

International Missions

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Preacher: Missionary Panel Discussion

[0 : 00] I mentioned earlier, we are focusing on missions and our work in missions, our engagement with missions as a church.

For some of you who are new, you have maybe heard about the gospel debt, but you don't know what that is.

And so, in the past, we have taken a month, typically in March, to focus on missions and to ask for pledges towards the gospel debt, which is funds that we use as a church, giving on top of the tithe to support local missions and to support international missions as well, to support our IMB missionaries.

And so, this year, we're doing something a little bit different. We're still going to take four weeks to focus on missions and to talk about the gospel debt. We're not going to take pledges this year, though. So, we're just asking for each of you to, you know, if you want to make a one-time gift to the gospel debt, if you would like to make a monthly gift to the gospel debt, whatever you would like to do, we're putting it on you to do, and we're trusting that this church that has cared so much about missions will continue to support the work that we're doing here locally and internationally.

And so, this is the first of four weeks that we're going to really hone in, zero in, focus on missions and the important job that we have been given from the Lord as a church to carry out His work to go and make disciples.

[1 : 47] And so, today, we're going to begin with a panel discussion. Many of you all know who is up here, the Grassers and the Caraways. They have recently come back from the mission field.

I'm nervous about what I can and cannot say, so I guess I'm going to let you guys talk, and so I don't get in trouble. We have a few questions, and again, hopefully, through the results of our conversation today, you will get to know not only them better, but understand what the Lord is doing internationally, and also the important role that we have, that you have as a Christian and as His church, to make disciples.

So, question number one, give us an overview of your time on the field. Give us an overview of your time on the field.

Where were you? What was your focus? And what did your day-to-day ministry look like? Okay, I'll go for that first. So, we were in East Asia.

We were in China for about 11 years, and we're on the foothills of the Himalayan mountains in a city of about a million people. And our focus was primarily with unengaged, unreached people groups.

[3 : 04] So, when we first landed on the field, we were specifically focused in on one unreached people group. So, this is a people group that basically has no churches, no believers, no gospel presence there.

And then, as we went on in our time in the field, we then focused on several other people groups around that city, primarily outside of the city, up in the foothills, and worked with unengaged people groups.

So, those are people groups that not only are they unreached, but there's no one really going to those places. They're completely unengaged with the gospel. So, we did that for about 11 years.

So, when I started doing missions, I spent two years in Bosnia. I know many of you remember Bosnia from the war of the 90s. And so, when I arrived in about 2010, there were still bullet holes and shell holes everywhere, and they were still rebuilding in many ways.

So, I spent two years working there with Bosnia Muslims, largely with two totally different groups of people. One was with Muslim students from the many college and universities that are in Sarajevo, and then also with Roma gypsies, who are also Muslims, but often of like a totally different type.

[4 : 26] So, I was working with students and then the poorest people in a recovering war zone. And then Katie and I, we met, we got married, and then we went back to the mission field, but this was to Russia.

So, we were in St. Petersburg, Russia, which is a city of 5 to 6 million people. And, of course, it's a Russian city in Russia, but Russian people were not our focus.

Our focus was also unengaged, unreached people groups from Central Asia. So, when you think Central Asia, where is this? It's basically any place that ends with Stan. All those countries you can't really identify on the map.

We got an Azerbaijan in there, those types. Those are all Central Asia, and all of those peoples come up into Russia to find work. So, most of those countries are closed. Some of them are very dangerous for missionaries.

So, when their people came into Russia, we could engage them with the gospel there. So, out of our city of 5 or 6 million people, about 500,000 were from Central Asia, and many of them were from small people groups that had absolutely no gospel presence amongst them whatsoever.

[5 : 34] Okay, so, tell us then, what was the most significant difference between where you guys were in China, where you all were in Russia?

What was the most significant differences between your fields, and then even with your strategies and how you engaged the people that you talked about who had not been reached with the gospel yet?

So, as Ben said, we were working with people outside of our city. So, to get to our people sometimes took two days to drive there.

And then once we got there, we would be run out very quickly if we didn't have a reason to be there. So, for the first few years, I had a student visa, and if we went up to the village, they would say, there's no college here, please go back to where you came from.

And then we moved to a platform where we did agriculture consultancy. And that opened up incredible doors for us as we traveled two days into a village, and we're trying to share the gospel or disciple some people that are new believers.

