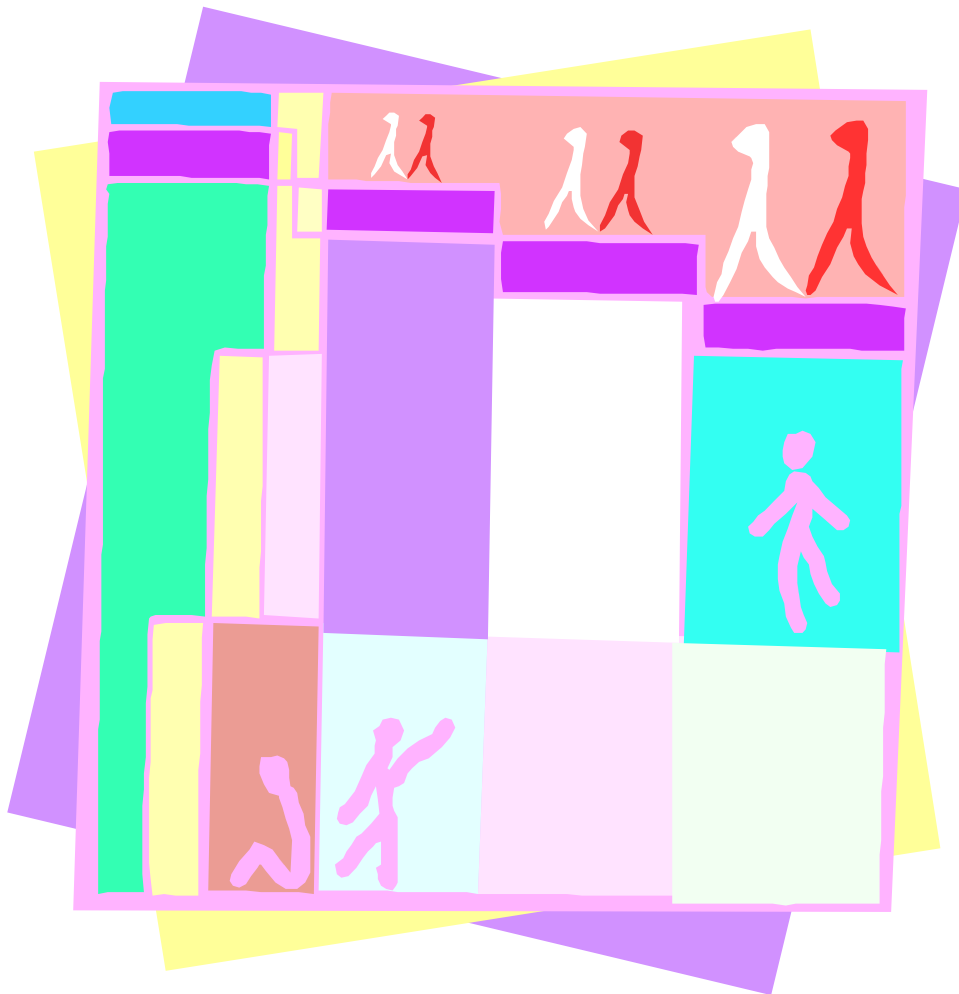


Steps on the Missionary Road.



28 Reflections for First Time Mission Partners

Claudia Smith

DAY 1: John 1 v 1-14

'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' v 14

God, the Creator and sustainer of all life, left behind His rightful glorious existence in the heavenly realms to become a man - a humble human being. Jesus, God made flesh became the most radical missionary the world has ever known. Jesus came to earth, to save His creation from their sin and bring reconciliation with God. He came to show humanity a new way to live and have their being. A life lived to first love and serve God and secondly to love and serve others. A life of servant hood and of sacrifice, by no means an easy road - the gate is narrow to this road and few enter. But be assured those who enter and embrace the taking up of the cross will find their reward is great in Heaven, their final destination. So be encouraged and challenged, you are following in profoundly holy footsteps as you step into your new life as a missionary.

'Jesus, God made flesh became the most radical missionary the world has ever known.'

The path maybe unknown and you may not know where you will live, what you will be doing; you may not know the language or the people you will be living alongside. You have left all you knew, your comforts and your securities. Uncertainty surrounds you and perhaps makes you feel vulnerable but one thing is unchanging, the Word. The Word is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, it is unchanging. The Word will be sufficient for you when you question, 'Why did I leave? Why am I here?' The Word will be your rock, your strong foundation in times of trials and suffering as well as in times of joy and celebration.

Day 2: Matthew 4v 18-22

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." v 19

'Come, follow me', I wonder what the first disciples expected or anticipated would happen when they left their fishing nets and began to follow Jesus. I wonder how 'immediate' they were in their leaving of their work and what they thought Jesus meant when he told them they would 'fishers of men'.

