

Missions

PERU

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One Mission**

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Report**



THINKING IT THROUGH

BY PHIL BARNES

Sons and Heirs of God

Do you remember the last time you used the word “primogeniture” in casual conversation? Likely not. But if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, primogeniture describes one of the most significant truths about who you really are.

In most civilizations throughout history, the firstborn son inherited all of the father’s wealth and rank—primogeniture. About 4,000 year ago, Esau, the rightful heir of his father’s estate, sold that birthright to his kid brother for a bowl of stew. Jane Austen made a career out of primogeniture: first with *Sense and Sensibility* and the three Dashwood sisters who were left penniless when their nasty older brother inherited the lot and threw them out. *Pride and Prejudice* followed, with the Bennets having five daughters and no sons and their entire estate therefore being entailed away to a distant cousin, Mr. Collins. And we mustn’t forget the more recent and wildly popular *Downton Abbey* in which the earl of Grantham has but three daughters, and the sinking of the *Titanic* takes his cousins who were the next two in line. Enter the distant and unknown cousin, Matthew Crawley. As you see, primogeniture makes for great drama.

It’s in this kind of primogeniture context that the Lord explains what it means for us to have been made His son and heir. Paul tells the Galatians, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26) Some versions try to be gender neutral by using the word “children,” which in many contexts is fine, but not here. This has nothing to do with our gender—just as the church’s title as “bride of Christ” doesn’t apply only to females. Even though I am a man, I am thrilled to be part of the bride of Christ, and sisters can be thrilled to hold the position of “son and heir.” We must not let current gender wars spoil the incredible positions the Lord has conferred upon believers. Being installed as son and heir, of course, is what Galatians 3:28 is all about: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in

Christ Jesus.” In the context, Greeks don’t inherit, slaves certainly don’t inherit, and women never could inherit. But in Christ, the position of “firstborn heir” is open to all. By faith alone, we are immersed into Christ (Galatians 3:27) and so share fully in His position as son and heir (Galatians 3:29). I told you there’s great drama to be found in primogeniture!

The amazing truth that must sink deeply into our hearts and minds is that this is the highest position and privilege in the universe for all eternity. That’s who we really are in Christ. My generation was the first to have the time and affluence to go backpacking for a year to “find ourselves.” Since then, the discovery and expression of “who I really am” has gathered momentum to today where self-identity is sovereign. If a person declares that they identify themselves in a certain way, then that trumps everything—including Scripture and common sense.

Believers don’t discover who we really are by backpacking through Europe but in Scripture. Our identity is cemented for eternity as a son and heir of God. Scripture refers to the expression of that identity as “putting on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)

Believers don’t need to play the lottery because they have already won it. All real, eternal things are ours already and forever. We don’t need to look for power, prestige, and position in this world, because we already hold the highest position possible and will reign with Christ. Our identity shouldn’t be wrapped up in our position as an elder, Sunday school teacher, or missionary but as a son and heir of God; and we must view each other as that as well.

The main reason we struggle to understand this is that it is just too wonderful to take in. It’s like a beggar on the street being given \$100 million, which, of course, is all going to burn anyway. In the estate over which we are firstborn sons and heirs, gold, silver, and precious gems are just building materials. Primogeniture—great drama indeed! ■

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COVER PHOTO: Nathan Bramsen—Hualaga River in Peru





FROM KILKENNY TO WATERFORD GOING WHERE GOD LEADS

BY DAVID WILSON

"A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." (Proverbs 16:9) In the book of Acts, we can see this interplay in action with the apostles planning their ways and the Lord directing their steps (see Acts 15:34–16:10). Many Christians struggle with knowing God's plan for their lives, and missionaries are no different.

However, as we look back, my wife, Beth, and I can see that the Lord has been leading us and preparing us in our service for Him. Usually, this has begun with a burden for a particular need, followed by a realization of our inability to meet that need, and then seeing God's provision of others to share in that ministry.