[6 : 51] They say, why are you here? We're checking on our trees, or we're checking on our rabbits. They're like, oh, of course you are. Have fun. And they leave. And so, I think that might be one of the biggest differences, is just the distance to get to our people and to get back.

A lot of our ministry was market ministry. So, the people groups that we wanted to work with from Central Asia manned the stalls in markets. And so, they would be selling produce of various kinds, or nuts, berries, that type of thing.

So, we could include our ministry in our daily grocery runs, which was definitely an advantage. But it's a little tricky, too, because you're literally trying to build a relationship with a grocery seller.

So, it'd be like trying to work with your Walmart checker out. Like, you get a very unique little window where you get to have a little bit of an exchange and start building in a relationship. But it's going to need to be through a lot of repeated exposure.

And that can be an obstacle. Because you might get to a really good point in a conversation, but the ending of that conversation is completely dependent on whenever the next customer comes. So, that was an aspect of our ministry.

[8 : 03] I think something else that was probably different was our ministry was very urban. So, a lot of the people we were working with were very sophisticated, city slicker type people.

And we're in a global mega city of six million. We spent so much time just in the subway. That's just a huge part of life. It's just traveling from metro stop to metro stop.

And it takes hours out of every single day. And I think that's definitely a difference that we had in our ministry, for sure. I think you guys were on ATVs and we were in the metro. I think as far as strategy, there probably, there were differences in the strategy.

And yet, there was a great, there was a lot of similarity in our strategy as well. We were trying to find the lost. We were trying to find those people of peace that God had prepared for us to be able to go and share the gospel with.

And so, day in, day out, that was what our work was, was to go and look for opportunities to share the gospel. So, different context, but the same goal, for sure.

[9 : 10] And I think on that point, a real similarity that we had was that both of us were trying to reach the unreached and the unengaged. And one of the reasons for this is that the global missions

movement, the modern missions movement, really started over 200 years ago.

All of the people groups that are easily reached and engaged, they've already been engaged in that 200 years. So, now, the groups that are left are often the ones who are smaller, who are more out of the way, who are more resistant.

And so, that was definitely a factor in both of our ministries, I think. There were definite challenges in engaging these peoples. I think that idea fed a lot into this concept that we had.

When we're going to share the gospel, we want to share it to a family or to a group. Here in the States, we typically, you know, I have this friend and I'm going to share with her and then she can share with her family.

But if you imagine living in a village, maybe two or three hours from a market town, and in that space, you might be the only believer there.

[10:19] I mean, how, I don't know, like a sitting duck are you to the enemy? And so, when we shared, we wanted to share with the whole family and so that they had support and they would have the government come in and threaten them.

We know that the foreigners were here. We know that you have, you know, believed, so we're going to stop paying you if you continue. And they needed that body, that support that we sometimes don't think of, you know, whenever we're sharing.

Good. So, there's not a one-size-fits-all approach, obviously. We can, I think, here in America look over, well, that's, you know, other side of the world.

It all kind of blends together, Russia and China, but totally different, even in your countries, totally different people groups who are there. But though the methods change, the gospel does not, and that's ultimately the goal.

So, I'll switch gears here a little bit now that we have a better idea of where the caravans and the grassers were, where they served, and what they did. One thing I know for us as Americans who maybe have gone overseas before for a missions trip, we've been there for a week, and so we get to experience, you know, just in a very small way, what it's like to be totally outside of your comfort zone.

[11:51] But that doesn't compare to what you guys did. I mean, you guys left family. You guys made these countries your home. You worked and you served along these people.

You gave your lives to the communities that you were serving in. And so, with the next question, I want to know, as you were doing that, what caused you the most stress, and what caused you the most joy during your time serving overseas?

This is an easy answer. The most stress was driving. I will often say that probably the most sanctifying process in my life was driving in China.

It's what the Lord used to make me more holy. And so, yeah, that created quite a bit of stress.

Every time that you get in the car, it's, okay, Lord, take the wheel.

So, probably as far as most joy, I know this is a softball answer, sharing Jesus with somebody that has never heard the name Jesus.

[12:56] That was definitely the thing that brought the most joy. Yeah, so the biggest stressor, unfortunately for us, was inter-team conflict.