They certainly were amazing men to know so little of what the future held, no New Testament to read and yet to confidently leave their livelihood to follow this new rabbi Jesus. I wonder what it was that prompted them to give it all up? What did they see in Jesus? What attracted them to Him? Perhaps hope, hope of a better life; a better way to live and the promise that the 'Kingdom of Heaven' was near. What prompted you to follow Jesus in your early days as Christian but also now, as you step out into missionary life? Hold onto what first attracted you to Jesus and hold onto the steps of faith you have taken to this point.

'Hold on to what first attracted you to Jesus and hold onto the steps of faith you have taken to this point.'

As you set time aside to spend with Jesus, recall scripture verses that have been significant in guiding, challenging and encouraging you as you took those first steps on the missionary road. Write down the words that God has spoken to you and look over them, allow him to speak to you again and affirm you in your calling. Keep them in your Bible, in a special book or commit them to memory. And as you 'come and follow' in this new season, though only the Father knows what lies ahead, know you take these steps with Jesus and he will walk the missionary road with you and teach you all you need to know.

Day 3: Matthew 8:18-22

"Foxes have their holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." v 20

If we take seriously Jesus' words, we can not escape the radical nature of making the decision to follow Him as our Lord and Saviour. He asks much of us, to put Him first above everyone and everything. It's easy to say 'Yes' in words but to actually commit in our actions is much harder. To leave the security of our homes and to go to a foreign land is tough. To leave our families when perhaps they don't understand why, is tough.

It is hard not to be there when loved ones are sick and we just want to be by their bedside or perhaps there is a new birth and we have missed seeing that new life in its early days. But God commands us to put Him first and yes, it is a sacrifice. It is painful at times but God never said it would be easy.

'But God commands us to put Him first and yes, it is a sacrifice.'

You have put your commitment of words into practice; you have obeyed the call of the Master, the Lord of All. When it feels too hard, when you miss your home, your family, when you wish you could go back - know the Lord sees your commitment to Him. He doesn't take it lightly, he knows the hardship for he too had no home, and he left his Heavenly Father and his early parents too. Sometimes it was a lonely path, a hard path, as the path of a servant is. Even for you, the life of a missionary can be hard but God will provide all that you need. Yes, times may be testing and you will wonder if you can stay the course but you have answered the call, do not look back but take one step at a time with Jesus the one who gave His very life for you.

Day 4: Matthew 10:1-4

'He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority' v 10a

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority. He has called you too; as you reflect on Jesus drawing his disciples around him, giving them instructions as he sent them out, he draws you to himself too. He calls you as he did the first disciples, he calls you by name. He will instruct you in all your need to know, to say and to do.

Jesus knew the type of people he wanted for his team, he choose them carefully, no one was there by mistake. He knew each of his disciples by name and he called them by name, specifically not randomly. God has chosen you specifically for the task ahead; he knows you are the person just right for the job. He knows what will be required in personality, in character, in skills and abilities and he has designed you for this time. So as you read over the names of the disciples: Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaeus, Simon and Judas, remember to add yourself to the list and hear and embrace the call of the Father.

'God has chosen you specifically for the task ahead; he knows you are the person just right for the job.'

As you begin this new season in your life, know that as God as called you, he has also given you authority, his authority. So when you feel powerless, lacking ability and needing assurance, remember his authority and know you are here because he has called and sent you. Use his authority wisely, do not abuse it but humbly accept it and work under the Master and his divine plan.

Day 5: Matthew 10 v 9-10

'Do not take along gold or silver or copper in your belts' v 9

Times have changed and the 21st missionary usually has a freight allowance but it is still good to reflect on the early missionary and the underlying principle of relying on God for His provision. God knows what you left behind, perhaps a successful and secure career, your home, family and friends. Not only that but things you enjoyed to do, going to the park, swimming, the cinema, being able to go out for a meal and going shopping (knowing where to go and what you are buying!). He knows you've made a big lifestyle change. The comforts, the privileges you once had, you probably don't have anymore. Life is different and though you have your freight allowance, you can't just pick up your old life and transplant it into the new one.

'He will provide for you as you are obedient and trust in Him for all that you need.'

In all that you are and will have to get accustomed to, remember that by giving up and leaving behind, it gives opportunity to really trust God for His provision. If you have your hands tightly clasped around the old things, how can you open your hands to receive what God wants to give you now? But we must acknowledge it can be hard, when it comes to emotional and spiritual support - the people who were around when you needed to talk, needed prayer, wanted advice aren't there anymore. Who can you lean on now? God is our ultimate provider and he will provide new relationships, new people that can come alongside whether physically, on the phone, by letter or email. He will provide for you as you are obedient and trust in Him for all that you need.

