



Global Missions Health Conference

2020 GMHC

Failing as a Missionary, Thriving as a Disciple



Introduction

Andrea

Area

Missions Mobilization with SIM

Experience

16 years in missions:

9 yrs in Bolivia & 7 sending from US

(3 yrs in medical ministry)



Introduction

Dr. Cathie

Area

Private Practice, Residency Education, FQHC

Experience

12 Years; 34 countries

Specialty

Family Medicine

Session Abstract

Failure is an unacceptable word in our society. Yet the Bible repeatedly shows God's grace and mercy in finding us in our brokenness and in using us as His instruments when we are weak.

This session explores what it means to fail in missions, how to (sometimes) avoid it, and how to get through it. Join us as we discuss what it looks like to thrive in missions and in life as we follow the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

Session Objectives

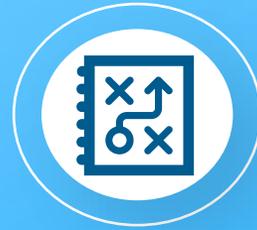
Discuss balancing preparation with setting realistic expectations for long-term service

Define key aspects of success versus failure on the mission field

Explore what the Bible says about failure, priorities, and identity

Analyze weakness, setbacks, and failure from God's perspective

Develop a willingness to receive redemption and restoration when we fall short



Preparation for Long-Term Service

(How much is enough?)

Long-Term Missions Preparation Checklist



01

Educational

02

Spiritual

03

Character

04

Missional & Cross-cultural

Long-Term Missions

Topics for Areas of Growth

- Basis for missions
- Biblical foundation
- Medical evangelism
- Discipleship
- Cross-cultural training
- Self care
- Language acquisition training
- Understanding spiritual warfare
- Teamwork & conflict resolution
- Safety & security
- Family thriving
- How to raise a support team
- Theology of suffering
- Theology of risk
- Theology of poverty



One Prepper's Timeline

- 1986: Became a Christ-follower
- 1990: Called to missions
- 1996-2000: Christian liberal arts college
 - Church-Related Vocation program
 - Mission trips x 2
- 2000-2001: Rotary year abroad
- 2001-2005: Medical School
 - CMDA and BSU student leader
 - CMDA GHO trips x 4
 - IMB Medical Receptor Program x 2 months
 - Saline Solution course

One Prepper's Timeline

- 2005-2008: Christian-based Residency
 - CMDA GHO trip x 1
 - Surgery PGY-2 rotation abroad
 - International elective PGY-3 rotation abroad
 - Grace Prescriptions, Perspectives, Encountering the World of Islam
 - Accepted to SP/WMM Post-Residency Program
 - Accepted to Project MedSend
- 2008: Post-graduation
 - Support-raising bootcamp
 - Second language acquisition course at CIT
 - SP/WMM PRP orientation
 - 3 months of faculty development/on-the-job training

One Prepper's Timeline

- Jan 2009: Arrived on-assignment for long-term service
- Feb 2010: Returned home



Heart check:
How do our expectations of what we may need on the field influence our preparations?



Heart check:
What are your expectations of what long-term service will look like?



Heart check:
Does preparation =
success?



“

Success occurs when opportunity meets preparation.

- Zig Ziglar



Defining Success for Long-Term Service

(Success vs. Failure)



Success vs. Failure

- What does success look like for long-term missions?
- What does failure look like?
- Are there metrics to define each?
- Who gets to define each?



“

God does not require we be successful,
only that we be faithful.

- Mother Theresa

“

Success is God's department. Faithfulness is our department. Success is being faithful to take care of the things God has entrusted to me; namely my family, my calling, and the precious friends He has given me for this lifetime. Fame and fortune aren't the real indicators of my success. How well I love and am loved is.

- **Alli Worthington**



But what happens
when we **“fail”**?

Common Questions about Failure



Why me? Why us?

Why did this happen to us? We're the only people I know who didn't make it as long-termers...



How did it come to this?

I don't even know how we even got here...it started out so well...



What now?

