

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Fall 2022
VOLUME 8 • ISSUE 3

How Do We Measure Success?



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From the President

Faithfulness + Patience = Fruitfulness

BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN

In some things in life, success is easy to define and measure. One of my lifelong goals was to run the Boston Marathon. Before being able to participate, I had to run a qualifying time. After multiple failed attempts, I finally managed to qualify for and compete in the 126th running of the Boston Marathon in April of this year. I even ran a personal best time and qualified for next year's event at the same time. For me, that was "success" several times over!



Success in global missions can be a bit harder to wrap our minds around. Some define the goal based on the Great Commission Jesus himself gave to the church (Matt. 28:19): to make disciples of all nations (or people groups). That's no small task. Even after 2000 years of Christian witness, about one-third of the world's population still has little or no access to a Bible, a believer or a local body of Christ. Thankfully, research initiatives like the Joshua Project help us track which cultural groups still lack access to the gospel. We are seeking to give increased attention to those groups in our own work at VM Missions.

Others would define the goal differently. In the second half of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20), Jesus commands us to teach these new disciples to obey everything he has commanded. From that vantage point, success is living in accordance with the principles of God's kingdom, particularly those upside-down kingdom principles Jesus lays out in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7): humility, purity of heart, marital fidelity, reconciliation, truth-telling, loving neighbors and even enemies, and sharing generously with those in need, to name a few.

I wonder what it would look like to hold together both the breadth of the Great Commission (every nation) with the depth of the call to discipleship (every commandment of Christ). I expect it would include counting the number of disciples and churches emerging in a particular cultural group. It might also mean finding ways to measure the degree to which those disciples and churches obey the commands of Christ. Ideally, we would also assess the tangible social and spiritual impact they are having on the surrounding community.

I confess I feel some discomfort with measuring "success" in missions. Depth of transformation is not an easy thing to quantify, nor do we often see immediate results. Like seed in the soil, it may lie dormant for quite some time before springing to life, maturing and bearing fruit. But like good farmers, we should be willing to calculate the yield of our efforts.

Perhaps the key to long-term fruitfulness in Christian mission is faithful witness combined with patient trust in the Lord of the harvest. As Paul reminds us, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6, NRSV). We measure our results—however long they may take to be evident—not to congratulate ourselves, but to give glory to the God who slowly but surely is making all things new.

Cover: Anita Rahma and her sons Josh and Simon (names changed) walk through their slum community in Jakarta, Indonesia, where garbage collectors eke out a living amid poverty and disease.

Main photo courtesy of Anita Rahma. Small cover photos (from left) courtesy of: Anita Rahma / Paul Yoder / Nahid Sultan / Nathan Carr / Joyel Allen.

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/21 to 08/31/22

Special Projects \$1,406,578	Special Projects \$1,502,032
Mission Fund \$910,264	Mission Fund \$987,873
Income Total \$2,316,842	Expenses Total \$2,489,905

Mission Fund: undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries.

Transforming

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2022 Bike Shenandoah Ride Raises \$28,000

On September 17, 84 participants of the 25th anniversary Bike Shenandoah hit the road to raise money for six local entities engaged in services and ministries with both local and global impact, including VMissions. The event was a resounding success, raising a total of approximately \$28,000. In addition to the funds raised, the ride is designed to be a fun way to build community and create friendships around common causes and interests.

Bike Shenandoah had some exciting additions this year. It was a special treat to have two of the beneficiary organizations include their own groups of participants in the ride. Eleven youth participated in the 25K ride (pictured) as the first of many adventures to come in their year-long journey with SLAQ (Servant Leader Quest), a ministry led by VMissions worker Ken Wettig. And for the first time, children from the Roberta Webb Early Education Center also participated in a “bike rodeo.” Approximately 15 children and their families (who benefit from the funds raised by Bike Shenandoah) joined in the fun.