Day 6: Matthew 6 v 5-15

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.' v 9

One of the biggest challenges for the missionary is keeping their spiritual life alive, moving forward and having time to pray for yourself and not just for the work you are involved in. In these early days, take time to focus on the need for prayer. Jesus needed time alone with the Father and so we must need time too. It's not easy though, when you're getting used to so many new things, new schedules, new people, and new places and perhaps just feeling tired from the move and all that is involved in that.

However prayer doesn't need to take a long time and we can simply take a breath and call out 'Our Father in heaven, holy is your name'. Though high and exalted in the heavenly realms, the Father is always near to us. He is a holy God but though holy he allows us to call him Father and in turn calls us his child. So in these early days, don't give yourself a hard time about missing your quiet time but rest assured the Father knows all the changes

*'Though high
and exalted
in the heavenly
realms,
the Father is
always near
to us'.*

you are going through. He wants to be involved; he wants to walk alongside you in all the adjustments you are going through and even to carry you if you feel tired by it all. Simply call to him and let your words be few saying simply 'Father'. The Father knows you; he knows all that you want to say to him, he knows your heart. So as you breathe 'Father' he hears you and he will come to you and he will walk with you in all the demands change brings. He knows you need him more than ever at this moment in time.

Day 7: Matthew 6 v 5-15

'Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' v 10

Whenever I pray this line, I always feel 'this is an impossibility'. I question: Lord the world is so messed up: full of injustice; full of poverty; of corruption; humans are innately selfish and there is a constant striving for getting more money and more earthly possessions - how can your will be done? The Lord tells us to pray this prayer and so there must be unquestionable hope. God without a doubt knows the way His Kingdom will come and how his will, will indeed be done. So it is not for me to shake my head in despair but instead be challenged to do my part to live a kingdom life: one that lives for justice, for helping the poor, speaking for those whose voices otherwise would not be heard and putting others before self. To live a life of love and of self sacrifice. The cost of following Jesus and taking up the cross is a demanding one but the Christian life, as we read in Acts is not for the faint hearted. Sacrifice and suffering are words Christians should be familiar with and praise God for the honour serving him, even through hardship and trial.

'God wants to see His Kingdom come and as you take part in God's mission in God's world, the Lord wants to equip you for your part'

What can you pray today though? In your situation, what challenges do you face to see God's kingdom come? Where do you need his Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide you as you engage in living a Kingdom life? God wants to see His Kingdom come and as you take part in God's mission in God's world, the Lord wants to equip you for your part. So pray and ask for his equipping, for his encouragement that in a world which seems to have lost its way and appears hopeless in many ways for there is hope and Our Father's Kingdom will come - Amen.

Day 8: Matthew 6 v 5-15

'Give us today our daily bread.' v 11

It is wonderful to know that we can come everyday, every week, every month - 365 days of the year and say to our Father, 'Give us today our daily bread'. Lord give me what I need.

Our loving heavenly Father encourages us to pray to ask for our 'daily bread'. What does that mean - daily bread? We are firstly asking for his provision for our physical needs - to feed us. When we come from a country stacked with shelves of food, this prayer can take on such a deeper meaning when living in a country which has little food or when people only eat one main meal a day and even more challenging to pray when perhaps people are experiencing starvation.

'Also as you pray for your 'daily bread' be reminded that 'Man does not live on bread alone but the word of God'.

Praying this when you are of getting used to a change of diet, you can ask God to help you as you get used to different tastes and the effects different foods have on your body. All very practical requests but important none the less. In Uganda we had a daily lunch of beans and usually potatoes. Eating beans everyday was bland and monotonous but we thanked God for his provision knowing for many, beans would be their only meal that day and that was a challenge to us.

Also as you pray for your 'daily bread' be reminded that 'Man does not live on bread alone but the word of God'. So as you pray ask that God would feed you spiritually - whether it is a bible verse which lifts your spirits, a reminder of God's love in your lives, being able to listen to a worship song or sing one yourself or just by looking around God's creation. Ask for God's spiritual food to sustain you, to help you as you follow Jesus and undertake his work in his world.

Day 9: Matthew 6 V 5-15

'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' v 12

The Lord's Prayer when we break it down and really reflect on what we are praying is one of the most challenging prayers we can pray. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us, those who hurt us by their words and actions. Forgive those who hurt intentionally and those who hurt us without even knowing. In our early days as missionaries we were very hurt by a neighbour's boy who came and befriended our children but at the same time was stealing from us. It hurt to know that for several months the boy had been eating with us, playing with the children and going out for day trips with us but was also stealing and lying to us was hard. I felt angry and upset but was challenged by the Lord's Prayer. What does this part of the Lord's Prayer mean to you? What challenge does it bring in your life? Ask for God's grace and strength to rise to the challenge.

