would have been back in the USA decades ago!

Luke 14:26 encouraged us— “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and furthermore, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Our focus should and must be on Him. He is our sustainer and source of strength. Everything

else must come second, including our desires, plans, families, comforts, and lives.

We thank the Lord that He called us, equipped us, and allowed us to be a part of His Kingdom's work for so long. In the end, it is only by His grace that we can do any of this, but in response to His faithfulness, we too, want to be faithful to Him. The blessings and joys were worth all the hardships, and we would do it all over again!

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# Renovating House Church Assumptions

## A Reconsideration of Early Christian Church Models

Jonathan McGrath

### What Was a House Church Like?

When missiology books discuss early house church movements, they often emphasize the small size of the gatherings.<sup>1</sup> Some house church proponents suggest that they were often capped at twenty persons and that the largest homes could hold no more than 50 people.<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Simson exhibits this reasoning; “The New Testament church was made up of small groups, typically between 10 and 15 people. It grew not by forming big congregations of 300 people to fill cathedrals and lose fellowship. Instead, it multiplied ‘side-ways,’ dividing like organic cells, once these groups reached around 15 to 20

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1 David Garrison encourages the principle in planting house churches that “smaller is better.” David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Arkadelphia, AR: WIGTake, 2004), 25.

2 Kevin Giles, “House Churches,” *Priscilla Papers* 24, no. 1 (2010): 6-8; Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: Spirit and Culture in Early House Churches*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), 32-33. Gehring caps such groups at “ten to twenty people.” Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 93.

people.”<sup>3</sup> These writings often depict a small number of individuals meeting in secret due to persecution as normative descriptions of early church gatherings.<sup>4</sup> Since these meeting spaces could not surpass 50 people, authors like Simson assume that churches grew sideways to accommodate.<sup>5</sup>

But, are these assumptions correct? For 21st century missionaries concerned with being both biblical and missiologically, we should desire an accurate understanding of early Christian house churches. This study will consider biblical, archaeological, and historical data to provide a more diverse depiction of early Christian house churches. The paper will argue that a variety of church models—even a variety of house church models—were used in the earliest church. As missiologists in the 21st century, we should reject platitudes such as “smaller is better,” and instead plant culturally and contextually appropriate churches.<sup>6</sup>

## Were Early Churches Small Because of Persecution?

Although orchestrated regional persecutions documented from the late 2nd century, the evidence of orchestrated persecutions from the 1st century through the mid-2nd century is less available.<sup>7</sup> In the earliest decades of the church, specific groups of Christians were persecuted in specific contexts. Acts 8:1-4 speaks of Paul leading a persecution against the church in Jerusalem. This persecution scattered believers to greater Judea and Samaria, and even beyond, but the persecution does not appear to have immediately followed them. Acts 12 speaks of Herod Agrippa killing some who belonged to the church (Acts 12:1)—including James. Agrippa persecuted the church to receive praise from the Jewish population under his rule. Acts 18 speaks of

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3 Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K. Waynesboro, Ga: OM Pub, 2001), xvii.

4 See Simson, *Houses that Change the World*, Ch. 6. Other proponents are more cautious in discussions about wide-ranging persecution. For instance, Zdero states that the notion of such persecution is “popular but inaccurate.” Rad Zdero, *Global House Church Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 2004), 24.

5 Simson, *Houses*, xvii.

6 The platitude “smaller is better” regarding house churches comes from Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 25.

7 For evidence of late-2nd century organized persecution, see Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 4.4. Tertullian, *Apology*, 20. See also, the late-2nd century account in *Polycarp’s Martyrdom*.



a dispersion from Rome of all Jews, which would have included Christians at that time (Acts 18:2-3). The reason may have been due to Jewish disturbances related to Christians, but this remains uncertain.<sup>8</sup>

Acts depicts Roman authorities as more reserved in their treatment of Paul. It also includes confusion as to why he should be tried and what charges should count against him (Acts 22:22-30; 25:1-27; 26:30-32). If persecutions were widespread and orchestrated then, this confusion would make little sense. Paul and Peter were sometimes persecuted by individuals from Jewish groups, but Acts does not depict the persecution of all Christians by either the Roman authorities or any Jewish group.

1st Thessalonians 1:6 speaks of the “severe affliction” (θλίψει πολλῇ) of Christians in Thessalonica. 2nd Thessalonians 1:4 speaks of “persecutions” (διωγμοῖς) endured by the church. However, the instigators of such persecutions are not clear. Since they serve as a model to surrounding regions due to their faith despite severe affliction, this suggests that such severe affliction had not yet spread to surrounding regions (1 Thess 1:7-9).<sup>9</sup> Revelation 2–3 suggests that persecution had arisen in some cities in Asia Minor by the end of the 1st century and may suggest a more widespread persecution of Christians.<sup>10</sup> However, none of the biblical data presents a widespread, orchestrated persecution of all Christians either by Roman authorities or from any Jewish groups in the 1st century.

Outside of the New Testament, Roman records show that Christians were targeted in the aftermath of the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64.<sup>11</sup> This regional persecution does not appear to have had widespread influence across the

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8 The reference to “Chrestus” in Suetonius, *Divus Claudius*, 25 may refer to Christ and Jewish disputes over Christian belief.

9 For a similar take from a historian’s perspective, see W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock), 151-55. Fee suggests that the persecution arose from their conversion and not from the state and thus would have been regionally contained. Gordon D. Fee. *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 7-8, 11, 31.