A TIME TO MOVE

We initially came to Kilkenny, Ireland, in February 1998 with the desire to help in teaching and building up the local assembly. Before we moved to Kilkenny, I preached maybe four or five times a year, taught high school Sunday school, and worked with the youth group. Suddenly, upon moving to Kilkenny, I began preaching more than 70 times a year and leading one or two evangelistic Bible studies every week! The local believers were active in sharing their faith, and I learned much from them about proclaiming the Gospel effectively in this culture. The learning curve was steep, but I was thrilled to be able to

give my time to studying, teaching, and preaching God's Word. As we saw the work progressing and local brethren taking on more responsibility, we felt it was important to move on and allow the work to develop autonomously.

We believed there was a need for an assembly in Waterford, and by the grace of God, He raised up others to come alongside and join in the outreach there. After several years, a little assembly was formed, and together we broke bread for the first time in February 2006. The intervening years have held times of great joy and great heartache. The enemy of our souls has been active, seeking to destroy this testimony, but by the grace of God, the work continues. Souls have been saved, and believers are being built up.

From the beginning of the work in Waterford, our goal was always to share the Gospel with the entire town through literature outreach. With Waterford's population of about 45,000 people, we felt this was an achievable goal. So our goal was that, at least twice a year, every home would receive gospel literature—a calendar in the winter and a magazine in the summer. For six years, we also had the privilege of writing articles for the local newspaper that is delivered free to homes every week. In recent years, we have also run in the spring a series of evangelistic Bible studies that we have advertised through the newspaper and invitations delivered door-to-door.

From left: The Waterford Clock Tower is a landmark dear to the local people; During Waterford Walls, an annual festival, many of the city's buildings are decorated with street art; The assembly's leased building offers it spatial and scheduling freedom; One method of literature distribution that the Wilsons use is "letter-boxing"; The summer leaders gear up for children's club.



A TIME TO SOW

In these efforts, I was often sustained by remembering some of the parables of the Lord Jesus. In Scripture, He teaches us to anticipate the mystery of God's workings in agricultural terms. In the parable of the sower, Jesus describes four types of ground but only one with soil that is fruitful (Mark 4:1–9). We learn that, after the farmer sows the seeds and goes to bed, the good seed sprouts and grows while he sleeps (Mark 4:26–29). A brother once pointed out that a farmer never digs up the seed to see if it is growing after he has planted it. Likewise, we should be content to sow the seed, water it with our prayers, and trust God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). So we continued to sow the seed broadly in Waterford, not knowing when it would land on good soil. We did what we could and trusted God to do what only He can do. Little by little, God has given the increase.

Some of this increase has been through believers who moved to Waterford and some who came to us from other local churches and others who are new Christians. Our goal is not to draw believers away from other churches, yet we minister to anyone the Lord brings to us. We have prioritized consecutive, expository Bible preaching with Sunday morning ministry focused primarily on the New Testament and our midweek studies primarily on the Old Testament. In May 2012, we finished Revelation and started again in Romans and have currently preached through as far as 1 Peter. I recently heard it said that we should never overestimate what one sermon can accomplish but never underestimate what five years of faithful preaching can accomplish. So we continue to teach and preach God's Word.

A TIME OF ENCOURAGEMENT

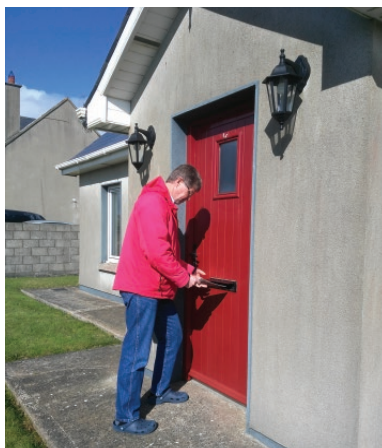
In 2014, I received an invitation to speak at a workers' conference in Ontario the following year. The invitation came at a difficult time when I was feeling particularly discouraged. I had liberty with regard to my topic, so I decided to speak about something I knew: dealing with discouragement in ministry. However, when we returned from that trip to North America, we began to experience one of our most encouraging times of ministry in Waterford.