'God calls us to forgive, as he also forgives us for all the times we hurt him..'

Often when you arrive in a new place and see how things run: local government, health services, education, police service, you can become judgemental and critical. This is a normal part of culture shock, comparing your new home with your old one. In time as you begin to understand the culture, it will help in your understanding of why things are the way they are. However dependant upon where you are on the mission field, sometimes you can see practices which are unjust, corrupt and violate the rights of other human beings - witnessing the sinful nature of humanity, it's hard to take in. But God calls us to forgive, as he also forgives us for all the times we hurt him, whether intentional or not. Often the regular sins we commit, come when we are tired after a long day or if we've been treated badly, we say things we don't really mean and do things we don't really want to do. God is gracious to you, even when you repeatedly mess up, you can come knowing your Father welcomes you with open arms to listen to your confession and to forgive you again.

Day 10: Matthew 6 v 5-15

'And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.' v 13

Temptation in itself is not sin and don't allow the devil to con you that it is. Jesus never sinned but was tempted just like you. So when you are tempted, view it as a positive opportunity to show God your heart - that you choose him over what you are being tempted with. By resisting the temptation, it's not that you just choose not to sin but you choose to put God first and show him your hearts desire is to love and serve him above all others whatever the cost to yourself.

'Whatever your temptation is, get to know it, know your triggers, what causes you to give temptation a second glance or a third.'

We all have areas of our life that is vulnerable to the enemies attack -it's different for all of us. As a parent, I have to constantly remind myself and ask for God's patience every day otherwise my temper rises and I land up shouting at the kids in a very ungodly manner. We all have something, that if left unattended the devil can get in and really mess things up, causing problems particularly in relationships: whether with our spouse, our children, the neighbours, a mission team member or even people at church. Relationships are foundational on the mission field, especially in the early days of settling in and being part of the community, so ask for God's protection from the devils schemes and be aware of any potential problem areas.

Whatever your temptation is, get to know it, know your triggers, what causes you to give temptation a second glance or a third. Know what causes you to give in and say, just this once. Know your weakness and ask God's help in becoming aware and knowing how to walk away from a path that you know in your heart is going to cause trouble. Pray too for God's protection on you and your family, the work and people you are involved in and know that in all you do God is with you.

Day 11: John 2: 1-11

'... and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding' v 2

When we first moved to Uganda we were invited to what is known as a 'Give Away' a traditional ceremony the day before a wedding, in which the bride is brought out of the family home and the groom makes an official request to marry her. It is an elaborate ceremony, usually involving the whole village, much food, beautiful dresses and many gifts being given between the families involved. Though we didn't understand everything that was going on (as it was all in the local language) it was a privilege to be invited and witness the event.

'I love the glimpse it gives us of Jesus' sociable nature and character.'

Parties, weddings, baptisms, confirmations are all wonderful occasions to join with new friends, the local community and people you would not otherwise meet. I love the story of Jesus attending the wedding; firstly in that he accepted his invitation along with his disciples and decided to go along. Secondly I love the glimpse it gives us of Jesus' sociable nature and character. I imagine him arriving with his friends, mingling in the throng and being bothered by his mother to do a miracle or two! Missionaries also never know when they might be called upon to do something at a celebration, perhaps not turn water into wine but certainly in Uganda we always had to be prepared to say a word or two, bring our greetings from England and thank the host for their invitation.

So as you settle into life in your new community, accept invitations, watch and learn as you attend, ask questions if appropriate and soak up your surrounding and if you are called upon to say a word or two be prepared!



Day 12: Luke 19:1-10

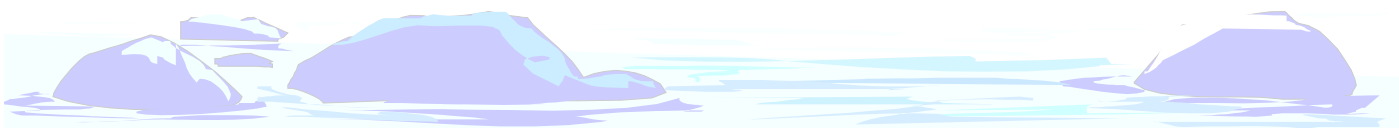
'...“Zacchaeus, come down immediately I must stay at your house today.” v 5

The story of Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus is another wonderful example of Jesus' sociable nature and the importance he put on building relationships with people he met. He wanted and was willing to spend time with people, to sit and share a meal. When I read the gospels, there is much mention of Jesus and food and Jesus referred to himself as the Bread of life.