10 This article assumes a date for Revelation in the late-1st century. See Robert L. Thomas. *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 23; Robert H. Mounce. *The Book of Revelation*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997) 20-21; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 4-27.

11 Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44. A similar statement appears in Suetonius, *Caesars: Nero*, 16.

empire. The Trajan-Pliny correspondence from the early-2nd century gives evidence of regional persecution of Christians, but this persecution arises from misunderstandings of Christian beliefs and practices.<sup>12</sup> The seeming ignorance of Christianity and how to deal with Christians suggests that organized persecution had not become normative across the Roman Empire at this time. The correspondence notes that elsewhere in the Empire, Roman authorities had struggled to know how they should handle Christian refusal to worship Roman gods, but it says little more. However, the lack of references to Christians in the voluminous Roman writings from this period argues against widespread, orchestrated persecution.

Both the biblical and extrabiblical data suggest that a typical 1st century church did not face constant threats of persecution—except for specific churches in specific places at specific times. When one considers that “cultural Christians were the norm rather than the exception in the early church,” it suggests widespread persecution was less likely.<sup>13</sup> This means that any assumption that house churches remained small due to threat of persecution in the 1st and early 2nd centuries should be reconsidered.

Other evidence suggests that Christian gatherings, even large Christian gatherings, would not have been abnormal in the Greco-Roman world. In a well-researched book on 1st century associations, Philip Harland states, “reviewing the evidence of association life from an ancient city like Smyrna, one immediately notices gatherings among goldsmiths, porters, hymn singers; devotees of Dionysos, of Demeter, of Caesar, and of Christ; Judeans; and others.”<sup>14</sup> In this context, the New Testament terminology for “church” or “assembly” (ἐκκλησία), “synagogue” or “gathering” (συναγωγή), and “fellowship” or “participation” (κοινωνία) would have been common language in these voluntary associations. Harland continues,

“Christian assemblies and Jewish synagogues were by no means alone as unofficial gatherings within this cultural

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12 Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 10.

13 Nadya Williams. *Cultural Christians in the Early Church: A Historical and Practical Introduction to Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 16. These cultural Christians found Christianity appealing, because it “created identity without demanding excessive personal commitment.” Ibid., 25.

14 Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 25.

landscape. Their Greek and Roman neighbors likewise joined together in informal groups, guilds, or ‘associations’ (koina, synodoi, thiasoi, mystai, phratores, synergasiai, collegia) under the patronage of deities like Zeus, Dyonyos, and Demeter. Associations gathered regularly to socialize, share communal meals, and honor both their earthly and their divine benefactors. In fact, cities like Ephesus were saturated with such groups.”<sup>15</sup>

This evidence suggests church gatherings would not have prompted a negative response from Greco-Roman authorities simply due to their existence. Religious groups and gatherings were common. This included gatherings centered on worshipping regional deities and other religious practices not endorsed by the state. Thus, claims that the early churches remained small for fear of persecution are exaggerated. Furthermore, it’s unclear from the context of the texts that discuss regional persecutions that this necessitated meeting in small houses. The next section of this article will discuss the biblical depiction of house churches and what archaeology can tell us about their size, spatial dimensions, and capacity.

## House Churches in the Bible

The early Christian movement preached and taught “in the temple and from house to house” (Acts 5:42; 20:20). They also worshipped together at the temple, but broke bread in their homes (Acts 2:42). In his attempts to destroy God’s church (Gal 1:13), Paul searched throughout “the houses” (Acts 9:3). The disciples gathered in houses for worship and prayer (Acts 12:12). And, the New Testament epistles speak of churches meeting in houses (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:5; Phlm 2; and 2 John 10). How should we envision these gatherings and the physical space that they occupied?

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<sup>15</sup> Harland, 2.

## House Church Practice, Décor, and Size

Christians continued to worship in the temple and synagogues throughout the earliest centuries of the church (Acts 5:42, 9:20, 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10; 18:4 et al.). Christians saw themselves as incorporated into God's people (Eph 2:12-17; Rom 11:13-24, et al.). Peter, for example, refers to himself as a "fellow Israelite" when addressing a Judean crowd in Acts 3 and argues that Jesus and his church continue the biblical story (Acts 3:18-20).<sup>16</sup> Paul uses similar language in his sermons (Acts 16:16, 23). Since the earliest Christians continued to worship with Jews in synagogues and saw themselves as incorporated into God's people, the received worship forms of the Jews in the synagogues influenced the structures, practices, and worship of early Christians.<sup>17</sup> Synagogues had structured leadership (Mark 5:22; Acts 13:15, 18:8, 17). Synagogue worship included Scripture reading (Acts 13:15, 15:21; 17:2, 17, et al.) and preaching (Matt 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:44; Acts 18:26, 19:8).<sup>18</sup> We see each of these incorporated into early church practice that included both Jews and Gentiles (1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Tim 4:13; Rom 15:4; Col 3:15-16; 2 Tim 4:2).