This happens a lot, and it is just a part of missionary life, unfortunately. There's just a few of you, you're doing really hard work in a place where you're under daily spiritual attack, and it is just easy for there to be divisions amongst the team.

So, unfortunately, that was a reality that our team had. And that was really hard. We used to say, you know, the unbelievers are great. It's the believers that are the hard ones, unfortunately.

But then joy, just like what Ben said, to get to tell the gospel to someone who not only has never heard it, but they've never even heard the name of Jesus.

And you see their response sometimes. They're like, that is an amazing story. Where did you hear that? It's like, it's in a book called the Bible. And they were like, wow, can you tell me more about this?

[14:05] And it's like, you know what? I can. So, yeah, that is really special. I think a daily stressor or something that caused anxiety was the weather.

We were so far north in Russia that during the winter the sun would come up around 11 a.m., and then it would go down around 3 p.m. So you're just dealing with a lot of darkness, like in Alaska or something.

So that just affects you over time. I remember having a really good day about three months after we had gotten there, and I realized kind of in the middle of the afternoon it was because the sun was out, and the sun hadn't been out for three months.

And it was like, I am having a good day. So I think that was a challenge. And then something that brought a lot of joy was just the long-term relationships that I have from our time overseas.

I still stay in touch with those friends. And it was really an honor to get to know a Tatar believer.

Like, God brought her from atheism to Christianity, and she is avid in sharing her faith now.

[15 : 09] And it's such a privilege to have that type of relationship. Good. Next question. So for a lot of us, we understand a little bit of what the IMB does.

We know about the cooperative program. I guess I should say we're a little bit more aware of the cooperative program and how that helps our missionaries. But could you tell us more about what was the role the American church played in your ministries?

Yes. We had volunteers come from the States constantly. There's usually several months in there that we don't have a day off.

We've got people leaving, and we're picking new people up. And the thing that I think was so crucial, we always would say, when people work, people work. But when people pray, God works.

And it's amazing to know that whenever churches send teams to work with you, man, they are praying for those people because they want mom and dad and cousin so-and-so to come back.

[16 : 14] And so there's just this shower of prayer over those volunteers that come out. And amazing things happen on the field when teams would come.

An integral part of what we did was we wanted to know who those people are, and we want to use your gifts. If you're in the medical field or you're a teacher, we want to use those gifts.

We don't just have this cookie-cutter plan for volunteers. And I think that was helpful to get the church to understand, I don't have to be this outgoing, talkative, loud, or fearless person.

I can be me and serve the Lord overseas as well. And I envision what the church did for us, similar to Moses, you know, whenever he is holding up that staff and whenever he gets tired, it starts to lower and they start to lose.

And they came up to him and they helped hold that staff up so that they could win the battle. And that, to me, was one of the biggest parts of what the church did for us, was to say, we're tired, we're lonely, we're discouraged, we need encouragement.

[17 : 38] And they said, we're here, we're going to hold up that staff for you. And they were there not just to come and help us do the work, but we had teams come out to minister to our team, to do marriage counseling, to do VBS with our kids or whatnot, just to keep the staff raised high.

And so I think that that is one of the most precious parts of what we as a church in the States can do. Good. Yeah, I think what you just said about the church coming out to minister to you, Katie and I experienced that as well.

Having teams come to try to reach the people that we were focusing on, that was helpful. But I think when we look back, we see that the teams that came out just to try to bless us, it mattered so much. We were so lonely. We were so isolated. We were so tired. We were empty. And to have Christians come and sit with us and pray for us and counsel us, hugely life-giving and way more important than we ever would have thought it would be.

And then also echoing what you said about the power of prayer, it was so strange because you're just stumbling around doing ministry all day.

[18 : 58] And every now and then I would stumble into a situation that absolutely it was a God thing. It was somebody whose heart was open. And they were from a small people group that, I mean, literally, they are a needle in a haystack.

And I would find them. And I would find the one person in the city of five million whose heart was open from this people group who wanted to speak with me. And then we'd start talking.

We'd find we had shared interests and things like this. And I would think about it after the situation was over. And it's like, how did that happen? The odds against that were absolutely astronomical.

I shouldn't have met that person. And then it was like, God's people are praying. That's what happened. And I just stumbled into it. I was having a bad Tuesday. Things were hard. And the Lord directed my steps to this person.