Two men turned up at our midweek Bible study in July 2015. It was fascinating to watch God at work in their lives. The one man came with an open mind and a desire to find answers to his questions. The other man was resisting God's work in his life. By September, the first man was saved, baptized, and received into fellowship. The other man continued to "kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). There were times when we saw him close the Bible, wriggling in his seat, and literally breaking out in a sweat. He came for a while, then left, and then came back again.

By summer 2017, the man had stopped coming, but God wasn't finished with him yet. His 21-year-old son was hooked on drinking and drugs and on a road to destruction. One night, the son was "off his head" on drugs, and the police took him to the hospital. In his drug-induced state he started to see demons coming for him and called out to the Lord. In His mercy, the Lord saved him. Over the next six months, I met with this young man twice a week for Bible study and discipleship, but I realized he needed more help than I could give. We were able to get him into a Christian drug-rehab program, and he has now completed a year there. His father realized that if there was to be lasting change in his son's life, their home needed to change. Out of love for his son, the man gave up fighting against God and surrendered to the Lord. He found a study program on the internet and began studying God's Word on his own every morning at 5:00 a.m. A few months later, father and son were both baptized, and despite ups and downs, they continue to walk with the Lord.

The first man is growing by leaps and bounds. He loves the Word and is constantly reading and meditating on God's Word. He has married a young Christian woman, and together they are serving the Lord and are a source of encouragement to many. His testimony in the community is particularly exciting. He knows a lot of people, and many are taking note of the transformation in his life. They ask what has happened to him, and he joyfully shares the Gospel with them.

In August 2015, we signed a five-year lease on a building for the assembly to meet in, and having our own building has been



a blessing. It has permitted us to have additional times of fellowship and also to schedule meetings whenever we want or need to.

In August 2016, we hosted our first annual Bible conference. Each year's conference has been a time of encouragement for us, with visiting speakers providing helpful ministry and teams assisting us with the children's meetings. We have also been encouraged by other believers from Waterford and around the country who join with us for fellowship.

A TIME OF EXPECTATION

We are thankful for what the Lord has done here in Waterford but believe that He will still do much more. We plan to continue our service for Him here while remaining open to His leading in our lives.

We often prayed that the Lord would again provide coworkers to share the burden of ministry, and in His perfect timing, He sent Brian and Rachael Johnson (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 12) to help take the work in Waterford in new directions. We thank God for this gracious provision.

However, we believe that the future of the Irish church must lie with Irish believers. Our burden is to see the Lord raise up a generation of young men from Waterford with hearts for God's Word and passion to reach not only their own communities but their country. There are several young men attending the assembly from Christian homes, and we would love to encourage and train them. However, we are also praying that the Lord would save three or four local young men from non-Christian homes who could be used of the Lord to reach others—young men who are willing to commit to a year of discipleship and intensive study of God's Word.

Please join with us in thanking the Lord for what He has been doing in Ireland and in praying boldly that He would do something even greater in the days to come. ■



David and Beth Wilson are commended from Fifth Avenue Chapel in Belmar, New Jersey.



From left: A member of eTeams helps the Waterford assembly reach the community; At the Waterford assembly, young students enjoy craft time during Sunday school; The Waterford believers gather together for worship and fellowship on Sunday mornings.

Nine DAYS, Six VILLAGES, One MISSION

Reaching Souls in Peru



BY NATHAN BRAMSEN & MICAH TUTTLE

Over nine days, from the end of January to the beginning of February, my dear brother Micah Tuttle and I, along with a team of eight Peruvians, journeyed into Peru's jungle to build relationships, disciple, hold open-air gospel meetings, and encourage believers. The following journal entries, written by Micah, are overviews of our days. Reading of eating jungle rats, of navigating jungle terrain far from the reaches of cell towers, and of preaching until our bodies want to collapse can muster up imagery that is disconnected from reality, but don't miss the connection. Whether you're reading this from a coffee shop in suburban America or in a candle-lit hut in a village outside Niamey, Niger, the heartbeat is the same. The details differ, but the common denominator is this: souls, souls, souls. Eternity is on the threshold.