Perhaps you won't be calling people down from trees to have meals, but inviting people to eat with you is a great way to get to know your neighbours and work colleagues. As you get used to different food even different customs in eating, take time to learn how to cook the local food, ask for help from new friends and invite people round to eat together. Take time to just be with people, find out about them, their lives, their culture, their world.

Perhaps you're not really into cooking, then if your budget allows perhaps go out for a meal with a new work colleague or neighbour. Find out where and what the locals eat, take time to talk about special times of the year and if special food is eaten. Talk about festivals, birthdays Easter and Christmas and what do people do? Or perhaps they don't celebrate certain things, find out why. Talk about customs and traditions when going to people's homes; are there things you should know so you don't offend your hosts? Equally when you invite people in; are there things you should be doing so your guests feel welcome and want to come back again? Finally whether you cook or not, enjoy being with people and don't rush to be doing, to be working but take a step back and ease yourself into your new way of life.

'Take time to just be with people, find out about them, their lives, their culture, their world.'



Day 13: John 4: 1- 26

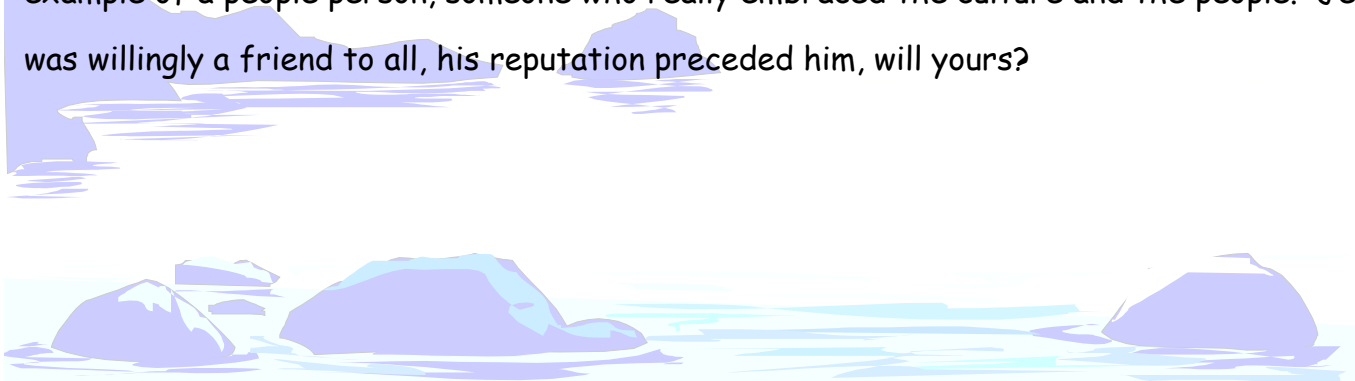
'When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink." v 7

When I read how Jesus asks this Samaritan woman for a drink, it creates for me the picture of when you are just passing someone or having a brief meeting, say in a shop or on a street corner. Jesus didn't have to speak to the woman it certainly wasn't expected, she was a Samaritan and he a Jew. He didn't know her but he engaged in a conversation which ultimately would change her life.

Our every conversation doesn't need to be life changing but some 'small talk' is certainly a good way to get to know people: local shop keepers, market sellers and fellow church goers. Stopping to greet someone and say hello in the local language, all begins to break down barriers of coming from a different culture. Building relationships is key to feeling at home in your new community and opening doors to opportunities to spread the good news of Jesus. It takes time to make friends and acquaintances, in Uganda we had issues of trust to work through as we got to know people and in every culture there will be different challenges in making real friendships.

'Building relationships is key to feeling at home in your new community'

Every missionary is in a different situation and you will need to work out what is appropriate and what isn't in speaking with people but with Jesus he had no boundaries. He is a wonderful example of a people person, someone who really embraced the culture and the people. Jesus was willingly a friend to all, his reputation preceded him, will yours?



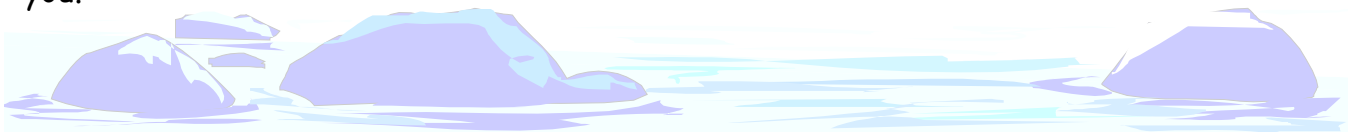
Day 14: Matthew 11 v 25-30.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." v 28

Moving is a stressful thing, it takes its toll and it maybe now in these early days you are feeling tired and weary. If you're not then 'Praise God' but it is quite normal when moving and particularly changing the culture you are living in to feel quite exhausted by the process. All the preparations of the last weeks, months and even years and you're finally here, you have arrived! But all the emotional, mental and spiritual energy that has kept you going in the lead up to leaving and saying goodbyes, now that you have arrived can suddenly fall flat. You may now be left feeling: tired, deflated and pretty wiped out. To add to it all, you are now are in the process of getting used to lots of new things. You will probably be meeting many people and having to smile and make a real effort to socialise and get acquainted with your new life. Even if you feel excited and are looking forward to all these new experiences, it can still feel a bit of a burden making such an effort all the time.