And it was a response to the prayers of God's people back home. So your prayer, it matters. It makes an impact. Very good.

[20 : 00] Yeah, I think a lot of times, and I'm speaking on behalf of those who are here locally in the church, is we don't realize how much our prayers are used by the Lord as a blessing for our missionaries.

And yes, giving is great, and that helps. But how important it is that we pray and how neglectful we can be of that as well. So just encourage the rest of us to be in prayer for our missionaries.

All right. Now we're going to change gears again. So you all have experience working, obviously, with the IMB.

And in what you do now, you're aware of other missions organizations. And so for a lot of us who have grown up in the SBC or we're very familiar with the SBC, we know of the IMB.

We've heard of these others, but maybe we don't know what the differences are. So could you tell us what is the difference in your life and work over season at home?

[21 : 05] Again, you've encountered many of these other organizations. How is the IMB different? International Mission Board, how is it different? I think real strength that the IMB has is just the amount of resources that it has.

It's drawing from so many churches and so many individual generous believers. There's just an incredible reservoir of resources that they can provide to their ministries. So I think that's something that's unique about the IMB.

Yeah, and I think along with that, just the training that we received as missionaries on the field before we hit the field and then once we were on the field, that training continues for our staff that they're constantly learning from what's happening all across the world and then implementing that. So I think IMB is laser-focused in church planting. That's one of the things that, you know, that's what IMB is known for and what they're about, whereas some other organizations, not to say that this is wrong, they focus on humanitarian needs or, you know, orphanages, things like that, Bible translation, all sorts of things like that that are valuable in their own right.

But the International Mission Board, they're about planting churches and discipling believers, seeing churches be healthy. And so that's maybe a distinctive that I would say about the International Mission Board.

[22 : 27] Good. And I know you guys have mentioned a lot of other missionaries that I've seen, they have to come back home and raise their support. But with the IMB and the cooperative program, that enables you all to stay longer on the mission field without the stress of having to come back home to raise enough support so that you can go back out.

Absolutely. And that is a major difference between the IMB and any other mission organization that I've ever heard of. So our personnel don't have to raise funds.

And the reason that's important is that it's so much easier for our personnel to get to the field. But then once they're there, they know they're going to be supported. Because it's something you might not hear a lot, but a lot of missionaries for other organizations, they raise their support, they get to the field.

Let's say they're in Mongolia. And then their supporters drop out. And so suddenly you're in Mongolia with only 60% of the financial support that you need. It's really challenging because you're not there alone.

You're there with your wife and your children, and you don't have enough. The IMB, we never had to experience that because we were so well taken care of because it's the pooled resources of Southern Baptists all over the country.

[23 : 42] And an experience I had, it was so interesting, I actually, when I was in Bosnia, I roomed with a missionary from another organization. So I was there for two years with the IMB.

I didn't have to raise any funds. He was there for one year with his organization, and he was self-funded. So as his one year was ending, he thought, you know what?

I think I'd like to stay. So he said he wanted to extend by another year. And so he told me his plan, and I just thought it was so funny because I wasn't seeing him anymore.

And I was like, brother, where are you? I just feel like you're up all night and you're sleeping during the day. He's like, well, yeah, that's what I'm doing. And I said, why is that? And he said, well, I need to raise funds. So we have a method.

You take your entire contact list. You message all of them. Of those hundreds of people you message, a couple hundred will respond. You then message those couple hundred to ask if they'll have a Skype conversation with you.

[24 : 42] So this is their strategy. And he's like, well, since, you know, there's a time difference, I have to talk with them when they get out of work. So that's in the middle of the night here. So I'm staying up all night to talk with them.

So I said, oh, wow, okay. So in that Skype conversation, you ask them to support you? And he said, no. Well, you want to ask them in the second Skype conversation. And so he actually moved out of our apartment and moved into their team offices for three weeks because for three weeks he was staying up all night.

He was living like a vampire to do Skype calls to try to raise support back in the States. Meanwhile, I was just getting to do ministry. And I'm not saying that our way is better.

I'm saying our way is different. But I really do love the way the IMB allows us to just show up on the field and we just get to focus on ministry. We don't have to worry about support raising.