Jewish synagogues across the Greco-Roman world used objects with religious artwork that depicted stories from the Scriptures. Artwork in Greco-Roman synagogues from the period of the New Testament can be found across Greece, Asia Minor, Syria, and North Africa.<sup>19</sup> Religious wall paintings and domestic worship were common in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>20</sup> Evidence from

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16 Israel as a nation, region, or people did not exist at the time of Peter's sermon. The use of the term Israelite in the second temple period often had eschatological implications for a reunited people of God. See Jason A. Staples, *The Idea of "Israel" in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Jewish Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

17 This article does not assume that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians kept the same practices or always chose to worship in the same way. It only assumes that synagogue practice shaped early Christian practice—even among Gentiles.

18 Gehring suggests an organized but less clear depiction of early church gatherings. Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 27. The patterns of synagogue worship and the Greco-Roman social norms of similar religious gatherings, when combined with the biblical depictions of early gatherings, suffice to show that early church groups had structure and organization. The extent of such structure and organization remains open for further discussion.

19 Edwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, Vol II: The Archaeological Evidence from the Diaspora. Bollingen Series XXXVII (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1953), 70-100.

20 See Timothy E. Gregory, ed., *The Corinthia in the Roman Period: Including the Papers given at a Symposium Held at The Ohio State University on 7-9 March, 1991*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* Supplementary Series 8 (Ann Arbor, MI). Also, see Daniel N. Schowalter, ed., *Religion in Ephesos*

Christian worship spaces in the mid-2nd and early-3rd centuries includes significant amounts of Christian artwork.<sup>21</sup> Despite the threat of persecution in the latter 2nd and 3rd centuries for being identified as a Christian, believers continued to mark their meeting spaces with Christian symbolism and artwork.<sup>22</sup> Since persecution increased during these centuries and artwork persisted, in an earlier period where religious artwork was accepted and persecution did not rise to these later levels, one could assume that Christians also used religious artwork in their worship spaces.<sup>23</sup>

How large were the homes where Christians met? Many common people in Greco-Roman cities lived in apartments or above their workplaces in the markets. These smaller homes could not accommodate more than 10-15 people.<sup>24</sup> But, should we assume that Christians only gathered in smaller homes? In his account of the archaeology of Ephesus, Jerome Murphy O'Connor suggests that these smaller homes could have accommodated small groups, but the larger church would gather in larger homes or other gathering spaces. This distinction may be evident in the use of the phrase "entirety of the church" (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας) in Romans 16:23.<sup>25</sup> Such a phrase would distinguish the larger gathering from smaller groups that met in apartments.<sup>26</sup>

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*Reconsidered: Archaeology of Spaces, Structures, and Objects*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. 177 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2020).

- 21 Consider the artwork of the Roman Catacombs, which became worship spaces following organized persecutions in the late-2nd century. The Duro-Europos house church also preserves Christian artwork from the early-3rd century. It would be plausible to assume that this artwork was continuous with artwork from earlier churches since this practice was common in the Jewish synagogues from which many early Christians came.
- 22 Even when forced to worship in the catacombs during the persecutions of the 3rd century, Christians continued to decorate their worship spaces with theologically rich and explicit Christian iconography.
- 23 Some evidence of early Christian symbolism, such as the cross and ichthus, remains from the early 2nd century. Furthermore, Christians in the mid 2nd-century were accused as worshippers of the cross. See Tertullian, *Apologia*, xii., xvii. Unfortunately, the small size of the church during the earliest period means that little archaeological evidence remains.
- 24 J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 160.
- 25 Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 41–42, 120–21; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 8-16*. Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 911. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 267.
- 26 Murphy-O'Connor, 196. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Text and Archaeology*, 3rd rev. and expanded ed (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 183.

More moderately sized houses common across the region often sized between 40-75m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>27</sup> Houses this size could still accommodate 30-50 people.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the biblical data suggests that at least some early Christians came from the wealthier classes.<sup>29</sup> In Ephesus, this segment of society's homes ranged from about 350m<sup>2</sup> to 650m<sup>2</sup>. Such homes often had sizable courtyards and a second floor.<sup>30</sup> Such homes could easily accommodate dinner parties for hundreds of people. Those who could not fit in the triclinium overflowing into the atrium.<sup>31</sup> The most extravagant homes were as large as 1800m<sup>2</sup>. Such homes had lavish gardens that could accommodate thousands of people if needed.<sup>32</sup> It is possible that the wealthier Christian homes could have welcomed hundreds of individuals.

Larger spaces could have accommodated the "entirety of the church" (Rom 16:23). The Jerusalem church had thousands of members after Pentecost, yet Acts 2:44 says that all the believers were together (ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ). Acts 5:12 notes that they all gathered at Solomon's Portico. Josephus describes this venue as having four sides each around 600 feet.<sup>33</sup> Such a venue could easily accommodate tens of thousands of people.<sup>34</sup>

This data sufficiently shows that an assumption that house churches remained small due to size constraints does not match the archaeological and biblical data. As a result, missiologists should have a broader perspective on the sizes of early Christian house and non-house churches.

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27 Ibid., 183. O'Connor suggests that the average house was 41.25m<sup>2</sup> in Corinth, 42m<sup>2</sup> in Pompeii, and 74m<sup>2</sup> in Ephesus.

28 Ibid., 182.

29 Gaius, Phoebe, and Lydia, for instance.

30 Murphy-O'Connor, *Ephesus*, 192-94.

31 Ibid.

32 Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, ed. Don S. Browning and Ian S. Evison, *The Family, Religion, and Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 201-203.

33 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.11.3. Josephus describes it as a furlong on each side. A furlong was approximately 607 feet.