'He invites us to come to him in your weariness and with the burdens you are carrying.'

God knows the toll change takes on a person: the challenges, the tiredness and wondering if you can really do this. Remember verses 28-30 of today's passage. He invites us to come to him in your weariness and with the burdens you are carrying. He reminds you not to carry things you shouldn't. You should carry his yoke, doing the work he has designed for you because though it may still feel like a burden, the burden will be light, it won't weigh you down. If you rely on God's strength and power, rather than your own abilities it won't mean you will never be tired but in your soul you will be able to carry the things God has for you to do. Meditate on God's words of refreshment, examine yourself and the work you are taking on, making sure they are not just good things but the God things he has designed just for you.



Day 15: Ephesians 2 v 1-10

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." v 10

If you go on holiday it usually for a week or two, so now as you pass the two week mark, perhaps you're realising, 'This isn't a holiday... this is home.' It may feel really normal after so much preparation, to be where you have thought about, read about, prayed about for many months. Perhaps you feel 'Finally I have arrived' but with a hint of fear and anticipation or excitement or with the realisation that 'This is it!' 'There's no going back' 'This is where the rubber hits the road.'

Be encouraged and know that however long you have been preparing for this work; God had prepared this work for you long before it was even a passing thought in your mind. You are his work of art, his creation and he has been moulding and shaping you for this time. He has much good work for you to do in the coming months and years. Isn't that amazing to know? To know God has spent so much time preparing you. Not only that but all that time thinking about you and what he wants you to do for him. He has created you, helped you to grow and develop so you can fit the plan he has for mission here on earth.

'God had prepared this work for you long before it was even a passing thought in your mind.'

Perhaps this isn't a holiday but it sure is an adventure of a life time so when reality hits home and all that that means for you, know the Lord is Sovereign and know his sovereign purpose and plan for your life.



Day 16: Psalm 139 v 1-24

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.' v 16

It is comforting, encouraging and exciting to know that God knows us so intimately and as the day unfolds, he knows exactly what lies ahead for us. God knows all that you are having to deal with emotionally due to the radical change you have made in your life. He knows you maybe coping with feelings of loneliness, boredom, irritability, social withdrawal, homesickness and helplessness to mention a few. But remember God has created you for a purpose. Perhaps it's hard at the moment but you will come through this period of adjustment. God carefully sculptured you for his divine purpose, before you even knew him as your Lord and Saviour.

We love and serve a sovereign God, all knowing, all powerful, the Lord and Creator of all. You can have complete confidence in your God and in his plan for your life, as it says, 'All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.' So what lies ahead for you? Perhaps the ministry you will be involved in is clear but perhaps not. Maybe you're not quite sure what you've let yourself in for, as you signed on the dotted line with your mission agency. Possibly now that you have arrived, the job is not what you were led to believe. Many feelings can flood in as you anticipate what you will be doing but know the Lord 'perceives your thoughts from afar' (verse 2). The ruler of all knows all that is before you and as you root yourself in him you need not be anxious about the days ahead. He holds you in his majestic right hand. He is all around you and you can not escape him and praise God for that. Wherever you and whatever you do, he will be with you.

'..God has created you for a purpose.'



Day 17: 1 John 4:18

'Perfect love drives out fear' v 1

It's natural to fear, to be scared or afraid. We all have different fears and Satan knows what we fear most. He cunningly will play on those natural fears we have. One of my biggest fears is the fear of losing the ones I love - my husband or my children. I fear that someone might harm them and I fear the pain that I would feel if I lost them. God reminded me of the story of Abraham bringing Isaac his son to be sacrificed and then God providing a ram to sacrifice instead (Genesis 22). God spoke to me about trusting him with those I love most and the need to be willing to offer not just my own life but the lives of those I love. God must come first - my love for God must be greater than the love I have for my husband or children.

In learning to love God more and trusting in him with my fears and my loved ones, it releases me to serve him. I can't say I never feel afraid but the reminder that his perfect love drives out fear, pushes out the fears. His word helps me to acknowledge the fear but then take it to God, hand it over to him. God's perfect love for me, my life and those I love enables me not become paralysed by fear but turn it around to say God is greater and ultimately his plans and purposes are perfect, so whatever the future holds - God will hold me, even if I have to face the fears I imagine.