And that's a direct result of the generosity of Southern Baptists like yourselves. Well, and when you come stateside, you know, these tired missionaries from most organizations, they come back and they have to hit the ground running.

[25 : 51] They have to go to this church and that church and this church and that church. And they can't stop or they won't have enough money. And I remember on our first stateside, it came unexpectedly. We were planning another 10 months on the field and we got a phone call that my dad had cancer and we came stateside.

And we didn't have to worry about going and talking and all of those things. We were able to minister to our family. We were able to be ministered to. I mean, we needed that resharpening and that support that we don't necessarily get from a big body overseas.

And so to be able to leave the field, come home and kind of get that medical treatment, you know, that get your wounds patched up and get feeling good again and then go back out.

I think that is something very unique and very precious to those of us who are with the board. Yeah, thank you guys for sharing that. I don't know if any of you were even aware of that, but to see how, and again, like you said, Nick, not to put one above the other, say one's better than another, but how much that is a benefit for missionaries that they can really know that they have that stability so that when they come home, they truly can rest.

And when they're out on the field, they can truly know that they're going to continue to be supported despite what may happen on the field out there. So now we are going to switch gears a little bit, asking you some questions that I'm sure you have been asked a lot that people want to ask you.

[27 : 30] And so we're moving into our lightning round. I feel like we need to, like, flip the switches and stuff. No, we won't do that. Okay. But we just want to start.

We'll start with you, Ben, and work down the line some interesting things that I'm sure people would like to ask you. First of all, how do you say Jesus or God in the language you studied?

And so maybe one of you can say Jesus and the other one can say God. So how do you say Jesus or God in the language you studied? Which language do you want? Your primary language. You do the primary one.

And I'll do the other one. Okay. So yesu and shangdi. Shamsi is the minority language. So yesu.

Yesu. Yesu. And you shouldn't try. That's true. Say the other one again. Shangdi. Shang. Shangdi.

[28 : 26] Di. Okay. So in the Central Asian languages, we would always refer to Jesus as Jesus the Messiah. That's Isa al-Nessi.

And then we didn't want to use their word for God, Allah, because they think of Allah. So we would use the word the most high, which is Sevisni.

Shangdi. And in Russian, it's bok for God and what was Jesus for Jesus. Jesus. Yeah. Okay. I'm not going to try to say the other ones.

I learned my lesson the first time around. How many languages can you say hello and thank you in? So how many languages can you say hello and thank you?

Eight. Eight? Eight. Yeah. Well, I don't like to brag. No, so we work with Muslims and Arab culture is Muslim culture.

[29 : 28] So all over the world, Muslims use words that are drawn from Arabic, even if they don't speak the Arabic language. So when you just walk into a group of Muslims globally and you just say, Salam alaikum, they're all like, wow, where'd you learn to speak our language, even though it's not their language.

So in a sense, Katie and I can say hello in dozens and dozens and dozens of languages because you just throw out Salam and they're like, wow, he's like one of us. It works great. But then of course, there's like in Russian and a couple other European languages as well. Yeah. The real question on that should be how many months did it take you to learn how to say hello in Russian?

Yeah. Because it's the normal greeting is, and it's just like, okay. Yeah. It sounded like you said vacuum, rats vacuum.

I mean, just sneeze when you walk into the shop and it'll kind of double. Very difficult. Very good. Okay. What was your favorite food to eat on the field?

[30 : 29] What was your favorite food to eat on the field? Rice noodles with kind of like this pulled pork. Yeah. Like a stewed pork. That was definitely mine. Uh, paro arse.

Yeah. Okay. My favorite was leong ogen pao la jiao. So it would be lotus root. Looks like a little flower when you chop it up.

And it had pickled peppers with it that Peter Piper picked. Okay. Same. Sounds delicious. Central Asians have a dish called plof, which is like pilaf, rice dish with a lot of veggies and lamb and a ton of oil.

And it's so good. My favorite food to eat was a Tajik dish called kortab. So you take a big wooden bowl and you put a loaf of bread in the bottom of it.

And then you take about a half gallon of heated yogurt and you pour it all on top of the bread. And then you take lamb, you put lamb on top of that.

[31 : 35] And then you take cucumber and tomato and put it on top of that. So it's kind of like a yogurt beef or a yogurt lamb stew. And then you eat it with your hand.