34 Consider that an NFL field is approximately 57,600ft<sup>2</sup>, whereas Solomon's Portico would have been around 360,000ft<sup>2</sup>.

## Conclusion

There is a lack of evidence that persecution necessitated house churches to remain small in either the biblical or extrabiblical data for the 1st to mid-2nd centuries. Nor does the data show that churches remained small due to size constraints in Greco-Roman homes. Instead, the data shows that both small and larger gatherings occurred and that the social and spatial environments of 1st and 2nd century Greco-Roman society allowed for them to meet.

The research in this article does not suggest that Christians should not meet in small groups, or that house churches of 10-15 are not an appropriate model.<sup>35</sup> In certain contexts, both with and without persecution, house churches may provide the most strategic model for church planting. Nevertheless, there are certain contexts where house churches will be less strategic. The research in this article suggests that a variety of church models—even a variety of house church models—were used in the earliest church. Thus, there was no biblically mandated size or location for church planting, but gatherings in different places and different sized groups, who gathered around biblically mandated practices. As missiologists in the 21st century, we should not feel constrained by platitudes such as *smaller is better*, even if the proponents of such platitudes claim early church support.<sup>36</sup> Christians in certain contexts may find traditional city center churches more strategic, whereas storefront churches may be more strategic in another context, and gathering in homes in yet another context. In some contexts, missiologists may find gatherings of five people more strategic, or they may find gatherings of five hundred more strategic in other contexts. Considering the earliest church, missiologists can consider multiple models and plant churches in the model appropriate to their context.

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Jonathan McGrath has a PhD in Old Testament Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. He is passionate about seeing God's word accurately read,

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35 Roger Gehring suggests a functional value of house churches to allow "Christians [to] go beyond the superficial, cultivate deeper personal relationships, and support one another in a very concrete way, even in material matters." Gehring, *House Church and Mission*, 93. Functional, relational, pragmatic, and contextual values may necessitate different models in different settings. However, these do not justify the stronger claims of others that small house churches are the biblical model.

36 Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 25.

interpreted, and taught among God's people for the sake of the nations. He has served with the IMB for thirteen years in East and Southeast Asia.



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# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

# Struck Down but Not Destroyed

## Lessons of Missionary Resilience

Karen Pearce

The dictionary defines resilience as “the power or ability of a material to return to its original form after being bent, compressed, or stretched”<sup>1</sup>—an enviable description for anyone who sets out on a life-long mission. However, in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul describes Christians as clay pots, humble vessels that display God’s power and not their own. Paul’s words describe the kind of paradoxical resilience that keeps missionaries moving forward: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor 4:8-9).”

Christian resilience is more than just bouncing back after a hard hit. It is the transformation of one’s character into something even better than he started with, precisely through those hard hits. It is the broken pieces of the clay pot, re-formed and held together by Christ Himself. Through the cracks, between pieces, the light of Christ shines through. God is intentional in making his

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1 Collins English Dictionary – complete and unabridged, 2012 digital edition. William Collins Sons & Co. LTD, 1979, 1986. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/resilience>

people this way: “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us...so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4: 7, 11b).”

Missionaries understand this well. Leaving extended family, learning a new language and culture, engaging in the missionary task, and being on the frontlines of spiritual warfare make virtually every missionary feel (and momentarily respond) like a fragile clay pot. They are stretched and shattered. They face their own weakness and cry out for God’s help, wrestling with the oft-present temptation to give up and go home.

The hardships missionaries suffer are often the same as those of Christians anywhere: cancer, loss of loved ones, church splits, leadership conflict, infertility, parenting crises, etc. However, sometimes their circumstances are extraordinary—like deportation, war, revolution, and terrorist attacks.

I talked to a few of our IMB missionaries who have weathered the hardships and asked them how they would describe themselves. They used words like persevering, stubborn, and tenacious. They also used words like unashamed, changed, and comfortable in his arms, testifying to the fact that the trials they have endured pale in comparison to the glory of knowing Christ.

They share about their most difficult times—how they made it through with their faith intact, what they learned about God, how they would encourage other younger missionaries, and what kept them in place serving and giving God the glory despite the pain. These missionaries are serving across the globe and range in age from Millennials to Boomers.

Europe: Sam White, Randy and Angela Stoda, Linda Gray, Allison Philips, Kyle and Jackie Kirkpatrick, and Mary Smith

North Africa and the Middle East: Don and Mary Allen\*, Dirk Dubose

Sub-Saharan Africa: Katee Shepherd and Alyssa Peveto

The common thread of God’s goodness and the missionaries’ gratitude runs through each of their different stories.

## **Did calling matter?**

God's call on their lives greatly impacted their resiliency. Regardless of the trial, it was their sense of his call that kept them in place, tethered to their mission and resolute in the face of loss. Surprisingly, it is also his call that caused the greatest confusion and anger as they wrestled with unmet expectations and disappointments.

When asked what advice they would give to new missionaries, their answer was consistently the same. "Be sure of your calling, remind yourself frequently of the calling," said Kyle Kirkpatrick. Jackie added, "If he called you, he also called you to the hard times, and he will provide all you need to stumble forward with your hand in His. You can know that those difficult periods will bring healthy growth and sweet-scented blossoms and abundant fruit, all for the glory of God. This is what He has called you to."