'Acknowledge the fears you have and ask God to speak to you with his incredible and perfect love.'

So whatever fears you hold, whether they are for yourself or for those around you, as you begin life on the mission field, take your fears to God. Acknowledge the fears you have and ask God to speak to you with his incredible and perfect love. Allow his love to release you if your fears hold you back from serving him completely and receive the peace that comes in receiving God's perfect love for you.

Day 18: 1 Peter 4:12-19

'However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.' v 16

Suffering, pain and sacrifice is not something we generally like to embrace. No one really enjoys hurting but this passage reminds us that bearing the name Christian and suffering goes hand in hand. That's a tough one to hear but we need to hear it and we need reminding that that is what we signed up for when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. So don't be surprised if life on the mission field is hard, Paul reminds us but Jesus never said it would be easy. He talked about talking up the cross and following him and when we consider Jesus' cross, we know the Christian life is not the soft option.

Life on the mission field can be tough; it can be lonely even when you are surrounded by new people. It can be uncomfortable without certain home comforts you have been used to - hot water, regular electricity and central heating! It can be confusing when things are done differently to what you are used to and you don't understand why.

It can be frustrating when you don't speak the language and you struggle to make yourself understood. It can be painful to be separated from loved ones and to miss your friends and family. You know what you are finding hard and God knows your sacrifice in his name.

It's tough but rejoice in your pain, praise in your frustrations, be joyful in your confusion and in your suffering feel God's blessing and honour that you bear the name Christian. It's not easy but God will give you his Spirit, to strengthen you in the hard times. He will give you his word to bring you hope and encouragement and he will surround you with his love and peace at all times.

*'..we know
the Christian
life is not
the soft
option.'*



Day 19: 2 Corinthians 1: 3-11

'For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows' v5

In the knowledge that suffering is part and parcel of being a Christian, it is a great encouragement to read this passage in 2 Corinthians, 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles' v 3-4a. God comforts you in your troubles and who better to comfort you than the Lord himself who has endured the cross itself.

If you suffer, know God promises that you will be comforted in your distress. God will be there for you, he does not promise to take the suffering away but he will not abandon you to suffer alone. Know also as you are comforted, this is so you would have the ability to comfort others who suffer. As we experience suffering and know God's comfort for ourselves we can reach out to those who suffer - offering the comfort of God that we felt for ourselves.

Paul's suffering was immense but it's amazing even at the height of his distress he takes a step back from his own pain, turns it around and witnesses to the fact that the suffering he is experiencing is good because it teaches him to rely on God and not himself. Isn't that incredible and such a challenge to us if we too face suffering in Jesus' name. Will you too learn from Paul's example and turn and cling to Jesus at distressing times? Will you ask the God of all comfort to teach you more of him and more of how to comfort others through enduring suffering yourself? When you feel under great pressure, more than you think you can cope with remember Paul's but also Jesus' example as he said to his Father in Gethsemane, 'Yet not what I will, but what you will.' Matthew

'..he will not abandon you to suffer alone.'

26:3

Day 20: 1 Peter 2: 9-12

'Dear Friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world..' v 11

We belong to God and are called to live a life worthy of the name Christian. We are called to turn from our old life, to turn from sin and live a life which reflects Jesus and points people to God. We are called to be different! Paul in this passage refers to followers of Jesus as aliens and strangers, as our citizenship is not an earthy one but we are citizens of heaven. We are passing through planet earth to our home with our Father God in heaven.

So you are a foreigner and therefore expect to be misunderstood at times for how you conduct your life as a Christian. Also anticipate that you will be looked at, watched, observed, scrutinized as you go about your daily life, as people watch how a Christian lives and breathes. You are the face of Christianity, the advert, the publicity material for those wanting to know about Jesus and what it means to live your life for him.

'So you are a foreigner and therefore expect to be misunderstood at times for how you conduct your life as a Christian.'

You are also a foreigner quite literally in terms of being from another country. You may look different to those around you, speak differently, and act differently and inside think differently. It can be a little disconcerting to be looked at so differently and to even be seen and labelled as the outsider in a community. It can equally be a challenge if you don't look so different from those around, perhaps you can even speak the language but culturally you are not the same. It will take time to feel comfortable being in your new surroundings and it will take time for locals to get used to you and realise that you are not a tourist! Be patient and also understand that however long you are in a place, in many ways you will always be an 'alien' but that is okay because remember you are passing through onto your final destination: heaven.

Day 21: Romans 8: 28-39

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' v 35

We may have been separated from many people we love, leaving family and friends. We may not know when we will next see our loved ones but one thing we know for sure, is that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Wherever we go our relationship with God remains the same, he is completely steadfast and travels with us everywhere we go, he never leaves us and neither does his love.

