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CHANGING LIVES



A TIME FOR SMILING

By Kelly Lewis

Many of us will face transitions in the coming year. This past year I faced two milestones: turning 50 and becoming an empty nester.

I knew I would miss being involved with my four kids and wondered how it would affect my marriage. I also considered my involvement at church, wanting to determine what ministries it was time to move on from. I didn't quite feel on firm footing. I knew I had to be rooted in God's Word.

The first passage that spoke to me was Ecclesiastes 3:2: there is *a time to plant and a time to uproot*. I spent a large portion of my life planting into my kids. I also developed skills as a worship leader and Bible study leader. Uprooting can be disruptive, yet God declares there is a time for it. It must be part of His best, and I want to embrace it without fear. I can struggle with this, and realized I tend to get my self-esteem from ministry rather than my position as a beloved child of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:6 says there is *a time to hold onto and a time to let go*. Instead of having firm roots trusting God's plan I find I can be more like ivy, clinging to what I love, be it a relationship, ministry, or possession. I want to obey God's Word, loosening my grasp and holding tightly to Him through changes.

I determined to apply Ecclesiastes 5:26: *He does not often consider the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the joys of his heart*. I don't want to be anxious about the future, but living in and appreciating today.

After one year of empty nesting, my husband I are exploring date nights, hobbies, and have more time to minister together. I am learning to slow down and listen to the Lord more. The encouragement from God's Word enables me to obey another verse: *She smiles at the days to come*, Proverbs 31:25.



MIKE'S MISSION STORY

By Mike Bledsoe

In 1977, I had a young family and the beginnings of a successful banking career. To that point, my spiritual world was very limited. I was committed to following Jesus and to being a godly husband and father but never really considered that I could be involved in missions.

I was challenged to think beyond our local church with a vision for reaching the world, to commit whatever I could to help fulfill the Great Commission. I told God to "count me in." I must admit, I didn't understand what that meant or even what the possibilities could be.

In my career I was given a good promotion one year later and I was able to be actively involved in business based ministry and was growing spiritually. Then... my banking career came to a screeching halt due to mergers and acquisitions. So, I did what any sound minded Spirit-filled man would do: I started two new businesses and I was making one-third of the income that I had previously. But, I still had an aching to be involved in missions.

Between the banking and starting the businesses, my wife and I went on a short-term mission trip to Romania serving as a business consultant. Through that experience, God gripped my heart for the world. God continued to allow us to be involved in missions even when we didn't have the personal resources to make it happen. Over the past 27 years, God has allowed us to be involved in missions in Romania, Moldova, Germany, Sweden, Ukraine and the Philippines.

God put a desire in me to be involved in missions. There is no way that I could have orchestrated the mission's ministry that He has given us. You never know how God will take a small commitment and turn it into a lifetime journey.

MISSION USA

THE SALVAGE PROJECT

By Jeromy Darling

The Salvage Project was founded in the fall of 2014 by Jeromy Darling as a vehicle for taking the gospel, through rock 'n roll, into prisons, halfway houses, hospitals and transitional living homes around the country.

I've read the life of William Wilberforce, an incredible man by any measure. He was a father of 6, a politician, philanthropist, who wrote books, gave impassioned speeches, suffered terribly from a stomach ailment, and in his spare time – *he ended slavery in Europe*. His life and work plagued my conscience with this one thought: "Are we not capable of doing more?" The Salvage Project is the answer to that question in my own life. My primary focus is young people

who are incarcerated, especially young men. This group was raised in a culture of broken promises. Many of these men are fatherless, betrayed by those who should have helped them most. Never before in the history of America has a group of young people faced such tremendous lies, temptations, distractions and dangers as they do in the 21st century. We will pay a heavy price for abandoning them. We already are. I want to go where few others will go – right into the belly of the beast – and use my music and message to help repurpose and restore lives through the ageless message of the gospel.

After spending 7 years as a music volunteer at the V.A. and 3 years doing volunteer concerts at local prisons in Minnesota, God opened the door for me to transition this work into a ministry.



I now team with GCC churches around the country to put on concerts in prisons in their communities or for their local youth. Since last fall The Salvage Project has traveled to 7 states and brought the gospel to over 1,000 hurting people.

Read more at
www.thesalvageproject.org.

MUSTACHES THAT MATTER

By Jackie Wallentin

Mustaches That Matter launched in July 2014, at Walnut Creek Church, in Des Moines, Iowa to help families in the adoption process cross their financial finish line.

MTM leverages the power of the mustache to assist families adopting internationally, domestically, or through the foster care system. All money raised goes into a fund to help multiple families each year. Within the first week, MTM met the month-long goal of raising \$25,000. In one month MTM provided \$76,131.

Over 200 men participated by growing mustaches, and they passed out business cards and engaged in conversations

throughout the month to ask family, friends, and coworkers to financially sponsor their mustaches. Many of the participants and a majority of the financial donors came from outside Walnut Creek, which allowed the gospel and the joy of adoption to spread.

The Ekwalls were one family helped through MTM. After hosting two children from Columbia in 2013, Will and Lori Ekwall knew they wanted to bring Jose (13) and Maria (11) home to stay and join their family, including their three children: Isabel, Eleanor, and Kendall. The Ekwalls hosted Jose and Maria through Kid Save, an agency that provides summer and weekend foster care programs.

"We went into the program mainly as an advocate family, trying to find a forever



MTM held a kickoff event at Walnut Creek Church

family for the kids," said Lori. "Once Jose and Maria were here, we knew they were really great kids who needed a home." The Ekwalls began the adoption process in September 2013 and last July their family traveled to Columbia to bring Jose and Maria home to Iowa. "We are very thankful for people's prayers for us, to know people are behind us," said Lori. "It's so good to be done with the process and have our new family home for good."