“God blessed us with beautiful weather, safe riding, and good food, fellowship, and fun,” said Jay Leaman, chair of the Bike Shenandoah board. “We are thankful for all the riders, sponsors, and volunteers who made this fundraiser a success.”

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Border Perspective

U.S./Mexico
learning tour
March 5 - 10



Nazareth/Bethlehem

Learning and
work tour
May 1 - 15



Wayfarers Germany, France

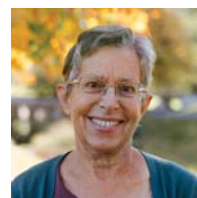
Learning and
discipleship tour
May 23 - June 1



Amman, Jordan

Serve on a
medical team
Summer 2023

Carol Tobin, VMissions Mission Advocate, Retires



On August 31, Carol Tobin retired from her staff role as Mission Advocate and Transforming Content Editor.

Though her formal role has ended, she will continue in volunteer roles for VMissions, including helping to coordinate the upcoming Perspectives course and local missions recruitment efforts. VMissions is grateful for her many years of faithful service on staff.

Carol served with her husband Skip and family for 16 years in Thailand with Eastern Mennonite Missions in the northeastern province of Ubon, among the Buddhist-majority Isaan people. In 2005, they became jointly appointed with VMissions. After ending their assignment in Thailand, they became VMissions staff members. They are parents of six daughters, several of whom are current mission workers with VMissions in Asia.

“When Skip and I put roots down in Harrisonburg, after our many years as church planters in Thailand, I was very grateful to have the opportunity to actually do things here, instead of forever telling people what we were doing someplace else. There was no way that our missional habits were going to end when we left!” she noted.

Carol found herself still focused on mission connections in Asia when she joined the staff of VMissions in 2010 as Global Ministry Associate, and later as Asia Regional Director. In 2020, she became Mission Advocate, which encompassed mission recruitment and many facets of promotion and mobilization. With a strong writing and editing background, she took on the role of Content Editor of this publication until her retirement.

● Whose Voice Are We Listening To?

BY ANITA RAHMA (NAME CHANGED)

“God has not called us to be successful, but to be faithful.” These words were spoken by Mother Teresa, who is, ironically perhaps, one of the most “successful” people on the planet—if we measure success by fame, followers, and positive impact on the world. But how should we as Christians define or measure success or failure? What does it mean to serve God faithfully in our particular contexts? How can we ever know if we are doing enough or being faithful enough or successful enough?

A friend in Harrisonburg, Va., recently shared with me that in the morning she tries to do (1) devotions, (2) Duolingo, (3) breakfast, and (4) a morning run before heading to her office. It is lovely when we have attainable rhythms and goals to keep us healthy and measure “success” clearly.

But on the mission field, so often this seems impossible. So often things seem outside of our control, and much of our energy is spent just surviving in a different culture, language, and religious context.

Those of us with young children on the mission field know all too well that it is difficult to measure a successful day. The list of things that one must do just to survive is incredibly long. Is the day a failure if I lost my patience and yelled at my children? If we forgot to have vegetables as part of our meals? If the laundry did not get done and the dishes did not get washed?

Depending on one’s mission assignment, it might be very hard to measure success in ministry. For those with a clear job description with an already existing agency (e.g. pastoring a church, teaching in a school, working as a doctor or nurse in a hospital), perhaps it is easier at the end of a day, a week, or a term to feel like you have accomplished something or met your goals. For those of us in uncharted territory of ministry, it can feel impossible to measure.

I reflected recently on the *A Life Overseas* blog that we are sowing seeds, but too often those seeds die—or we never see the growth. Heartbreak can seem all too real, but often we try to only tell our supporters back home the positive

stories, the breakthroughs, the joys. But we need to talk about the deaths, the griefs, and the brutal disappointments.