For me (Nate), coming from the desert of North Africa, the Peruvian jungle views were mesmerizing. As the Lord blessed me recently with the gift of cancer as a platform for His glory, some discouraged this trip, but the Lord gave clear, sweet confirmation to move ahead in simple obedience. As we launched out toward Achinamisa, our first village, God serenaded us with a glorious rainbow arching over the Huallaga River to remind us of His unfailing promises. Under the banner of that faithfulness, we went. Edith Cherry's words reverberated through my mind: "We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling, and needing more each day Thy grace to know: yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing; we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go."

Top: Using the port at Chazuta, the team launches down the Huallaga River.



▲ The Huallaga River serves as the backdrop to the nine-day trip.



◀ A rainbow greets the team as they prepare to begin their journey.

Knowing how precious each child is, Nate and Micah show them Christ's love. ▶



Day 1: Arriving at Achinamisa

This morning, Nate and I (Micah) headed into the jungle with a team of eight Peruvians accompanying us. As we navigated the muddy waters of the Huallaga River, we cruised through a torrential downpour and then into a furnace of thick humidity. This river cuts through the easternmost finger of the Andes in northern Peru and then flows into the lower Amazon basin. It brings back memories of the numerous river trips I've done here over the past 10 years.

At about 3:00 p.m., we finally arrived in the port of one of my favorite villages, Achinamisa. Immediately, a crowd of excited brothers and sisters greeted us. I really missed these precious souls! We exchanged plenty of joyful backslapping, vigorous handshakes, and bone-crushing hugs. Before we knew it, we were having a children's meeting in the church building and then an open-air meeting in the main square. Today was the first day I interpreted for Nate. It's fun to preach with someone who shares the same passion and urgency. This week is going to be a blast!

Day 2: Setting a plan

Last night, I awoke when a rat ran across my chest. From here on out, I'm setting up my tent! We began the day in prayer, Bible reading, and singing with our team, which I call the "Tremendous 10."

Elizabeth and Nancy are awesome with the kids. Our 20-year-olds—Dino, Eber, Jhon, and Roger—are eager to help. Lucho and Yuri tend to the boat and do all the heavy lifting while Nate and I preach our hearts out three times a day.

Both last night and tonight's open-air meetings were powerful. Listeners left stunned. Today was the first of seven full days of the following schedule: team prayer, breakfast, children's meeting, lunch, children's meeting, dinner, open-air meeting, personal prayer, and sleep.



▲ The team gathers before breakfast each morning for a time of Scripture reading and prayer.

► The "Tremendous 10" join together to preach the Gospel in six villages.



◀ Nate and Micah's vibrant preaching engages children of all ages.

▼ At each village, Nate rounds up the local kids and leads them to the children's meeting.

Day 3: Heading to Yarina

It was great to have the Lord's Supper with the brethren here. No grape juice or wine is available in this village, so we used coconut water. God sees the heart. After the church meeting, we continued with our program and gathered the 60 local kids to do one last children's meeting for Achinamisa. Nate is tremendous with these precious little children. He always seems to have four or five kids hanging on him.

As we slowly motored the boat out of the port, I yelled out a reminder from Revelation 22 to everyone on the riverbank: Jesus is coming quickly. I kept preaching from the boat's prow until we were out of earshot, and then I flung myself into the river—I didn't want to leave this village!

When the boat picked me up, we went on to the thermal springs down the river. Boiling-hot water comes right out of the ground and then splits into two waterfalls. It's a great place to rest, recharge, and refocus!

When we arrived in the next village, Yarina, we immediately rounded up about 70 kids for an unforgettable "horita feliz." Tonight, people crowded around to listen as Nate and I preached. Now both of our heads are throbbing, and my vocal cords are raw, but my heart is bursting with joy.

Day 4: Coming to Leche

At our team devotional this morning, a demon-possessed woman came into the room, fixed her eyes on me, and took from her bag what looked like an animal fetus. She waved it all around my face while murmuring unintelligible things and then left. I reminded myself that God is my rock, my fortress, my shield, and my strong tower. And we prayed!