We sold everything to go overseas. What do we do now? Where do we go?



**Depression/
discouragement**

Grief

Resentment

Anger

**Common
Feelings**

Shame

about
Failure

Fear/anxiety

Shock

Loneliness

Concern

Guilt



Reasons why **Missions / Missionaries Fail**

(a look at the evidence)



Evidence to Date: 1997 & 2003

- ReMAP (the Reducing Missionary Attrition Project)
 - Conducted in 1997 by the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF)
 - Results presented in *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition*
 - Relies most heavily on the perceptions of agency leaders—with “agency leaders” including some leaders who are in charge of sending churches that don’t use outside agencies
 - The differences between missions administrators’ perceptions and official records described as “not huge” but “significant”
- ReMAP II
 - Conducted in 2003 by WEA (WEF changed its name to World Evangelical Alliance in 2001)
 - Results discussed in *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Best Practice in Missionary Retention*
 - Expanded to the administrators of approximately 600 mission agencies in 22 countries, representing nearly 40,000 missionaries
 - Looks at the organizational practices that lead to retention
- Still missing—the viewpoints of returned missionaries



Evidence to Date

- ReMAP is the origin of the oft misquoted, “The #1 reason that missionaries leave the field is other missionaries”
- However, this is only after discounting the unpreventable causes of attrition, acceptable reasons (as deemed by agencies at the time), how leaving the agency vs. the field is attributed, and variances due to COO
- A more accurate statement might be:

The most important non-acceptable reason as perceived by leaders of mission agencies (and some sending churches) for why missionaries from the US stopped working with their agencies 20 years ago was problems with peer missionaries.

- It doesn't quite make for a great “quote of the day” ...

Evidence to Date: 2015

- 2015 Engage
 - Conducted in 2015 by Global Mapping International (GMI) and the Best Christian Workplaces Institute (BCWI)
 - Results presented in “Thriving People: The Engage Survey 2015 Aggregate Report” and in *Help Your Missionaries Thrive: Leadership Practices That Make a Difference*
 - Surveyed >1,700 North American cross-cultural field workers (7 agencies)
 - 87% felt their assignment was a good match with their skills and gifts
 - 48% said leadership helped them identify growth areas and resources to improve
 - 42% said their supervisor asked about their spiritual condition
 - 38% said their agency helped ineffective field staff become effective