We can confuse the call with a promise of ease or success. Understanding that the call includes hard times is a learning process.

Mary Smith has served overseas for more than 30 years. After 11 years serving in one country, she had to leave because of conflict with ministry partners. The situation left her feeling attacked, falsely accused, and alone. She was hurt and shocked, unable to comprehend why God allowed this. "After all, he called me to follow him," she said. "He called me to serve as His missionary, so why would things go sour?"

Linda Gray is completing 25 years of service, but she wasn't sure what God was doing when 18 months in she was forced home because of a cancer diagnosis. "I was angry at God," she said, "it had taken me so long to get there, why would he send me back home?"

Randy Stoda had similar feelings when he was deported from one country. He was serving on a healthy team, had good national partners, and was seeing fruit in ministry. "I felt that I was in the perfect place," Randy said. They had a very good living situation—a comfortable (by this country's standards) apartment that fit his family's needs perfectly, great IMB colleagues serving beside them, a local partner who was a pastor with a heart for the nations and was a very close friend, and they were just starting to see some traction in ministry. "So, naturally, when that was all taken away, I had some real disappointment—even anger," he said.

God patiently helped all of them as they stumbled forward.

Mary healed over time stateside. God brought her future husband into the picture, answering a long-term prayer request. They were married at the end of her stateside assignment and were re-appointed together 3 ½ years later. “God’s comfort was there in the healing process. To know that He had called me and still had me in mind for future ministry was a blessing,” Mary said.

Linda never got a clear answer to her questions, but she has no doubt that the Lord used her cancer diagnosis and return to the states for treatment to teach her and grow her for the next part of the journey. “I trust the Lord more today than yesterday and I am more committed to his call, to him, and to serve where he has put me for this season,” she said.

The Lord eventually brought Randy to a place of acceptance: “I was able to remember that the Lord didn’t call me to a place, but to Himself, and He didn’t call me for my comfort but for His glory.”

In the paradox of the call, these missionaries faced a myriad of emotions, learned hard lessons, and had their faith stretched as God led them on a journey of following, trusting, and believing.

## **What were some of your biggest spiritual struggles during difficult times and how did you work through it?**

For Angela Stoda, getting kicked out of her country of service not only made her question the “call,” but caused her to question her own salvation. She had grown up in a tough situation and God had been her refuge. “I always felt like God and I were together,” she said. “It wasn’t until this experience in this country that it seemed like we were not on the same page.” She prayed and believed God would prevent her deportation and when he didn’t, Angela was thrown into a crisis of belief: “I realized my will and God’s will were not one and the same. I had never been angry at God before and I knew my heart wasn’t responding the way it should, so I began to question whether I was even a Christian.”

The leadership was helpful in Angela’s working through some of these issues. God brought Angela to a place of honesty before God, realizing she had

allowed her service to God to usurp her devotion and submission to Him. “His ultimate goodness to me was continuing to love me even when I was angry and hurt and his desire for me to continue to grow and walk with him,” she said.

Don and Mary Allen grew up on the mission field and returned as a married couple. They have experienced evacuation, wars, and loss of teammates due to a terrorist attack while serving in North Africa and the Middle East. They quickly learned that God doesn’t always call people to safe places. “There was a place we were called to, and it was going to be risky. We had to settle that before God, not once but in each individual situation,” said Don. “It was not a ‘one and done’ conversation but coming to God again and again when those times arose.”

For Kyle and Jackie Kirkpatrick, the trials have taken many forms, from ministry burnout to a cancer diagnosis. They didn’t question God as much as they did themselves and their own ability to understand and be obedient in the circumstances. “I sometimes felt hurt to be facing these painful situations, but because I know that he is faithful and good, (I knew) that I must not be seeing clearly,” Jackie said. “I believe Lord, help me in my unbelief.”

While leadership helped many work through some of the hardest times, for others the struggle was over leadership decisions with which they didn’t agree. Anyone who spends significant time serving with IMB must get used to change. At pre-field training, new missionaries are told they must not be merely flexible; they must be fluid.

As organizational strategies change or political situations arise in dangerous places, decisions are sometimes made without the missionary’s input. But in each case, faithful ones like Mary Allen take their questions to the Lord. “There were several times when I had to ask God again, ‘Am I still supposed to be here?’ when hard things happened. Some of those hard things were decisions made by leadership that I didn’t agree with. Each time, I felt that God didn’t release me from overseas work. My call to be here with IMB had not changed.”

For Kyle, even when decisions were made that caused him to question, he ultimately trusted that “God will use even what I perceive to be poor decisions for his glory and my growth.”

Mary Smith advises new missionaries to remember that God, not the IMB or its leadership called them to be where they are. Trusting God to work through imperfect leadership stretches a person's faith and is vital to perseverance. "I believe that remembering God's call and staying faithful through changes and difficulties is the key to being resilient," Mary said.

## **How did God bring comfort or insight to you during this time?**

Alyssa Peveto and her husband struggled with infertility for years. After her second miscarriage she was in a pretty low place, but she was learning to trust God: "I can still remember sitting at my kitchen table and hearing God speak so clearly to my heart, 'Do you trust me?' And I did. I still do. So, with every subsequent miscarriage and with every 'No,' from potential adoptive families during our adoption process, my prayer was, 'This hurts, but I trust You.'"

God's personal presence was tangibly felt by many. Katee Shepherd echoed this: "Recognition of my limitations and His presence is always the greatest insight."