When the morning rain let up, we said goodbye, jumped into the boat, and headed to the next village, Leche. After installing our camp in the boarded-up second story of a brother's house,



► The team's boat, *El Chasqui del Rey* (Messenger of the King), carries them safely through ever-changing waters.

we invited all the local kids to come out to the children's meeting. Kids come out eagerly in these villages, and we had a great meeting!

After a scrumptious dinner of yucca root and cacao, we did open-air preaching. The adults aren't as eager as the kids. A few people showed up to sit on the benches we put out, and the rest listened from the shadows. Still, we preached with all the urgency we could muster.



► The kids love hanging out with Micah and Nate and jump at the chance to take pictures together.



Day 5: Cruising to Santa Rosillo

Last night, the river rose by 10 feet. Lucho and Yuri had to wade in chest-high water for half of a mile to get to where we tied the boat yesterday. But the more water the better! The tributary we had to take is usually only about knee-deep, but with the extra water, we cruised all the way to Santa Rosillo. What's usually a difficult 10-hour hike became an easy two-hour boat ride.

Upon arrival, our team scattered throughout the village and invited all the kids to our usual meetings. When the kids descended upon the church building, the whole team sprang into action. Nancy and Elizabeth taught the lesson; Lucho led the memory verse; Dino, Eber, Jhon, and Roger directed the small groups; and I interpreted for Nate who gave his usual dynamic message. The kids loved every minute of it!

Day 6: Breaking routine

Today, we ate *powfil* (jungle turkey) for breakfast, *anyuje* (jungle rat) for lunch, and *sajino* (wild boar) for dinner. In addition to our usual schedule, we also did some door-to-door evangelism today. After some good conversations, I wrapped things up by preaching on the town's loudspeaker.



▲ The team's everyday meals include foods from plantains to wild boar to jungle rat.

► The team entertains the local kids with activities like an intense game of tug-of-war.



for a prayer walk with the Lord down my favorite jungle trail. The open-air meeting tonight was especially powerful as Nate preached about trusting God during difficult circumstances. We wrapped up the day with a midnight swim in the river and some stargazing. Spectacular!

Day 7: Pressing on to San Jose

We picked up another team member, brother Milton, from Santa Rosillo. He is coming with us to preach in the last two villages. As our boat left the riverbank, Milton's dog swam behind us. Neither logs nor rocks nor exposed sand bars could stop that dog from following his master. What a spiritual lesson!

The river is low. We couldn't use the boat's motor, so we had to float most of the way, sometimes pushing the boat along with a long stick (*tangana*). We got stuck on sandbars a few times, and several of the guys had to jump out and push the boat.

After arriving in San Jose and greeting our friends, our team held the children's meeting followed by gospel preaching for everyone who would listen. Amazed at how hardhearted people can be, I reminded myself, "You respond, Micah; you respond!"

Day 8: Reaching Huimbayoc

We didn't sleep much because of an all-night, drunken party with pounding music across the street. After stumbling out of our tents and having devotions, we enjoyed a breakfast of mashed plantains, one-inch-thick bacon slices, and corn *chicha* (a traditional beverage). Delicious!

After the children's meeting, we jumped in the boat and motored our way down the Chipurana River and then up a portion of the Huallaga. After about four hours, we arrived in Huimbayoc. Tonight, we preached our last open-air message, and we didn't hold anything back. We finished with our heads pounding, throats aching, chests heaving, and our hearts praying, "Lord, please spark revival in the land!" This doesn't get old!

Although leaving the villages is hard, the team knows God is working in each one. ▶

Two young girls finish up their art project after the children's meeting. ▼

Day 9: Heading home

We woke up with strained vocal cords—a small price to pay if Christ is preached! We said goodbye, and then we began our long boat ride up the river toward civilization. As we cruised along, we ate smoked pork, plantains, and rice.

Sitting in the boat, I reflected on some of the things that God used Nate to teach and reteach me this week. As Christians, we shouldn't waste the difficult circumstances that God puts into our lives; we ought to turn them into opportunities and find joy amid the storm. We also must leave the work in God's hands. He saves souls; we don't. He brings them to maturity; we don't. And, foremost, we should love people. Christianity is not only taught, but it's caught. People see our love or lack of it.