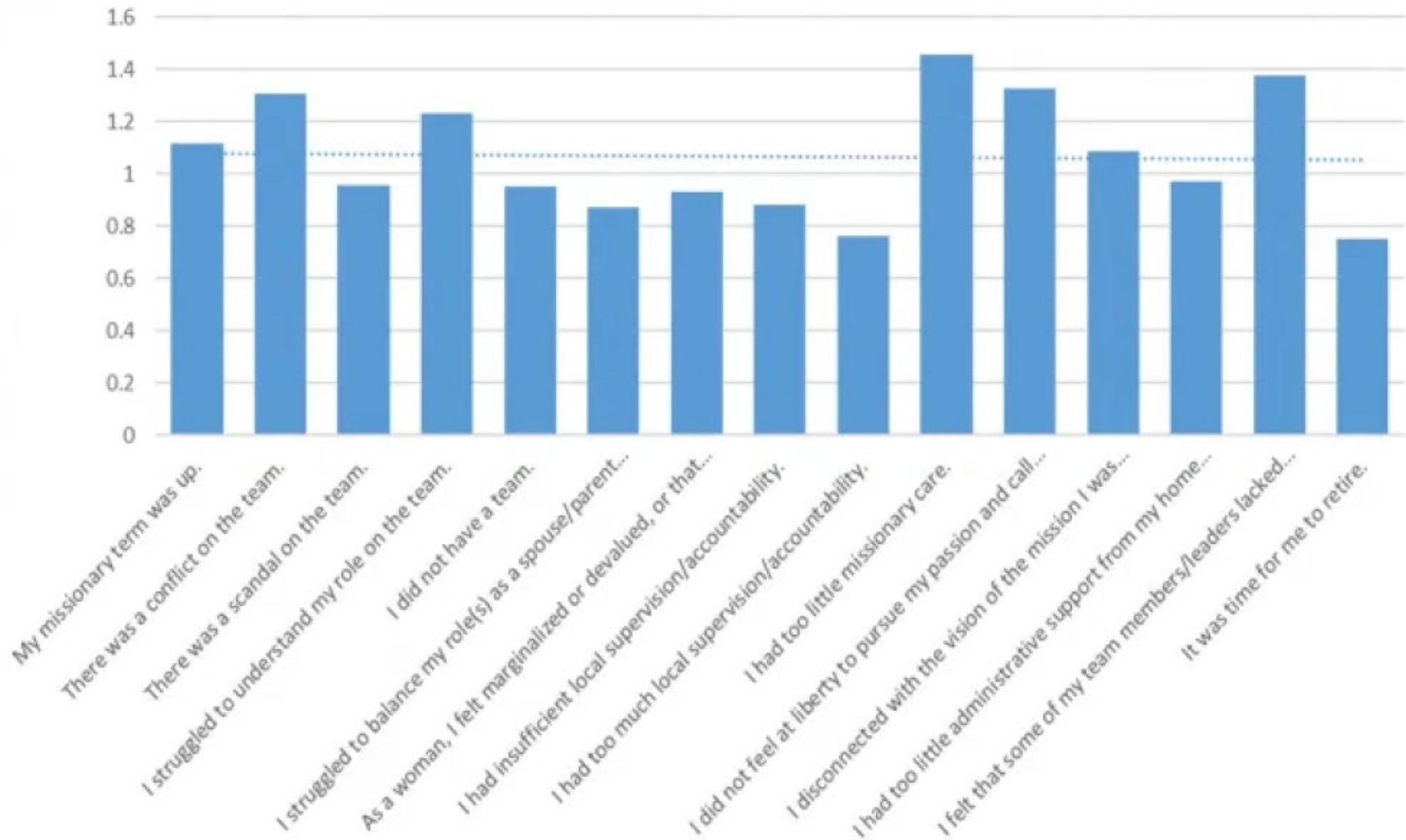


Evidence to Date: 2017

- 2017 Missions Experience Study (John Brown University)
 - 745 former missionaries who completed the research survey
 - >70% originally from the US, but also from Australia, Canada, Europe
 - >65% women
 - >140 countries of service from 6 continents
 - Age range 20 to >80 yo, with the majority (~30%) being 30-39 yo
 - Age of first going to the mission field
 - ~48% were 20-29 yo
 - ~35% were 30-39 yo
 - Average time spent on the mission field was 9 years
 - All participants were people who had formerly been missionaries, yet had decided to return to their passport country

Evidence to Date: 2017

- 9 categories of factors
 - Family, team/agency, host country, health, expectations, spiritual, financial, mental health, and other
- 2 categories ranked significantly higher than the others: family factors and team/agency factors
 - Under family, most factors considered unpreventable (serious marital issues or needing to take care of extended family)
 - Of team/agency factors, the highest rated factors in the decision to return to a passport country as perceived by former missionaries were
 - **lack of missionary care**
 - **lack of integrity on the team**
 - **lack of freedom to pursue calling**
 - **team conflict, and**
 - **confusion over role on the team**





What About Healthcare Worker Attrition?

- Not well-studied, but higher than other forms of missions
- Unique Challenges
 - Placements primarily in developing countries (vs. developed)
 - Practice with limited resources/lack of support (physical and human)
 - Overwork
 - High death rates/intensity of disease burden
 - Unexpected administrative burden
 - Inconsistency in vision between agency/program and long-term healthcare worker (HCW)
 - Moral injury/vicarious trauma
 - Suburban job waits back home ???