Dirk Dubose started as a Journeyman and is now married and has survived being forced out of his original country of service. Even during the most difficult and lonely times, his confidence in God's faithfulness and goodness didn't waver. God keeps him cognizant of the fact that he had been working in Dirk's life through every circumstance in his life. "I like to look back and see how God has put everything together," Dirk said. "I can go back to childhood and see how he orchestrated things in my life. None of it was a mistake. It's all been connected, and we can definitely see that."

Allison Phillips\* lived with her family in a country where they had to have a contingency plan just in case they were forced to leave. They didn't have to act on it until recently, but they had been ready for 20 years. She agreed that God's faithfulness was never in doubt: "There is too much evidence to doubt—all I have to do is ponder what He has provided in the past. It's all about the stories."

Kyle and Jackie Kirkpatrick voiced the overwhelming impact God's Word played in their perseverance. They began memorizing Scripture as they

walked through their battle with cancer. “The Lord is using this to correct my thoughts and misperceptions throughout my day, constantly re-aligning my heart to His,” Jackie said. Kyle added, “The Word is both a correction and a comfort.”

Both Kyle and Jackie also found great comfort through friends and colleagues who stood with them on the hard days. “He has ministered to my heart through the ways he has provided for me when I felt so broken and lost in a fog. He sent many believers to encourage me as they sent notes and verses and songs,” Jackie said.

Randy and Angela Stoda also found great comfort in other believers. “Find and treasure those relationships you have with life-giving people, and don’t be afraid to lean on them when you face difficult times—which you will,” Randy said.

Mary Allen not only appreciates her Christian friends but knows that she needs them: “I am reminded of how weak we are, how much we need community and how much we need prayer. I am also grateful for how well IMB takes care of us when there are security issues, evacuations, and major medical problems. They are amazing with resources.”

## **What is the biggest take-away from your hardest moments?**

Jackie Kirkpatrick voiced that she’s still taking away truth and grace as she walks forward in her journey, but one of her biggest to date is from Matthew 13, the parable of the sower. The plant perished under trouble because it “had no root” (Matthew 13:6). “We must also have a root drinking deeply and regularly from the fountain of the Word. By having difficulties and drinking in Truth, we grow healthy and strong.”

Sam White learned to trust God more and not try to make sense of everything: “Instead of asking ‘why did this happen?’ I’ve tried to treat hard, difficult situations as opportunities to trust Him and His Word.”

Mary Smith echoes this and adds, “Don’t ask ‘why did this happen?’ but ask ‘for what purpose did God allow this?’ The first question leaves you angry, unfulfilled, and doubtful. The second one opens up the chance to see what’s possible.”



For Alyssa Peveto, the purpose showed itself quickly. Her infertility struggles became a bridge for the gospel to African women who are shamed if they don't produce a child in the first year of marriage. "I even told God once, 'if I have to go through a hundred more of these same hurts, it'll be worth it If I can just minister to even one woman like me,'" Alyssa said.

Randy Stoda also commented that his trials made him more patient with others who are struggling. He also learned that his work, and even his life, is transitory.

Don Allen came to an understanding that as big as each trial was to them personally, God has a much bigger plan and "we are but one part of that story."

Allison Philips saw, too, that "life is short. The next life is eternal. Eternity is what matters."

Linda Gray came away knowing that she can trust God's ways: "Even if I do not 'like' the choices he has given me, they are always the best for me, for others, and for His glory."

Angela Stoda summed it up well: "I think I have a greater sense of who God is and His loving care for us."

Their words give testimony to the truth in Romans—we can rejoice when trials come because God is doing something good.

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5 NIV).

\*Names have been changed for security reasons

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# RESOURCE REVIEWS

## Podcast Review. *Resiliency*

Findley, S. (Host). West, S. (Host). (2019-2022). *Resiliency*. [Audio Podcast]. Antioch Resiliency. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/resiliency/id1478351346>

**Reviewed by Melanie Smith, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim.**

*Resiliency* is a Christian podcast hosted by Steve Findley and Silas West of Antioch Ministries International in Waco, Texas.<sup>1</sup> Steve and Silas are compassionate believers who are strong advocates for member care. They invite field workers and other supporting Christian experts on their podcast to encourage field workers as they discuss a myriad of topics such as marriage and parenting, health and wellness, community building, education, and maintaining relationships in their home countries.



The greatest asset of this podcast is the strong theological foundation from which each guest speaks. Each guest shares his or her personal experience grounded in a Christ-centered worldview which gives way to joyful encouragement to those who listen. The range of topics would aid all demographics of missionaries, as the podcast features married couples, young single women, empty nesters, and widowers. It is disappointing that this was a limited

podcast run that ended in 2022 because there are so many more topics and interviews that could be helpful to new and seasoned field workers alike.

I found several episodes to be particularly helpful to me. As a parent of two third culture kids (TCKs), I was grateful for episode 47 called “Is My Kid Going to be Okay?”<sup>1</sup> Along with wearing many other hats, Melissa Shipman is a TCK education consultant who supports families navigating education opportunities and challenges on the field. She offers advice for families seeking different education avenues such as utilizing pre-field planning and giving grace to both parents and children in the education process. Likewise, “Grace for Today,” episode 64, documented an interview with Daniel and Melissa about parenting overseas. They shared about how their simplistic living impacts their kids’ lives, fostering flexibility and contentment in them.