And it's, it is ridiculous because it's like, we're going to eat this soup with our paws. Here we go. And you get in there and it's like, okay, that's fantastic.

So. All right. That's a good segue into the next question. What is the strangest thing that you've ate? We can't say these words in church. Let me just put it this way.

The rear end of a goat. Gross. Yeah, it was gross. It was charcoal. They'd like thrown it on the fire and then pulled it out. And because I'm the honored guest, of course, they just like laid it out there for me.

Like here, this is for you. You get the special piece. And it, it was indeed special. I'm glad, glad you said that wasn't your favorite thing. It wasn't my favorite.

[32 : 37] I guess you could find that in America. I think blood sausage might've been the worst thing. I mean, I'm a phlebotomist. We spend years learning the technique of not putting the blood in your mouth.

Um, so I'm just, I could never get over blood sausage. Blood sausage. Uh, in Kazakhstan, when they have their big New Year's holiday, the main dish is a really nice tasty base of noodles that they hand make and they spend a lot of time.

And then the topping is horse meat. So that would be the strangest thing that I ate. Interesting.

Yeah. And I, I was the guest of honor.

I didn't know that. Um, they showed that because they gave me a massive horse's knee and they're like, we give this to the honored guests. So I had to eat all of it. It's just ridiculous.

But the strangest thing I ate was actually, it's, um, it's a Russian dish and they love it. They serve it at New Year's. It's called holiday. And they take meat and they boil it down for hours till all the water, water is gone.

[33 : 42] And all that you're left with is congealed fat. Take that fat and put it in a Jell-O mold. And they put that in the fridge and then they take the lid off and they're like, my mom made this for you.

And, and they eat it cold. And it's just like, it is the Jell-O of your nightmares. And, uh, yeah, that was the worst thing. And my friend of course is watching me as I eat it.

So just, that was the hardest. So if the carraways or the grassers bring a dish for a potluck, make sure that you're maybe second guessing that a little bit or asking a few questions.

Last question in this, in the lightning round part, uh, and an important one. What is this? What, or is there, excuse me, a passage of scripture that was helpful, encouraging, or significant to you and your ministry during your time in Russia or China?

Is there a passage that really is one that, um, the Lord used in a, in a big way to? Yeah. Luke 10 was, uh, was basically our bread and butter every day as we were going out. That's the passage

where Jesus is sending out the 72 and he gives them instructions to pray to the Lord of the harvest, uh, as they're going and, uh, gives some very specific details of what they're supposed to do as they go along the way.

[34 : 58] And, um, so that was for us, I'm not, not just a description, but it was, it was almost a prescription for us that we would apply that looking for those persons of peace that God had prepared, uh, going to one home, not just going from house to house, looking for the best meal in town.

Uh, but, you know, staying with that person of peace and then, you know, sharing the gospel with them there. And so, uh, especially in the context that we were in, where we were in a, you know, a closed country, hostile to the gospel, and we were not there as missionaries.

We were there, you know, doing a different platform. It was important for us to really follow what scripture said for our safety, but also just to depend upon, uh, the Lord to open up those opportunities and allow us to stay there.

So Luke 10. I think Ephesians 6, 9 and 10 says, uh, pray for me brothers that whenever I open my mouth, words will be given so that I can fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I will declare it fearlessly as I should. And I think for me, I, in my Bible, it says kindred of China. Um, and so, um, I didn't realize what all that was going to look like.

[36 : 11] I thought, well, I just need to be bold in this closed country, but it also turned into, okay, Lord, um, I don't know if what I'm saying is very clear or if I'm going to say the wrong thing, like, yeah, I'm going to let that one pass.

But, um, I, I think also there were times that my day to day looked like teaching my children. We were homeschooled.

That's what my day to day looked like. And, um, as someone that had worked outside of the home and wasn't used to that, I didn't feel like that was very exciting.

Um, sorry, kids, I love you. Um, and I loved homeschool, but, um, being in that home day after day, and there'd be days that Ben would come and say, hey, let's go to the village. And the next day we'd go out to the village and I could fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, which we are ambassadors in chains.

And all of a sudden I'm like, yeah, I could do this every day. Let's go. I can go back to homeschooling now. So it was that support and encouragement at the same time. Good. Um, yeah, for me definitely is what the Lord said at the end of the great commission and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.