Long-term HCW Studies: 2011

- 2011 CMDA Patterns and Responses in Intercultural Service in Medicine (PRISM) Survey
 - Mean age of 48 yo with 10.84 avg yrs of service
 - 33.8% reported that their role is not consistent with what they envisioned before coming to the field, which contributed to low role satisfaction
 - 37.9% believed their sending organization would prefer if they would stop doing medicine and would begin to focus on other types of work, even though 83.6% consider the medical part as essential or important to their purpose in being there



Long-term HCW Studies: 2015

- 2015 MedSend Global Healthcare Workers Needs Assessment (GHWNA)
 - Mean age of 41 yo with 7.18 avg yrs of current service
 - ~34% disagreed that their roles were consistent with what they expected
 - Agencies ranked family or personal needs as the first reason for people leaving the field, followed by interpersonal conflict, and organizational changes
 - However, 1/2 of post-field respondents said they left the field for potentially preventable reasons, most often burnout, interpersonal conflict, or emotional exhaustion
 - 40% of those still serving said their agencies had fair, poor, or no plans for managing interpersonal conflict on the field
 - 68% of sending agencies do not provide member care designed to meet the specific needs of healthcare professionals

Long-term HCW Studies: 2015-2016

- 2015 CMDA LAUNCH Survey
 - 177 responses from long-term missionaries
 - Sought to identify the main hindrances to long-term service
 - Found relationships key to effective launching
 - Launching is a marathon
- 2016 CMDA Relocating for the Gospel Survey
 - 104 responses of potential missionaries
 - Found concerns about raising financial support and finding a good team fit as the major hindrances
 - Encouragement from a personal contact (pastor, mentor, teacher, leader) can help launch



Is Failure Really Failure?

- If 99% of aspiring missionaries fail to launch due to multiple issues and
- If 30-35% of missionaries who made it to the field come home prematurely due to various reasons
- Is coming home/not making it a full-term/not returning long-term really failure?



Failure Paradigm Shift

- Matching with a mission hospital or agency is like matching with a residency
 - Sometimes it is a great fit, sometimes people leave, sometimes there are a few years of just surviving until it's over
- Finding a job or workplace you love and plan to stay with your entire life right out of college or training rarely happens
 - Why should we expect that to happen on the medical mission field?
- Finding the right fit for work the first time is often not achieved anywhere in the world
 - Why do we hold medical missionaries to a higher standard?



Those Who Have **Gone Before Us**

(a look at our Manual)



“

The hunger of the human heart that is unfed by what is authentic will go for what is inauthentic.

- Dallas Willard



Moses

Exodus – all of it



- Raised in royal household
- Wise, intellectual
- Mighty in word and deed
- Specific calling by God
- Liar
- Murderer
- Deserter
- Betrayed family's confidence
- Anger management issues
- Proud



Failure Principle

The humbling that comes with failure brings us face-to-face with the power and presence of the Almighty. This, in turn, helps us count the cost of our calling more accurately as we do His will.



Gideon

Judges 6:11-8:35

- The reluctant questioner
- Antithesis of Isaiah 6:8 (here I am, send me)
- “Here I am not, can you send someone else?”



Failure Principle

You can debate God about why you believe He is wrong – He is big enough to handle our doubts. He may even concede some of your requests and changes to the calling, but you are still a hero, a warrior in God's heart.



King David

2 Samuel 11-12

- Giant-fighter
- Friend to Jonathan
- Psalm-writer
- Patient servant to a wicked king
- Spoken highly of in >1/2 the Bible's books
- Coveter
- Adulterer
- Thief
- Liar
- Murderer



Failure Principle

When we have sinned, we must recognize it and repent. God's forgiveness doesn't save us from the consequences of our conduct, but if we abandon the behavior and are willing to accept the consequences, God will still use us.



Elijah

1 Kings 17-19



- Caused the rain to stop > 3 yrs
- Fed by ravens
- Saw limitless jar of flour/jug of oil
- Widow's son resurrected
- Beat prophets of Baal by calling down fire from heaven
- Burned out
- Afraid
- Ran away from his mission field



Failure Principle

Burnout is only permanent if you allow it to be. Don't listen to everything that you're tempted to believe when you're exhausted. Take time to care for yourself physically, spiritually, and emotionally—and then get back to it.