In my book *Beyond Our Walls: Finding Jesus in the Slums of Jakarta*, I strive to share honestly about the journey of following Jesus to an unlikely mission field. I share about the heartbreaks and losses: fires, evictions, deaths of students, sicknesses, and team struggles. But I deeply believe that Jesus is with us in our suffering, and that somehow the process of walking through the valley of failures and challenges has brought us closer to our Lord.



A fire in 2020 devastated parts of the slum community where Anita and Yosiah serve.

Photo courtesy of Anita Rahma

When I joined Servants to Asia’s Urban Poor twelve years ago, I interned first in the inner-city neighborhood of the Downtown Eastside in Vancouver. The needs there were incredibly overwhelming; literally thousands of people on the streets struggling with homelessness, drug addiction, and involved in the sex-industry.

How could I, a young university graduate, possibly do anything to make a difference?

For those of us in uncharted territory of ministry, success can feel impossible to measure.

One night I had a dream that I will never forget. I dreamed I received a manilla envelope in the mail and on the front of the envelope was a skull and crossbones. When I opened the envelope, a piece of paper fell out with the large inscription: insufficient.

I awoke, terrified. And I had to spend time praying and asking the Lord to calm me. That dream was Satan speaking lies over me. It is the whisper (or often *loud* voice) in my head, telling me that all that I do is insufficient. I can never make a difference in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. I can never actually see change in this slum community where we have planted ourselves for the last ten years in Jakarta. The needs are too overwhelming. And I am insufficient.

But, there is truth to conquer that voice.

And the truth is that Jesus is enough. Jesus is more than sufficient. Jesus is the hope and the truth and the life. Jesus is the hope for the world, our families, and ourselves.

I love how the apostle John put it:



A view of the slum's trash dump, where members of the community earn a very meager living by collecting and reselling whatever they can find. When frequent flooding occurs, outbreaks of disease such as malaria and typhoid are widespread. Photo courtesy of Anita Rahma

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... For from his fullness we have all received, *grace upon grace*" (ESV, emphasis added).

As we minister, whether overseas in another country, or across the street in our local neighborhood, we must remember whose we are. We are servants—and children—of a beautiful savior, a loving king, and a forgiving friend. We have nothing to prove, no merit to earn. We have been forgiven; we have received grace upon grace. And out of this fullness—out of his fullness—we can become bearers of his love and compassion to those around us.

I think that Mother Teresa was right. We are not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful. May we receive, each day, the Lord's love and live into that truth. And when we do fail (which we will, because we are human), may we once again receive the Lord's grace to carry on.

Anita Rahma and her husband Yosiah (names changed) are founders of House of Hope, a free kindergarten and afterschool program in their slum community in Jakarta, Indonesia, in partnership with Servants to Asia's Urban Poor.

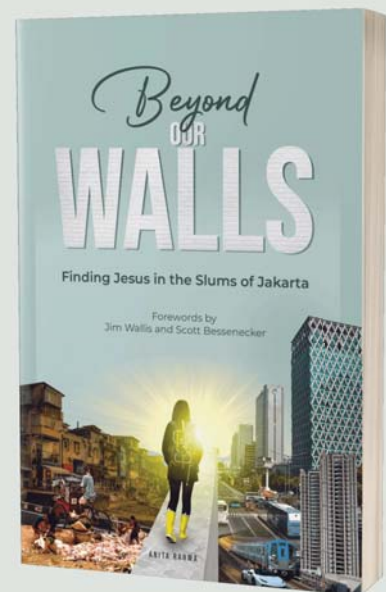
See "Some Seeds Die" at www.alifeoverseas.com

Order *Beyond Our Walls*—out November 15, 2022:

Amazon: amazon.com/dp/1645084485/

Publisher: missionbooks.org/products/beyond-our-walls

**And the truth
is that Jesus is
enough. Jesus
is more than
sufficient.**



Beyond Our Walls: Finding Jesus in the Slums of Jakarta provides a unique window into what ministry in an urban slum setting can look like. The author shares the amazing story of God's faithfulness in her life as she follows Jesus into the slums of Jakarta, Indonesia, and still lives there twelve years later with her husband and two young sons.