[37 : 25] Um, cause I cannot tell you how isolated we were sometimes and how lonely it could be.

Um, you're, you're in a, let's say a market hall and there, there's a thousand people in here and you were the only believer. Um, it was so hard.

It was so cold. It was so dark. Their hearts were like stone. You would preach the gospel and they would say, that's better than what we have.

And you would say, do you want to believe? And they'd be like, no, no way. No, not at all. All of these moments. And then it was just a constant battle for me to always remember the Lord is with me.

The Lord is with me. The Lord is with me because he said that he would be. And even though I feel alone, I know that I'm not because he's with me. Similar for me. First Peter 4.12 says, let those who suffer according to God's will and trust their souls to their creator in doing what is right.

[38 : 28] And it just became an encouragement for me as we rounded year two and needed to make it through year three. It was like, this is just hard now. It's just hard. And that verse was so encouraging because it says, let those who suffer according to God's will and trust their souls to their creator in doing what is right.

And it was like, okay, I need to make sure that my suffering is according to God's will, that I'm not being sinful or anything. But to the extent that it is, I get to entrust my soul to God and know that he is the one who's going to be making this good at some point in time.

And I've seen that so much now, but during that third year, that was it. That was a really important verse. Yeah. Amen. One thing as a church that we've been praying for and hoping that the Lord will do and accomplish is to see him calling people from our congregation out into ministry, whether that's pastoring or being a missionary.

And so I was wondering if there was someone here this morning who they've heard you talk and the Lord's been speaking to them about giving their life to serving him full time and going overseas. What words or what encouragement would you give to them as they are discerning that call to possibly serve overseas on missions? I would say go, experience it, be a part of it.

[40 : 01] I would encourage that you find where scripture is pointing you that way. Have that be affirmed by the body and others around you.

I know that for us, when times got really hard, it was that calling, that certainty of calling that we went back to and said, well, I know for a fact that God called me, so I'm not going to quit. And we needed that anchor. But I would also encourage you that you don't have to be young to be called to the mission field.

Our closest friends overseas, probably, they didn't start until their kids were off to college, and then they moved overseas.

And I think that it's important, like I said earlier, it's not a certain type of person that is called, like the person that just fearlessly shares the gospel all the time.

[41 : 00] That's not necessarily who God calls. He might call those who are very quiet, but have gifts in other areas.

And so it doesn't matter if you're a minister, or if you've gone to seminary, or any of those things, if God's calling you, you're not too old, and you're not too young, or you're not too inexperienced to be obedient.

Good. Any other words of encouragement? Yeah, I think there are many things that can be done. One that I would really recommend, if you're trying to discern a calling, is to start to learn, to start to study, to find out what's going on in the world, to read about missions, movements.

Where is the church advancing? Because it's advancing all over the earth. But actually read about it. Where is the church being persecuted? We have a tremendous resource because Voice of the Martyrs is in this city.

Learn about people groups. Learn about languages. Learn about history. I spent tons of time. I should have been doing other things, really, but I was just looking at Wikipedia, Wikipedia, Wikipedia, article after article after article.

[42 : 19] And it was crazy to me how the Lord used those Wikipedia articles in my missions journey. I would run into somebody from a small people group, and I know their people group, and I knew their background.

And people would just be taken aback by that. And it was just because the Lord had allowed me just to collect knowledge. And especially if you're thinking about this calling now, it's a great opportunity to start to read and see how the Lord directs your calling.

Because for me, I was never interested in working with Muslims. I wanted to do something else. But through a long process, the Lord really led me towards Islamic ministry.

So I would say the more research you do, the more the Lord will use that to refine your focus. Yeah, and I would say if that's you and you have questions, I know that any one of you, for all four of you, would love to be able to give some advice and some encouragement and answer whatever questions you might have.

The last question for you, for what advice would you give a church that wants to be involved in overseas ministry? Yeah, I think it's really important that the church doesn't look at ministry overseas as just what they are going to bring to the field.

[43 : 37] Sometimes we have a focus of, okay, well, we're going to do this. We're going to go serve them in this way. And that may not necessarily be what the field needs.

And so being able to have a perspective of we want to serve the field. We want to serve those that are out there on the front lines. Helping serve our missionaries.

But also wanting to use your giftings to be able to reach the lost. It's a good thing. I think a great strategy is just to be able to ask, what do you need?