John Mark

Acts 15:36-41;

Col 4:10-11

- Family receives Peter after miraculous release from prison
- Friend of Barnabas
- Co-laborer with Paul & Barnabus to Antioch & Cyprus
- Leaves them high & dry in Perga
- Considered dishonorable abandonment by Paul
- Decision divides “the greatest mission team ever”



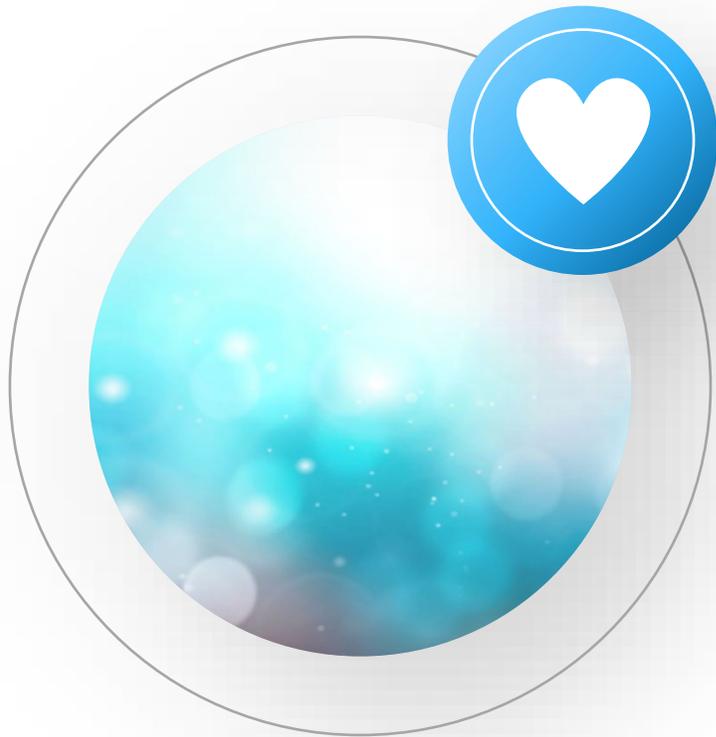
Failure Principle

We all develop gradually. Failure isn't a sign that we can't cut it. Sometimes we're trying to operate at a level that we're not mature enough to handle. We can outgrow those kinds of failings, provided we don't give up.



Saul > Paul

Acts 7-8, 22; 1 Tim 1:15-16

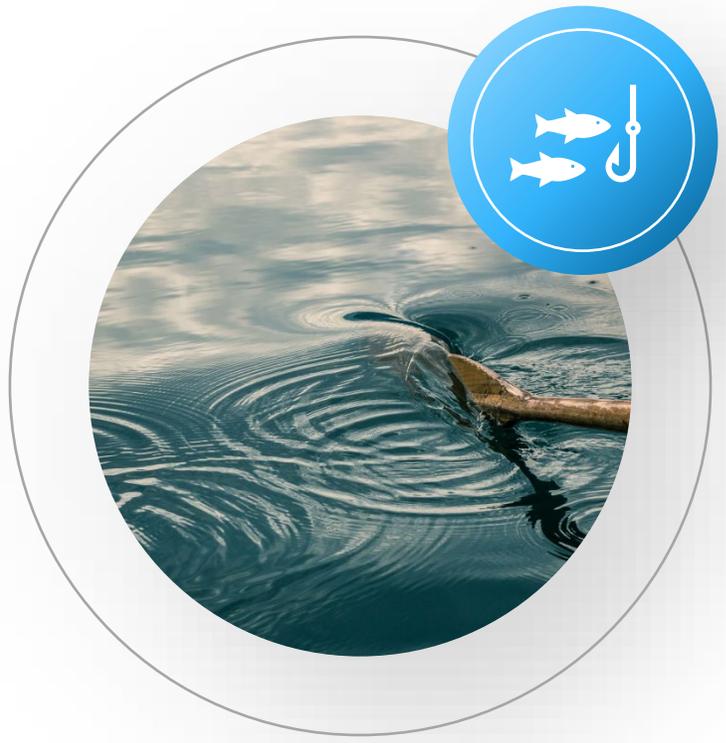


- Terror to the early church
- Present and approved of murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr
- Went door-to-door in Jerusalem looking for Jesus-followers to put in prison
- After putting these in prison, he planned to hunt down the Christians they sent mail to
- An encounter with the resurrected Christ changed everything