Not only have her Muslim neighbors had an opportunity to get to know a follower of Jesus, but the author herself has been forever changed by her experiences. While life in the slums is often hard, the joys are many as well.

—WILLIAM CAREY PUBLISHING

Success Requires Transformation

BY PAUL J. YODER



As a teacher educator, I often remind my students to refer back to the learning objectives they have identified in their lesson plans. These future teachers are gaining knowledge and skills that will equip them to be effective educators.

The role of objectives in their planning is key—the objective is the goal.

In my four years on the VMissions Board of Directors, I have found that our vision statement serves as a beautiful and life-giving objective. The verb “envisions” speaks to the “picture” that we are painting. The goal is a lofty one—one that neither I, nor the whole of VMissions, can achieve. Yet I find that our vision is powerful precisely because it is aspirational and therefore reminds us that we rely on the Holy Spirit.

Three Scriptures have recently been helping me more fully “envision” success in God’s kingdom by highlighting both the transformation we need in order to discover God’s kingdom and the transformation we experience through our kingdom participation.

Jesus Transforms Our Person

The close link between transformation and God’s kingdom shone through during a recent Sunday School lesson on John 3. In John 3:3, Jesus tells Nicodemus: “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (HCSB). The causal relationship that Jesus describes is profound. Being “born again” is not simply for my salvation, but is directly related to my ability to envision God’s kingdom.

I am inspired by the “Spirit-filled church of many cultures” phrase in our vision precisely because it is the work of transformation through Christ that is bringing together believers and workers from many cultures, communities, and countries. As Jesus illustrates in John 3:8, God’s Spirit is not constrained by language or miles.

Jesus Transforms our Perspective

Philippians 1:9-11 has been an anchoring passage in the life of my family following the death of my father, Nate Yoder, in April 2020. During our last family beach trip a few years earlier, Dad had printed copies of this passage to use during our full family devotional time. In reflecting on this passage, I am reminded that righteousness is a very

difficult word for four-year-old children to pronounce, and that a righteous life is the fruit of not just devotion to

God but knowledge of God’s kingdom, the peaceable reign by which God wants us to order our lives. This transformed way of life prepares us for “the day of Christ” and brings glory to God.

Jesus Transforms our Purpose

Finally, the Luke 5 passage in which Jesus calls his first disciples illustrates the ways in which God provides and then calls us to transformation in God’s kingdom. When Jesus approaches Simon Peter, he performs an initial miracle by telling them where to fish and then overflowing their nets. This interaction astonishes and even distresses these professional fishermen. Peter declares himself “a sinful man” and asks Jesus to leave. But Jesus invites Peter, James, and John into new life, including a new vocation of “fishing for people.”

In sum, success in God’s kingdom requires and reflects continual transformation. The transformation is so complete that we sometimes refer to God’s “upside-down kingdom” or being “born again” (John 3:3). In this new kingdom, the old measures of success—political power (Nicodemus) or a full net of fish (Peter)—are replaced with a life of discipleship. In this new kingdom, followers of Jesus overcome the tribalism and polarization of our society through the power of the Holy Spirit. This vision of right relationship and a “harvest of righteousness” is only possible through Jesus (Philippians 1:11; NRSV).

I choose to invest in the work of VMissions because I believe that VMissions is driven by a worthy objective: envisioning a Spirit-filled church of many cultures living out God’s kingdom in every sphere of life. Just like I remind my students, objectives like this give us a goal to focus upon and strive toward. May we at VMissions pursue that beautiful goal wholeheartedly through the transforming work of Jesus Christ, who is bringing vision into reality.