Every evening, Micah and Nate discuss the day's events over cups of coffee. ▶



As each day ended, Micah and I (Nate) would take quick baths in the river or share a cup of Nescafé instant coffee and rehash the day's events, sharing our burden for the precious souls and our own conviction of heart. Rarely did we come to a day's conclusion without splitting headaches from preaching. Still, we were intensely thankful to God for strength to make it through another day of "our own great weakness feeling," in Edith Cherry's words.

But what did I take away from these moments in the Peruvian jungle? First, I witnessed iron truly sharpening iron. These nine days with my brother Micah (and our Peruvian teammates) were a God-send. Sometimes, in our open-air preaching, we would simply embrace mid-message as the Spirit united and ignited our hearts with such longing for others to see His beauty and worthiness. I am thankful for brothers and sisters who push others on toward the goal of the upward call of God through Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12–14).

Second, our experience reminded us to invest in children. How completely obvious it was in all six of the villages we visited why our Lord emphasized having faith like a child. As our boat pulled away from each village, fragments of my heart stayed behind as the little faces watched us disappear. The children's attention, enthusiasm, and response to the Gospel at each children's meeting contrasted with the evening open-air meetings in the plazas and streets. Though many adults listened, few drew close. Most adults cautiously set up benches outside a night club or conveniently lurked in the shadows of their homes. Even as conviction clearly set in and the meetings ended, many would walk away sadly, deeming their lives of sin

more precious than the Savior, like the rich man in Christ's day.

One final lesson that hit home was the reach of sin. The issues we confronted in the local churches, despite being isolated from much of the world in the jungle, were identical to those in North America. In the panorama of issues, each issue tied to rebellion against submission to God's Word and Jesus Christ. We shared many heavy moments as we prayed together and discussed our burden to see the church grow in the Peruvian jungle. I am thankful for Christ's promise that this is His church and that we are to faithfully make disciples.

The time quickly came to an end, but we pray the investments will be eternal and that the fruit will remain (John 15:16). Be encouraged, my friends. Our calling is to bear fruit, not to produce it nor try harder to make it happen. Rather, we are to abide in the Vine. Fruit is not for the one bearing it but for those who come and taste of its beauty. As our life bears the fruit of the Spirit, may the world taste true love, joy, peace, and patience in our lives and earnestly desire to enjoy a relationship with Him as well. ■



Nathan Bramsen is commended from Overbrook Gospel Chapel in Greenville, South Carolina, and serves with his wife, Priyanka.

Micah Tuttle is commended from Eastgate Bible Chapel in Portland, Oregon, and serves with his wife, Amy.





A CALL TO

MISSIONS

Obeying the Great Commission
Amid Global Challenges

BY STEPHEN MCQUOID

All of us, at one time or another, have experienced a sense of being overwhelmed. Modern life carries with it so many responsibilities, and sometimes the burden of all we need to do intimidates us. Imagine you are one of Jesus's disciples. You come from the backwater of Galilee and have never traveled more than 150 miles from the place of your birth. You have little money, not much education; your opportunities in life are limited. Jesus says to you, "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) It is hard to imagine just how terrifying those words must have seemed to the followers of Jesus. With all their limitations, they were to take on the responsibility of world evangelization—how overwhelming!

Today, we are well used to travel, and we know a great deal more about our world than the early believers knew of theirs. However, the challenge of the Great Commission is as over-

whelming for the church today as it was for those early disciples. The number of people who need to hear the Gospel is greater than ever. We also face hugely conflicting worldviews that make gospel proclamation incredibly difficult. There is the world of Islam with all its diversity and complexity. Atheism is on the rise and increasingly militant and adversarial. Hinduism remains a religious colossus that blinds and binds, while the proliferation of other faiths, dogmas, and cults prevents millions of people from seeing the truth of God's love in Jesus. These barriers to the Gospel would be deeply serious even without the need of a visa. Many places are closed to the Gospel, and the need for cultural adaptation as we reach out to other people groups is arguably greater than ever.