Failure Principle

For those who put their trust in Christ later in life, we can make up reasons to feel unqualified for service. But the gospel is so powerful that our transformation becomes a profound testimony to God's goodness and grace.



Peter, Peter, Peter

Matt 14-16; Mk 14; Jn 21; Acts 2

- Smart, experienced businessman
- One of Jesus's closest friends and confidants
- Only disciple willing to try walking on the water
- First to call Jesus the Christ and son of God
- Proud
- Foul-mouthed
- Denied Jesus three times—the 3rd time cursing his accusers
- Hypocrite, according to Paul



Failure Principle

Failure doesn't disqualify you,
even if you've been following Jesus for some time.



All of Us
Go through Night Seasons



Psalm 127:2

It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

- Written by Solomon, who asked God for wisdom in a dream **by night**
- Bread of anxious toil/sorrows = worry
- Hebrew/NASB version says, **“For He gives to His beloved even in his sleep.”**
 - You are God’s Beloved – you are loved!
 - God wants to give you rest
 - God wants to give to you in the midst of your night



Genesis 15:1, 5-6

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield,
your very great reward.”

He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

- God gives to His beloved in their sleep
- When was Abram first credited with justification by faith?
 - In a vision **by night**
- God gives victory ... **even in the night**



Your Story is **Still Being Written**

(morning is coming)



Psalm 30:1-5, 11-12

I will exalt you, Lord,
for you lifted me out of the depths
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.
Lord my God, I called to you for help,
and you healed me.
You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit.

Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people;
praise his holy name.
For his anger lasts only a moment,
but **his favor lasts a lifetime**;
weeping may stay for the night,
but **rejoicing comes in the morning**.

You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and **clothed me with joy**,
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever.



Matthew 14:22-32

“...but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. And **in the fourth watch of the night he came to them**, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

- Boat was beaten by waves and the wind was contrary
- When did Jesus come to them?
 - 4th watch of the night = 3am-6am
 - Darkest part of the night
- How did Jesus come to them?
 - Walking on the water
 - In a way they never expected
- Compare/contrast the disciples’ vs. Jesus’s reactions



Do not Lose Heart!



- Failure on the mission field can come as a result of our own or others' poor choices or actions
- It's easy to think...
 - I've blown it
 - God can't use me
 - There's no hope for restoration
- But ... this is NOT TRUE!
 - God's nature is all about redemption
 - God loves a good comeback story (He has one of His own you know)