Success Can Rise Out of Failure

BY ANNE (NAME CHANGED)



A few years ago, I was part of a vibrant discipleship group of women of Muslim background. Over the years, they built bonds of trust between them. Two of them had teenage kids: Helena was the mother of Milli, a shy yet flirtatious girl with beautiful eyes.

Malika was the mother of Chondo, a skinny boy who was more interested in computers than class. I was amazed when I heard that Milli and Chondo were interested in each other. The four parents talked it over together and agreed that in a few years (Milli was 15), the two could get married. Both Chondo and Milli attended one of our youth conferences, and I was glad to see that they were getting to know each other within a safe environment.

In village Islamic community, all romantic interest is taboo and teens are commonly married off by their parents with only a few days' notice. I was thankful and proud that the believing community was finding a new way forward that gave the youth a chance to get to know their future spouse and model the ways a Christian marriage is completely different than an Muslim one.

One evening at the campfire, Chondo shared with me how he hears from God, and how at peace he was. Wow, now that's success!

Months later, I found out that Chondo's parents had married him off to a Muslim widow. I was shocked. Chondo had failed a major high school exam, and when Milli's parents heard, they were angry and responded by marrying her off to a Muslim man instead of him. Chondo's dad in turn arranged a quick marriage between Chondo and a Muslim widow named Ayesha. Ayesha was in her mid-twenties, with a toddler, grieving over the death of her husband in a road accident. The relationship between the mothers, Helena and Malika, was completely broken.

Just when I rejoice at how good things are going, things fall apart.

I was furious. Chondo and Milli were both still in their teens. And to be married off to Muslims—how does that build the church? Now Chondo is supposed to be a parent when he isn't even ready for marriage? And what if Milli's husband refuses to allow her to read the Bible or be part of church? How could people in our own faith community act so vengefully and with so little consideration for faith?

This experience illustrates my struggle with success. Just when I rejoice at how good things are going, at how much fruit is resulting from my ministry, things fall apart. I could easily name ten other situations similar to this one where seeming success crashed down into failure in the most disturbing and disheartening ways. They leave me bound up in grief, anger, and despair. I feel like quitting,



Steve Evans/CC Wikimedia

and many times I have found myself creating distance from the people who have brought so much disappointment into my life. My attitude toward these "failures" is so often a failure itself: full of bitterness, hopelessness, and anger.

And yet the Lord is faithful. He is so patient with our bad years and our bad attitudes. He promises to never leave us, to never give up on us, and that patience extends to

the brokenness of our brothers and sisters as well. Just like the Lord is patient and forgiving of my anger, so the Lord is patient with all his children who make a string of bad decisions that wreck others' lives. And sometimes, against all hope, success rises up out of failures I had given up for dead. This kind of resurrection is work only Jesus can do.

After a year or two of marriage, Chondo and his wife Ayesha moved to our city. I was still angry and unwilling to engage with them. But Chondo kept bringing Ayesha over to visit and despite my attitude, I got to know her. Here was a girl, widowed before the age of twenty, which in South Asia used to be a death sentence. But she was given in marriage to Chondo, and to her surprise, she was loved and cared for, given freedom of dress, movement, and faith.

Her heart opened wide to Jesus. She asked me to help her understand the Bible better. So I began to disciple Ayesha. She, and her eagerness, drew Chondo deeper into trusting Jesus. The two of them were baptized, dunked in our bathtub last term. That was a success! But the truth is that none of it has gone in the way I hoped for. I think the only success I can personally count is my increasing intimacy with this Jesus, friend of sinners; this one who is so patient with our striving for success.

Anne (name changed) lives in South Asia, where she enjoys discipling Muslim-background women.

● Success Is Doing What Pleases the Lord

Nathan's own story and example demonstrates a transformed life in Jesus.

BY NATHAN CARR

What is success in recovery ministry? That's a question I've had to think a lot about in the past few years as I've launched into ministry of my own.