And so asking the missionaries, how can we serve you? What needs do you have that we can bring as a church? And really having a true partnership. You know, partnership isn't just one way of, okay, I give and I give and I give.

But it's really both sides of it. It's working in connection and tandem with each other. And so there is definitely something that the church receives as they go.

[44 : 37] Being able to – I just remember my first mission trip overseas. Being able to have my eyes open to lostness in a way that I never had before. And so going allows you to be able to do that.

But going strategically, going asking what are the needs and then how can we really partner together to advance the gospel. Again, I think that there are many things that could be said. But I think something that would be really important for a church that wants to be involved in missions, which is fundamentally an evangelistic work, is to be doing evangelism here. It is a tendency. Perhaps it's unique to the American church, but I doubt it, which is we don't want to be evangelistic where we are. But we hope that in the airplane ride to the field we'll become evangelists.

And I'm sorry to tell you it doesn't work that way. It would have made my life easier if it had. So if we want to be, as a church, evangelizing internationally effectively, that starts in Bartlesville.

[45 : 41] That starts with our family. It starts with our friends, our neighbors. And then it starts with people in this community who aren't exactly like us. Because if we can bridge the divide with somebody in our own city, we're going to be so much better equipped to do that when we are on the mission field.

Amen. Good. Very good. We're going to move on to our application questions. So there's four of these. We'll talk about these tonight in our community groups. If you're not a part of our community group, still good application questions for you to think about this week and to pray about.

Because we do want to be a church that is active in missions. And as Nick pointed out there at the end, missions doesn't mean just going overseas and sharing the gospel.

It takes place where you're at, where the Lord has you. That's your mission field. So question number one for us to discuss is just for you to reflect. How have you been involved in missions in the past and present?

So really just a question of reflection to think about what involvement you've had past and presently. Question number two. Read Matthew 24, 14, 28, 19 through 20.

[46 : 54] Acts 1, 8, Romans 10, 13 through 14. What does each of these passages say about missions? What involvement does God command you and our church to have in missions?

So the second question, we're going to the Word to see what the Lord has said. The expectation that He has for us as His church and you as a follower of His to be involved in missions.

Question number three. Many people from foreign nations live and work in Bartlesville. Do you know who they are? What can we do to reach them with the gospel?

And so I don't know if you've looked around at a lot of our different schools as you're dropping off your kids or you work. The Lord has really brought the nations to Bartlesville. Do we know who they are and what are we doing to reach them with the good news of Jesus Christ?

And then the fourth question. How can your group work together to engage our community with the good news of Jesus Christ? What missions, projects, can you organize and serve in together to advance the gospel locally and internationally?

[48 : 05] So what we want our community groups to do, and if you're not in a community group, you can still partner with one, is to just really be starting to think about what can your group do together in Bartlesville to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to be on mission together.

So be thinking about that tonight. I want to say to you guys that we're so glad and we're so thankful, one, for your willingness to go, for the work that the Lord has done through you.

We're so thankful that you're a part of Highland Park Baptist Church, so thankful that the Lord has brought you into our church family, and thankful for already what you've been willing to do here, helping us to have a different perspective of what it's like to be on the mission field, but also for any of us who have been around the Caraways or the Grassers, you know that they have a passion for missions.

They don't need to be in China or Russia for that, and so it's really a passion that I think is encouraging for the rest of us. So thank you for that too, just your encouragement for us to see that we have a responsibility to be involved in sharing the gospel here in Bartlesville and continue to do that throughout the world as well.

So thank you guys so much for sharing with us today. I'm going to pray, and as I pray, the praise team will come up. And for the invitation this morning, I just encourage you to be thinking about and praying about your involvement in missions and those people whom the Lord has put you in

community with, and what will you do, and how will you be used by Him to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

[49 : 50] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this time that we've had together this morning. Lord, we're thankful that you are faithful to advance your kingdom, to advance the gospel, that you use many different people and many different ways to do that, whether that's sending them overseas or just here in our community.

And so, God, we pray that we would be a people who is obedient to your commands to go and to make disciples. And so, Father, we pray that you would open our eyes to the opportunities that exist around us.

We pray that you would use us as individuals and collectively as your church to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and that you would be pleased and glorified by what we saw. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thank you.