We live in a post-truth world where trust needs to be established before our voices can even be heard. Add to that layers of doubt and suspicion due to the association of Christianity with

colonialism or the West, and doors begin to close in our faces even before conversations begin. Given the enormity of the task, we need to ask ourselves the question “do we want to be obedient or not?” Volumes have been written on missions, and some have tried to find excuses for not being involved. However, Jesus told us to go, and if we are serious about obedience to Him, we must go. Then, when we finally join the hosts in heaven, we will celebrate Christ’s great achievement of redeeming people from every culture and tongue (Revelation 7:9). What does this mean for us now? What should missions entail in our day? The list is almost endless.

... the challenge of the Great Commission is as overwhelming for the church today as it was for those early disciples.

TO ALL PEOPLE

While we believers are called to reach those from every nation and language, each region of the world faces unique barriers to the Gospel, some of which are outlined below. Having an awareness of these challenges reveals a country’s great needs to us and, as a result, avenues through which we can reach the people for Christ.

The Americas

Central and Latin America have traditionally been strongholds for Catholicism, and while evangelicalism has grown significantly, many still have no clear knowledge of what it means to be a Christian. Mexico has witnessed the growth of evangelicals, yet they remain a small minority, sometimes persecuted and often beset with doctrinal shallowness. Moreover, the challenge of crime, secularism, drugs, and corruption present a great combination of obstacles for the Gospel. Similarly, in Venezuela, a more vibrant evangelicalism is challenged not just by social problems but also by an unstable political system, which means many languish in poverty despite the nation’s natural riches.

The Americas contain spiritual powerhouses like the US; however, only time will tell how long that will remain the case. Many in the US and Canada are becoming skeptical of the claims of Christ.

Africa

The growth of Christianity in Africa, especially over the past century, has been dramatic, but mission activity is still needed there. Sub-Saharan Africa is a global, spiritual hot spot with a great need for theological education, leadership training, and practical support for national workers to enable them to reach

their own people and build strong churches. Jesus said (in Matthew 26:11), “The poor you will always have with you,” and there is much poverty in Africa. Consequently, there is also a great need to express the love of Christ through medical and educational work, as well as the development of economic infrastructure. In the Islamic areas of North Africa, religious freedom is greatly restricted, and the spiritual needs are so acute that the 10/40 window is as relevant now as the day the term was coined.

Asia

Among Asia’s teeming millions, India alone numbers more than 1.3 billion people. Many Asian countries have severe restrictions regarding mission activity, but in this dynamic part of the world, the potential for friendship evangelism and the use of the internet, satellite TV, and published resources is almost limitless. However, the need could not be overemphasized. Among Tajikistan’s eight million people, there are only around 1,000 believers, and restrictions designed to curb the influence of the Muslim majority also adversely affect the church.

China, with its vast population, communist ideology, and growing global influence, is an area of both spiritual growth and enormous spiritual need. While China reaches out economically to the world, it detains more Christians than any other nation. Despite this, the church is strong and growing. Carefully thought out and planned mission work will pay dividends. More complex is North Korea with its repressive regime. This so-called “hermit kingdom” is economically backward and culturally isolated. There is no easy access to North Korea’s imprisoned millions. Great creativity and courage are needed for the Gospel to break through.

The Middle East

In this troubled part of the world, it is hard to imagine what solutions could be found for the tragedies of Syria or Yemen. It is equally hard to see how the Gospel could penetrate Saudi Arabia, which lies at the very heart of Islam. Recent tensions between Saudi Arabia and Turkey have exposed the naked ambition of both countries to take a lead role in the Islamic world. Turkey is more open to Western influence and more closely aligned politically with the West. Despite this, missions activities are not allowed. The church, although small, is growing but faces significant issues requiring sensitivity.

Egypt and Iran are two other Islamic states in desperate need of mission input. Egypt allows some freedoms for its Christian minority, yet discrimination against and persecution of Christians remains the norm. Iran too persecutes Christians while its Shiite leadership battle against Sunni dominance.