“Run for Your Life: The Benefits of Exercise to Increase Resiliency” was episode 5 featuring Rachel Keener, who works for a university counseling center. Rachel’s research in resiliency proves the power of regular exercise, and she specifically sees the correlation of regular exercise when living in a foreign culture. She gives scientific evidence of exercise helping our brains and bodies with high-stress situations, language learning, and building community.

In episode 56 entitled “Keys to Long Haul Living,” Dr. Burritt Hess talks about establishing healthy patterns around spiritual, physical, and family wellness on the field. These include taking regular spiritual retreats and meeting regularly with a trusted spiritual advisor as well as the value of maintaining physical health through our eating habits and exercise. These disciplines and others can align us when we feel like we’re misaligned and encourage us to continue in our host culture. Dr. Hess also shared from his challenges of focusing too much on work and neglecting personal or family care. He suggested finding activities that rehumanize us and having periodic family conversations to intentionally discuss any negative patterns that may need to be changed.

Episode 61, “Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You,” and episode 57 entitled, “From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” both gave me real-life examples of ways to interact with my host culture while strengthening my own spiritual disciplines and growing in my relationship with the Lord. The guest

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1 This is not a Southern Baptist missions organization. For a complete understanding of Antioch International’s beliefs, see <https://antiochwaco.com>.

of episode 57, Rachel Dyachenko, serves in Moldova. She recounts her early years on the field when she would overcommit herself in ministry and then experience burn out. Rachel had to learn not to overcommit, to value her *yes* and *no*, while also giving herself grace to see areas of growth.

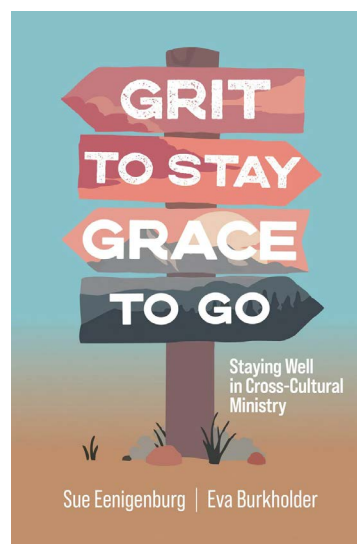
I would recommend *Resiliency* to any Christian field worker seeking encouragement or to gain another's point of view. The guests spoke from their own knowledge and experience while maintaining the Gospel at the forefront of their interviews. I was personally challenged by each of the guest interviews and believe this resource will be a helpful tool for field workers maintaining or restoring resiliency on the field.

## Book Review. *Grit to Stay Grace to Go: Staying Well in Cross-Cultural Ministry.*

Eenigenburg, Sue & Burkholder, Eva. *Grit to Stay Grace to Go: Staying Well in Cross-Cultural Ministry*. Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2023.

Reviewed by Josh Smith, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim.

At some point in their ministry, missionaries will encounter the question of whether to stay or to go. *Grit to Stay Grace to Go* is a workbook written to assist missionaries with working through the difficulties that accompany either scenario. Sue Eenigenburg and Eva Burkholder together have over 70 years of ministry experience, most of those years being cross-cultural. Eenigenburg has degrees from Moody Bible Institute and Lancaster Bible College. Burkholder is a graduate of Baylor University and holds a Master of Christian Education from Columbia International University.



The workbook is broken down into three sections. The first, written largely by Eenigenburg, primarily focuses on not leaving the field too early and hav-

ing the *grit* to stay through difficult times. In Part II, Burkholder addresses the ones who stay behind when a teammate leaves. In Part III, both authors attempt to assist those who are in the process of choosing to stay or go.

The strength of this workbook lies in the wealth of experience of its authors. If you can imagine a scenario or challenge from the field, one or both have likely been through it. Pulling from the authors' personal experiences as well as input from other cross-cultural workers, each chapter offers tangible and practical applications for a broad spectrum of challenges. At the end of each chapter, there are sections for reflection, response, and prayer. These sections provide an opportunity for the reader to process the information in a meaningful and intentional manner.

The combination of the authors' wealth of knowledge is a strength of this book, but it also seems to be the cause of one of the weaker aspects of the book. For example, one of the strengths of Part II is its Reflection section, which provided a variety of scripture passages for the reader to reflect on. Unfortunately, this beneficial aspect was only featured in Part II. Both Part I and Part III provide helpful questions in the Reflection section, but they would have benefitted more by providing the reader with additional passages as a foundation for personal reflection.

As a cross-cultural worker, I believe that all of us would benefit from reading the subject matter covered in this workbook. When we arrive on the field, most long-term missionaries expect to be in our place of service for the long haul. However, it does not always work out that way. We often arrive thinking our team will be together for a long period of time. In my experience, this is rare. Learning how to stay behind well when our teammates leave, learning how to leave a team well, and learning how to send our teammates off well seem to be topics that are given less attention in missions preparation. My family and I have been on the field for only five years, and we have already experienced leaving a country. We have also been the ones who stayed behind as teammates were forced to leave. I have seen colleagues leave their teams well, and I have seen colleagues leave their teams in ways that could have benefitted from the material in this book.