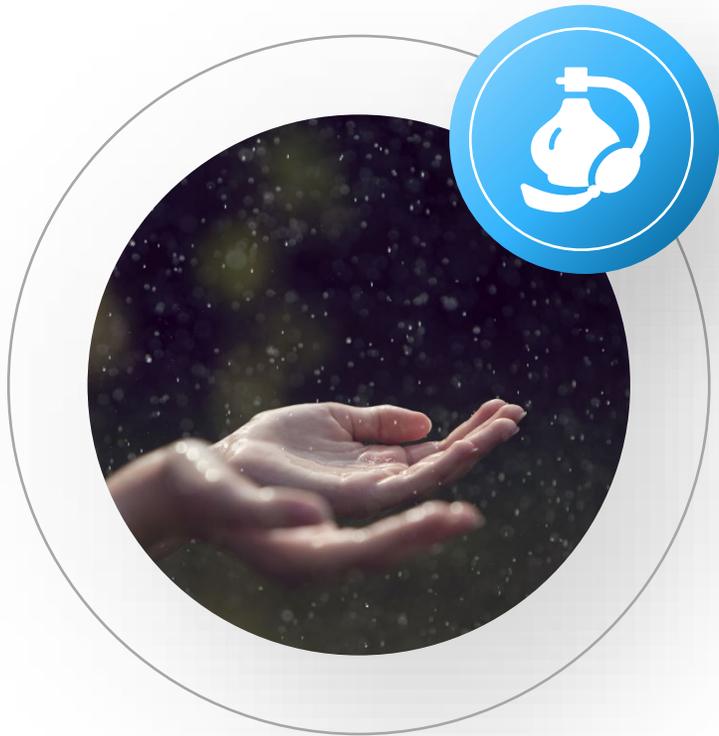
Redemption Power **in Weakness**

John 12:24-26: grain of wheat

2 Cor 3:17-18: transformation as a process

Philippians 2:5-11: our example

Shifting our Focus from **What** to **Who**

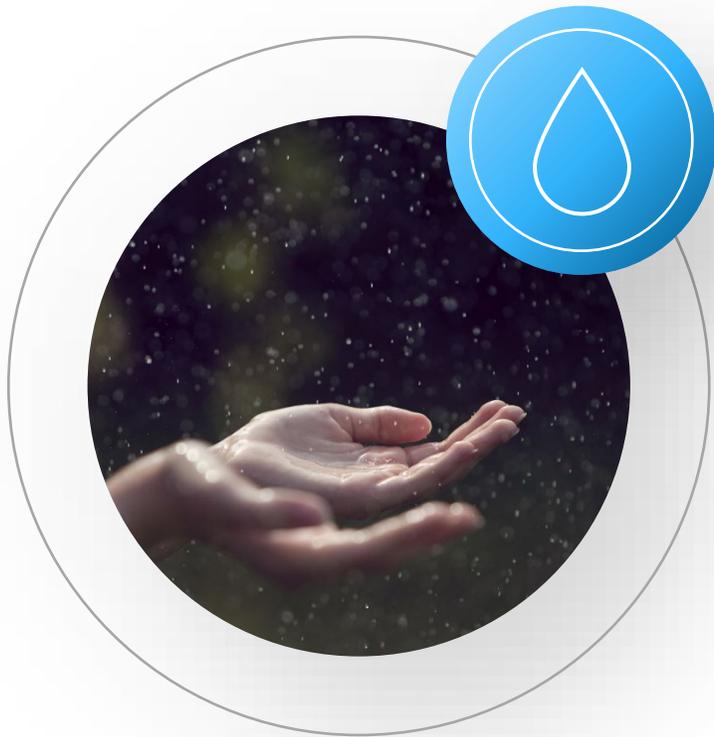


Mark 14: the alabaster box of oil

- What is our primary role in spreading the Gospel?
 - Extravagant time with Jesus
- So many times we are doggedly determined to *work for* Jesus while forgetting that witness must follow worship
 - Jesus doesn't need us to *work for Him*
 - He calls us to join *with Him* in what He is already doing
- When we get the order right (spending extravagant time w/ Him first), He works through us in ways that would not be possible otherwise, and whatever is accomplished has His stamp on it



Shifting our Focus from **What** to **Who**



John 20: the God who speaks the language of tears calls us softly unto Himself

- He understands and weeps with us
 - By taking on mortal flesh and suffering on the Cross, the Son of God experiences our pain and sorrow as His own
- Just as Mary was blinded by her grief and tears at the tomb, we do not always recognize Him when He comes to us
 - So He stands and waits, crying with us, calling again
- Our tears mingle and then are lost in His – to be wiped away, swallowed up in Resurrection victory



The Need for More **Stones of Remembrance**



Lamentations 3

- Verses 1-19 outline suffering, weakness, dark and painful times
- Verse 20 says, “**My soul** continually remembers it and is bowed down within me”
 - Emotions are carrying the author away
 - This can easily happen as we continue to rehash events
- However, verse 21 begins, “But this I call **to mind**...”
 - Must will ourselves to change