Nevertheless, disillusionment with the Islamic Revolution, along with the remarkable work of God, means that a greater number of Iranians than ever before are coming to know Jesus Christ. They need support, both within Iran and among the Iranian diaspora.

Europe

While freedom of religion is widespread throughout Europe, it is among the most spiritually needy parts of the world. Indeed, statistically speaking, you would be more likely to come across an evangelical Christian on the streets of Qatar than you would in Luxembourg. The spiritual needs of Europe are immense. Among the 62 million people in France, there are 10 times more Muslims than evangelicals, and secularism is the default position. As religious freedom still exists, mission work can be conducted throughout Europe, and short-term mission teams are one of the ways in which this is achieved. Nevertheless, there is no substitute for friendship evangelism, where trust is built through long-term relationships.

FOR ALL BELIEVERS

There has never been a time in all of human history where so many people have been so mobile, not just for economic reasons but also because of war, famine, and civil unrest. The opportunities for work among displaced people are as great as the challenge. Gospel workers are needed to bring good news to a world on the move.

The harvest is plentiful, but there is an urgent need for mis-

sions workers (Matthew 9:37). We need to fervently pray for the needs of our world, be willing to respond to the call of Jesus, and prepare to be sent into the fields to bring in the harvest.

In many ways, the world seems smaller. Global communication and travel have resulted in an unprecedented ability to access remote areas and share our ideas with anyone, anywhere. Among so many competing messages and with increasing hostility toward Christians, mission work faces significant challenges. Yet we are called to go out to all nations and take the wonderful, life-changing truth of the Word to all people. ■

Stephen McQuoid is the general director of GLO (Gospel Literature Outreach), GLO-Europe.org.

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MIDWEST

26 Below

"CHRIST OR CULTURE—WHICH WILL YOU CHOOSE?"

BY CRAIG FRITCHEY

This year's Midwest 26 Below High School, College, and Career Winter Retreat, held at Hidden Acres Christian Center in Dayton, Iowa, was a record event. With 253 people in attendance from as far away as California, North Carolina, and Texas, this was our largest 26 Below retreat, anywhere, to date!

This year's retreat was also one of the most spiritually focused conferences I have experienced. This spiritual focus was not displayed in emotional reactions, but rather in deep and serious conviction of the Holy Spirit that led those in attendance to a sober-minded contemplation that I have rarely seen at a youth event.

Nate Bramsen (*Missionary Prayer Handbook* Day 28) gave a powerful and personal sermon series on the theme "Christ or Culture—Which Will You Choose?" Nate's five messages were divided into three parts: "The Sins of Sodom Are Our Sins" (listed in Ezekiel 16:49 as pride, gluttony, prosperous ease, and evading the poor), "Meditation on God's Word is the Remedy" (Psalm 1), and "Aaron: An Example of Idolatry" (Exodus 24–32). Nate reminded us of our own sin and the power of the Word of God to change our hearts, minds, and lives. Visit CMML.us/midwest2019 to listen to the message recordings.

Attendees also had the opportunity to hear three seminars: "Thinking Cross-Culturally" with Rich Brown (MPH Day 26), "Glorifying God with Our Lives and Ministries" with Lucas Richard (MPH Day 2), and "Everyday Discipleship" with Ben Kerns (Emmaus International). These sessions, along with a missions panel featuring several current and former missionaries, provided a practical missions-emphasis to Nate's content.

On Sunday, the Lord saw fit to send a blizzard that prevented anyone from leaving camp until Monday morning. This extra time provided a unique opportunity to reflect and process the weekend in small groups and to create "going home" action and accountability plans.

Please pray for all who attended Midwest 26 Below as they apply the lessons the Lord taught them and that each would be sensitive to the Lord's calling in their lives. Next year's retreat is scheduled for February 21–23, 2020, with Jerry Mattix (MPH Day 27). Let's pray for another record year! ■

Craig Fritchey is CMML's conference and security coordinator.



Top three photos by Eric Robinson