My cousin Lewis and I had barely talked for probably 15 years, but one day he called me to ask for help. It turns out he had seen the ways my own life had been changed, and that gave him hope of a different life for himself. He was heavy in addiction, suicidal, on the verge of losing his family and everything he had. He saw what had happened to me and was desperate to know how to do it.

I was in a position to help him. I had new skills in ministry through my work here at VMissions, and more practice at leadership from running Celebrate Recovery meetings. God had given me someone to care for, and the tools to make a difference. One night I reached out to the church and called a meeting on Zoom for us to pray for Lewis. More than 70 people joined to lift up this man's needs, and then joined our efforts to meet them. We got plane tickets to fly him and his son here from Kansas, helped him get settled here, found him a job, and connected him with a community.

He took that start and ran with it—God was working in his heart. I was just there to guide him here and there. The change was dramatic. He got his life together, he attended meetings, he built new patterns and new relationships. And as a result, his transformation inspired others to change too. The mother of his son, who had stayed in Kansas because of her own season of struggle, soon noticed the positive change, and decided to move here to join them. They've now been married for two years, and she is involved in ministry as well. Lewis has started leading a Celebrate Recovery group, and is considering a call to be a pastor.

This was a success. It felt close to my heart to shepherd someone with an almost identical story to mine, and pour out the kind of help and love to others that God had used to save me. He was leading the wrong life, and through my work God helped him find a right one. It leaves me feeling grateful that I could be in a position to give guidance the same way it was given to me. And Lewis' story is one of many—guys I've sponsored who are now healthy, in leadership, starting their own groups. Some of these victories are



Nathan Carr (right) with his cousin Lewis. Courtesy photo

My own definition of success has to run deeper than just a sense of accomplishment, or I'm not going to make it very far.

dramatic, some of them are quiet. All of them are lives changed through the work I've been called to do.

But they're God's successes, not mine, as much as I'm grateful to be part of them.

My own definition of success has to run deeper than just a sense of accomplishment, or I'm not going to make it very far. Early in my ministry I fell into that trap of thinking I was the one

who had to make things happen. I allowed people's struggles to become personal to me, and I always felt I should have done more when someone relapsed. I put everything on my own shoulders, and it wore me out. I was forced to face the reality that I could only give them so much.

I talked through my struggle and self-doubt with Pastor Margaret, my ministry mentor. Why wasn't God using me to change the lives of the people I was working with?

Her response has stuck with me: "If he doesn't use you today, he might use you tomorrow. Be willing to wait, to be alert, and be ready. What's pleasing to him is that you're available when he wants you."

That's a deeper definition of success: to do what pleases the Lord, whatever it is. Christ is not looking for results, he's looking for hearts with a love for doing what pleases him.

I recently had a talk with Lewis, who was grappling with these same questions, eager to move forward in some of our big ideas for the ministry, anxious to see progress and results. It's exactly how I used to feel, and how I still feel sometimes. But this time I was able to point him toward the success that really matters. What pleases the Lord more than all that stuff is living by his word, providing for our families and leading them to him, living a godly life. Quiet things.

If we want to see real success that changes our lives from the bottom up, then we need to be willing to give up changing the world and learn to love doing what pleases the Lord.

Nathan Carr serves men in recovery and those released from jail in Harrisonburg, Va.

● Success Is the Outflow of Abiding

As she engages Mary Baldwin University with the gospel, Joyel finds her success in being with God, as her work flows out from abiding in him.

BY JOYEL ALLEN



Success in the kingdom of God can look vastly different than success in the world. We're fed from family members, teachers, and friends that success looks like a lot of money, influence, and power. Those things are not

inherently bad. The issue comes

in when we expect those things to actually fulfill our being and meet the needs of our soul. The world promises things that it can never actually fulfill and leaves us feeling empty.

Followers of Christ have the simple yet challenging opportunity to be with God and to let the work we do overflow from that. And once we do that, we are successful in the kingdom of God. In my own personal life and ministry, sometimes I get this concept switched—that I somehow have to do things for God to get his approval and to be successful. But this simply isn't true.