The Need for More **Stones of Remembrance**



But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

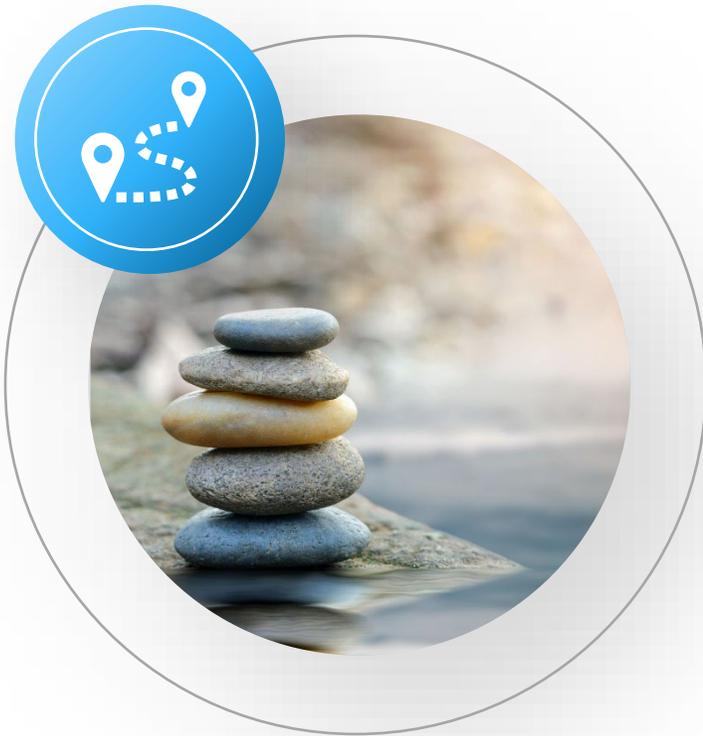
The **steadfast love** of the Lord never ceases;
his **mercies** never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your **faithfulness**.

“The Lord is **my portion**,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

The Lord is **good** to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.



The Need for More **Stones of Remembrance**



- A Biblical view of ourselves, our world, history, and where we are in it is vital so that we can see our circumstances clearly
- It is in looking back at the wondrous works of God that we can have stability when looking around us and confidence when looking forward – whatever the future may hold
- Wherever you are in life, God has never once forgotten you. He is intimately acquainted with every one of your needs



“

Our lives are not measured by the lives of others, nor by our own ideals, nor by what we think might reasonably be expected of us...our lives are measured by who we are created and called to be, and the measuring is done by the One who creates and calls.

- Richard John Neuhaus ([Death on a Friday Afternoon](#))



Encouragement

For Those Who Have Been Hurt

- We all have great stories – the good, the bad, and the ugly
- Our stories are still being written
- Our stories are not complete without Jesus
- His story is more powerful and compelling than anything we could imagine on our own
- Our stories are never so bad that the cross can't redeem them
- Jesus is in the business of comebacks





Questions

For Aspiring Long-Term Workers



1. What are my motives for wanting to serve as a long-term worker?
2. What are my core values and how are they driving me to long-term service?
3. How do I define success as a long-term worker?
4. Am I willing to work for a balanced life and continued personal growth?
5. Can I pursue genuine humility as a cross-cultural learner, recognizing there is more to be caught than to be taught?
6. Can I place relationships above achieving process and outcomes?
7. Am I able to submit to authority?
8. Can I manage/lower my expectations re: serving as a long-term worker?
9. Can I walk with the poor in a way that respects their dignity?
10. Do I fully understand the holistic Gospel and the Jesus I represent?



Next Steps & Take-Aways

- What do I personally need in order to thrive long-term?
- What steps do I need to take in order to be prepared?
- Am I prioritizing my relationship with Christ now?



Next Steps & Take-Aways

- What step will I commit to take as a result of this session?

- By when?



Let us hold unswervingly to
the hope we profess, **for He
who promised is faithful.**

Hebrews 10:23

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Thank You
For Attending