Visit mustachesthatmatter.com for more information regarding the campaign.

INTERNATIONAL

BRIDGE BUILDERS

By Jim Wiebelhaus

Jim Wiebelhaus pastors at Candlewood Church in Nebraska.

I want to invite you to Bridge Builders – a conference about mind-blowing opportunities to reach people groups with the gospel. Jesus commanded us to make disciples of every people-group in the world. He is so serious about this that He has brought millions of people to our front door.

International Students: Their number has grown to 890,000 and half of them are from the least evangelized countries of the world. Most are eager to make American friends and you could be the first Christian they have ever met. They are the future leaders of their countries

and by ministering to them you are reaching their country with the gospel. God is very strategic!

Immigrants: There are 40 million first-generation immigrants living in the U.S. Many immigrants come to the U.S. due to severe stress or violence in their home countries. They need to learn the language, how to file forms with the government, how to drive and shop, and they need friends! As you take the gospel to them, they are able to reach their own cultures. This must be our priority if their nations are to be reached with the gospel.

Are you interested in cross-cultural ministry? Do you sense that God might want you to do ministry overseas someday? The best way to prepare is to learn from, pray for, serve, love



and evangelize the people groups God has brought to your city. Bridge Builders encourages and informs people interested in cross-cultural ministry. Doug Brown, Ching Yu, Guang Song, Mike Keator, Kenny Young, Robbie McAlister, and others will be sharing their stories and passing on what they have learned, May 22-24 in Omaha, NE.

Learn more at
www.ism.candlewoodchurch.org.

ENGAGING MUSLIMS IN EUROPE

By Daniel Goering & Paul Meiburger

Not too many centuries ago Europe was the birthplace of the reformation. It generated theological thought and passion that reached around the world. It sent out missionaries, established beachheads, and provided models that other nations copied and used to impact the rest of the world.

The developments of the last 150 years however, have left Europe in a fog of secularism and atheism without a moral compass. Ed Slonchka of Global Reach Network shares a startling statistic about Europeans: "The percentage of non-Christians who know a Christian: 14%. This means that 86% of all non-believers do not even personally know a believer from whom they can receive good news." The immigration of Muslims into this vacuum presents a golden opportunity for the

gospel. Yes, some of them are being radicalized, but most are just wanting acceptance and to enjoy life in the West.

In order to better equip people to effectively engage Muslims, Great Commission Europe is planning to organize a "Ministry to Muslims" learning community in Cologne, Germany. This will be facilitated by Sarwar Aziz (a former Muslim, now an elder in the church in Cologne), and Paul Meiburger (a pastor in Torino, Italy, where there is one of the highest population densities of Muslims in Europe).

When the majority of Muslims arrive in Europe, they are generally very open to new ideas. It is a key time to reach them for Christ. Sadly, too many Christians maintain a distance out of fear, forfeiting golden opportunities to befriend, serve, and share the love of Christ. We are



Paul Meiburger with Arab friends in Italy

praying this weekend will be a big step forward, that those who come learn how to effectively share the gospel with Muslims around them, and that more Muslims in Europe will become followers of Jesus



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INSIDE GCC



BRIDGE BUILDERS

The 2015 International Student Ministry & Asia Mission Conference *Bridge Builders* will be May 22-24, 2015 in Omaha, Nebraska.

A Bridge Builder is someone others can walk across to find salvation in Jesus. Join this conference to be inspired, informed, encouraged and equipped at becoming more effective in various forms of cross-cultural ministry.

Learn more at

www.ism.candlewoodchurch.org

MEET A GCC PASTOR

THIS EDITION: CHRIS BIANG

I was a freshman at Iowa State when I came to Christ in January 1972. I met my wife (Virginia Bovenmyer) later as part of a church plant team from Ames, Iowa, to East Lansing, Michigan. We were married three years later, and began our family of five. I was appointed an elder in 1982. In the mid-eighties we noticed the beginning symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis in Virginia. In 1988 we moved to Chicago to help with a church plant. Soon, Virginia was full time in a scooter. She still managed to home school all five children until they went to college.

Our children are involved in Great Commission churches in Kansas, Illinois, and Indiana. Four of the five are married with five grandchildren. We moved to Purdue in 2010 to help with the church there. Currently I pastor in West Lafayette, In., and serve our region of churches. In November last year we had two sons married on the same day, two different churches, one joint reception. It was a big day in the Biang family.



Virginia has had recurring bouts of MS related difficulties. The verses we rely on are about His grace:

"And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

"Never take counsel of your fears." Stonewall Jackson

RAISING UP FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

JOHN HOPLER - DIRECTOR, GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES



"You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and set your journey..." Deuteronomy 1:6-7

Moses was coming to the end of his life when he wrote the words quoted above. The Israelites had been wandering year after year. But now they needed to step out. They had stayed where they were long enough. It was time to start their journey into the Promised Land.

In this newsletter, we read about several individuals who decided that they had "stayed long enough" where they had been. Some launched out a new

ministry. Others stepped out and traveled to a new country. Others reached out to a new group of people.

As an association of churches, we are committed to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to every man, woman, and child. To do so, it will mean ordinary men and women like you and me stepping out in a new way to reach people for whom Jesus Christ died.

What is God laying on your heart? What has the Holy Spirit been saying to you about your next journey? Who is it that God wants you to bring the gospel to, so that Jesus Christ may be the Lord of all?

May God bless you as you refuse to stay any longer where you are, and turn to set your journey to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.



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