We get the chance to invite God into our brokenness, our best days and our mundane, and be with him.

During my senior year, I got really involved in campus ministry, trying to finish up my classes, and securing a job for my future. Somewhere in that, I stopped seeking God's face and started to only seek his hand. While fasting, God pointed out to me that I had a list of things that I would come to him with and then just leave his presence to get on with my day. I even had a list of things to pray about during the fast and didn't ask God what he wanted to do.

As a result of this, I developed pride, anxiety, and I was exhausted from ignoring the reality that I could go to my heavenly Father to just be with him. During that time, God was faithful and loving to correct me and focus my attention back on him. And from that time abiding with him, I was fruitful in all of those areas!

It's amazing that Love Himself curated a space for you and I to just be. We can see this concept of just being with God all throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, God instructed his people to build different temples and tabernacles to dwell with his children. In the Psalms, David describes a strong desire to dwell with his creator, and we learn that

God inhabits the praises of his people. God even gave the ultimate sacrifice of his son on the cross which allowed for us to be reconciled to the Father.

We can see there's something so special about creation being with our creator. The outflow of abiding and being with God is the fruit that we bear that not only benefits us, but those around us.

We're constantly approached with opportunities to remain distracted, in bondage, and lost. We can trade God's truth for lies of the enemy that negatively affect how we view ourselves or how we view God.

But even then, God is faithful to redirect us back to him. There is a fulfillment that we experience that trumps any kind of success the world can give. To be successful in the kingdom is to be with God.

I wrote a poem when I realized that I could show up as myself and be with the holy God:

God Is A Safe Space

Inspiration: Psalm 91:2

I can mess up here—He is my safe space

I can be corrected here—He is my safe space

I can be vulnerable here—He is my safe space

Perfection Himself, curated a space for you and I to just be...

I can go forth confidently—He is my safe space

Worry has no hold on me—He is my safe space

I do not fear—He is my safe space

Perfection Himself, curated a space for you and I to just be...



A small group that Joyel hosts at Mary Baldwin University plays a game.

Courtesy of Joyel Allen

Joyel Allen serves in college ministry at Mary Baldwin University as a tranSend intern in partnership with Every Nation Campus.

Call to Prayer: Praying Together Is Success

Is praying together its own answer? Looking for answers in the future, we may fail to notice what is being accomplished in the present.

BY CAROL TOBIN

When Skip and I were in the process of bringing closure to the seven years we spent leading our mission team in Det Udom, Thailand, there was one bitingly poignant incident which I will never forget.

My teammate Kara (name changed) and I stood soberly looking at each other—wives and mothers with parallel journeys across those seven years together. Both of us had mothered infants, weathered illness, doggedly homeschooled, and endured loneliness. But because we struggled in vastly different ways, each was always a frustrating enigma to the other. The painful judgments and the bitter disappointment we had been to each other hung heavily between us.

And so we voiced the inevitable question: “Was it worth it?” A sad hug. It wasn’t a question either of us was prepared to answer. We were both so weary.

Another experience came some months later, which has stayed with me these many years. We had moved to the U.S. and were being given a warm welcome in Harrisonburg, Va.

One evening, at a large prayer gathering, I scanned the room for familiar faces. But how could there be familiar faces? We were too new to know or be known. As we prayed, a fierce desire rose up in my heart. I longed to see my teammates! The desire to see them became so strong that it became a prayer that I almost expected to be answered immediately, as if I could turn around and there they would be! I would know them; they would know me. And, best of all, we would pray *together*! What joy that would be!



Carol and Skip Tobin talk with friends in Det Udom, Thailand, in 2006.

Courtesy of Carol Tobin.

In the absence of the crucible of life within our team, I finally realized that I would be forever longing for the specific sweet taste of prayer with close brothers and sisters, carrying the same burdens, living and longing for the same answers to the same prayers.