This book will not necessarily provide an answer to your situation, but it does not intend to. *Grit to Stay Grace to Go* supplies the reader with examples, ideas, methods, and resources to approach difficult situations in a way that is God-honoring. Using a biblical foundation, this workbook provides nu-

anced, practical steps and beneficial points of reflection while allowing each reader to process a given scenario in his or her own way. Every cross-cultural worker will, at some point, need to process staying or leaving, going or being left behind. *Grit to Stay Grace to Go* is a book that can help one process the challenges and difficult emotions that accompany those scenarios.

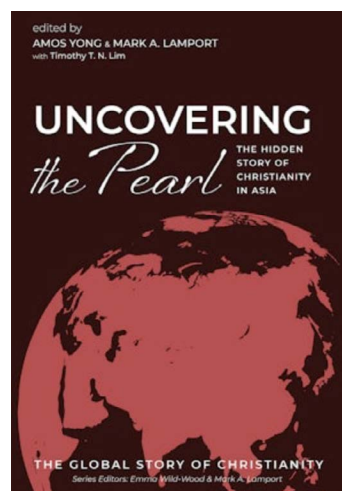


## Book Review. *Uncovering the Pearl: The Hidden Story of Christianity in Asia.*

Yong, Amos and Mark A. Lamport. *Uncovering the Pearl: The Hidden Story of Christianity in Asia*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2023.

Reviewed by Bo Parker, IMB Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

Historical documents and treatises are never written in a vacuum. As much as an author might try, bias will seep through the ink of the author's pen. It is essential in the scope of Christian history that we look at the thread of Christian expansion, in this case the Asian context, through multiple lenses to get a full-er picture of all actors and events involved. Agreement or disagreement with the perspective and interpretation is valid; however, it is necessary to filter this type of historical interpretation through the lens of Scripture and not personal preference—thus, the daunting project undertaken by the editors of *Uncovering the Pearl: The Hidden Story of Christianity in Asia*, Amos Yong and Mark Lamport. The purpose for this endeavor is to unite collaborators from various backgrounds to provide a broad and comprehensive overview of Asian Christianity while also addressing



contemporary issues facing the Christian community in Asia. This work is a part of a series entitled *The Global Story of Christianity*.

This work provides brief and general histories of the movement of Christianity in each region or “neighborhood” of Asia while addressing the context and interaction with existing faiths, religions, and ideologies, and it finally tackles various global issues for which the Church plays a role in answering. The book is divided into three primary sections: The Story of Christianity Narrated in Historical Context, The Story of Christianity Adapts to the Asian Context, and The Story of Christianity Encounters Twenty-First-Century Asian Issues. The first section provides a broader chronological survey of Christianity and the spread of Christianity throughout Asia. The historical discourse is broken up into three eras of time: 0-1500 AD, 1500-1800 AD, and 1800-Present. The historical narratives of these eras deal with the intersection of Christianity with existing faiths or beliefs and provide the context in which Christianity was introduced. In the second section, each chapter covers a different region of Asia in which the authors dive into the realities and challenges of Christianity. Within these discussions, the writers address issues related to ecumenism, practical theology, revivals, rise of education and health care, struggle against cultural immorality, and nationalism. The third section addresses contemporary issues that Christianity has faced in the Asian context. Each chapter, written by different authors, tackles issues of interfaith relationships, totalitarian governments, Asian diaspora, marginalized peoples, and the impact of Asian Christianity in a global context. *Uncovering the Pearl* does not provide a final concluding chapter. However, it concludes with a timeline of significant historical events in the Asian World that highlight events both related to and not related to Christianity.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

A work of this magnitude was no small feat. Other Asian historical works exist, but it is virtually impossible to cover every detail or issue in one volume. *Uncovering the Pearl* reaches its intended purpose of providing a handle on the broad scope and influence of Christianity in the Asian context. The contributors maintain a sensitivity to indigenous expressions and perspectives throughout this volume. Yong and Lamport’s selection of authors from varying backgrounds within the Asian context also provides a balance and perspective that is Asian in nature, although written in English. Clear section

and chapter titles make it easy to navigate and see the intended direction of the book. A key strength of this work is its effort to help the reader to have a shift in perspective from a Western point of view to an Eastern point of view as it relates to Christianity and the influence of Christianity in Asia.

This work also has weaknesses, including its ecumenical nature that in turn fails to create a distinction between Catholic Christianity and Protestant Christianity. A strong opinion on the negative impact of colonialism also tends to overlook those who, within that context, tried to distance themselves from colonial endeavors. Some authors understand their subject scope better than others in this book. At times the criticisms of Christian missionaries overlook the impact of the context and time on their methods. A few contributors also diminish the exclusive nature of the gospel in favor of interreligious harmony. Certain authors propose a greater emphasis on social ministry void of gospel proclamation as the necessary course of action as Christians. An overall lack of gospel perspective or response in correlation with the history and issues is a primary weakness of this book.

## **Significance as a Resource for Global Christianity**

Overall, I find that this is a helpful resource for an understanding of Asian Christian context both from a church history perspective and missiological perspective. Though not perfect, *Uncovering the Pearl* is a needed resource that helps to fill a large void in recording the Asian church context and role in the expansion of Christianity.

## **Related Reading**

Other works that cover the genre of Christianity in Asia include: *A Brief History of Christianity in Asia* by R. Lamon Brown and Michael D. Crane, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume I&II* by Samuel Hugh Moffett, and *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia* edited by Felix Wilfred.