I had discovered that there is such a thing as unity of heart, powerful enough to transcend the difficulties and enable us to withstand the incompatibilities present in our relationships.

Psalms 133 reminds us, “How good and pleasant it is, when God’s people live together in unity!” Perhaps we are inclined to think that this unity refers to the ease of simply being with people who like us, or rather people who are like us! But what if unity is forged out of something far fiercer? What if the unity is founded first and foremost on the common desire for God’s purposes to be accomplished?

It was the huge potentiality of unity of purpose gone awry that necessitated the scattering at Babel. And now, thanks be to God, we have been gathered back and are invited into a new

experience of unity as we corporately embrace the very power of the Spirit in our midst. As a body, we can allow God to use us for God’s purposes that will always come “not by might nor by power but by my spirit says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6).

This year, I have been blessed to participate in several prayer clusters in which we sense this fierce forging. It’s not friendship or a common stage of life, or even similar convictions on particular political issues that bring us together. Rather, we enjoy a uniquely invigorating capacity to agree for God’s missional purposes to be accomplished in a particular context that we all care about deeply.

Let’s learn to seek this kind of unity! For is this not “success?” Isn’t this coming together to pray and seek God’s will and way an “answer” in and of itself? After the passing of years, it’s the answer that my teammate and I can graciously and gratefully acknowledge, “Yes, it was worth it!”

Carol Tobin is a former VM Missions staff member and mission worker in Thailand.



Ken Wettig (left) leads a discussion with SLAQ participants during Bike Shenandoah on September 17. Courtesy of Ken Wettig

Worker Profile: Ken Wettig

Service program: transForm
Serving since: 2021

Assignment:

I serve as the initiator and director of a youth discipleship program called SLAQ (Servant Leader Quest) in which we seek to raise up diverse cohorts among the next generation of serving leaders in the way of Jesus through outdoor adventures, community service, and “crucial conversations.” We seek to do this by coming alongside both Christian families and the local church to create formative experiences that both support and challenge youth in developing the kind of character and leadership that we see in the person of Jesus.

For the most part my role is to: 1) Do program development along with our leadership team, 2) coordinate the various cohort activities, 3) support the young adult Serving Leaders as they step out into increasing levels of leadership, and 4) seek out ministry partners who believe in what we do and want to join in the adventure by supporting SLAQ through prayer, finances, and networking.

Biggest challenge:

The biggest challenge I face in my role is similar to that of any other ministry leader in the United States: time. We live in such a busy culture, and unfortunately the same is true for high school-aged youth as well. So, making sure the schedule is laid out months in advance, and that all the various pieces are well-communicated represents much of the challenge in this sort of ministry. Finally, just getting out of the way and letting the Holy Spirit work among the Serving Leaders and youth as they really own the learning experience is a challenge I hope to better meet in the coming year.

Biggest joy:

The biggest joy is the same every time, it’s the actual monthly cohort learning activities themselves. Every aspect of the cohort takes significant levels of behind the scenes coordination and planning, which can be taxing, but once that work reaches its intended purpose—our learning activities—it is all worth it. Whether the outdoor

excursion, the community service, or the crucial conversations, the youth bring a lot of energy and excitement to everything we do, and I find it an honor to be a part of it every time.

A typical month:

Each month we roll through a series of three learning activities: outdoor excursions, community service, and crucial conversations. The SLAQ Day includes a Discovery Bible Study, before we all load into a 15 passenger van to head out for the outdoor excursion (hiking, biking, rock climbing, paddling, caving), then a time of quiet reflection and prayer of blessing. Our plans for community service are still being developed; the SLAQ cohort, with young adult serving leaders and two volunteer parents, will spend one weekday evening a month doing volunteer service work within the community. And each month we meet for crucial conversations: together as parents, youth, and pastors, we engage in a shared conversation on an important faith and culture topic.



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