This is such a comforting passage especially as it can be hard saying goodbye to people and an effort to keep in touch once we are in our new home. Fortunately now with the internet in many places you can find a Cyber Café and send a message home and receive a reply within a few days if not a few hours if you're on Facebook. However some reading this will be in remote places and contact home will not be so simple or perhaps you can't be as honest as you'd like for security reasons. You may be reliant on the postal system and perhaps if you are off the beaten track, post is not so reliable and contact home can be complicated. Perhaps you're feeling a bit cut off, detached, unconnected and removed from the world you once knew. It can be a real challenge to communicate with those back home and then waiting for replies but when you feel humanly separated from people. Grasp the love God has for you and allow that knowledge to hold you, support you and sustain you in times you long for a word from back home. Reflect on God's love often and let his love be food for you soul, your spirit, you heart and your mind.

*'Wherever
we go our
relationship
with God
remains the
same'*



Day 22: Ephesians 6:10-18

'Stand firm with the belt of truth buckled round your waist.' v 14

I remember someone drawing attention to the fact the armour of God has no back protection. This came with the reminder that there is no turning back with Christ. As Christians we must keep moving forward and face the enemy when he seeks to pull or push us off course.

As you face life on the mission field this passage has some important instructions for good practice in your daily living. It holds a reminder that when you face difficulties that you should be aware that the enemy is devious and underhand. Satan is always seeking to undermine confidence and cause doubt, so it's vital to be prepared and put on your spiritual armour.

'..you can trust God because he is and speaks the truth'

The first piece of armour is the belt of truth and in a world where truth is debated and many hold onto whatever truth they decide, it is crucial we hold onto the undeniable claim that Jesus is the truth, 'I am the way and the truth and the life' John 14:6. Jesus is the only truth and his word is truth. On many occasions throughout the gospels, when Jesus spoke, he began with the phrase, 'I tell you the truth...' If we ever doubt you can go back to this foundation, that you can trust God because he is and speaks the truth. When the father of all lies, Satan, tries to deceive you, telling you half truths or rocking your confidence in your knowledge of God you need to seek out truths in scripture. You need to fasten that belt of truth firmly on as you begin the day and remember the words of 2 Timothy 2:15¹⁵ 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.'

Day 23: Ephesians 6:10-18

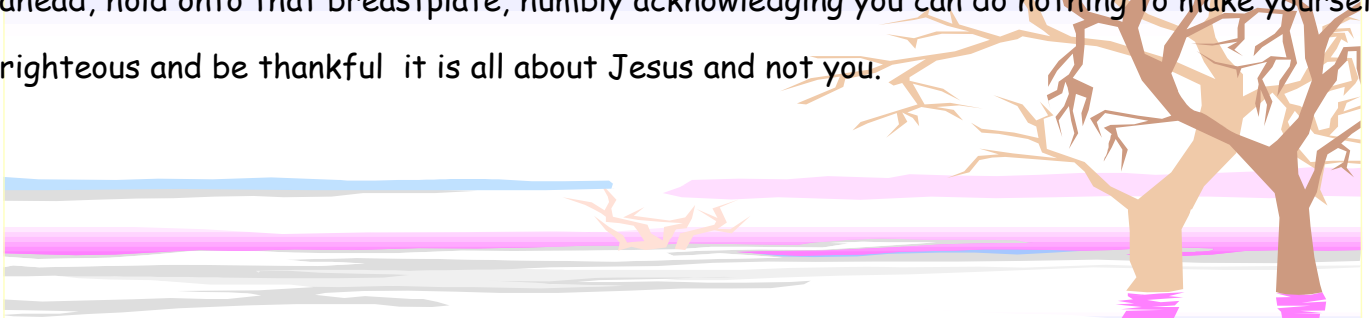
'Stand firm... with the breastplate of righteousness in place,' v 14

It's normal to have doubts about whether you are up for the task ahead but Satan in his craftiness can use these normal human thoughts and feelings, causing you to dwell on feelings of inadequacy and so at worse paralyse you from actually doing anything useful at all.

The second piece of armour we need to remember to put on is the breastplate of righteousness. Recognise that your righteousness doesn't come from what you do or who you are, but solely through your faith in Jesus Christ. This then releases you from trying to be good enough and instead frees you to be who you are in Christ. You are loved and accepted by your Father in heaven and you are a child of the King - that is qualification enough for what God has called us to.

Jesus makes you righteous, Jesus makes you in a right relationship with God not reading the bible, not praying, not being good and not being a missionary! So hold that breastplate over your heart, protecting yourself from Satan's lies that can hurt your emotions by knowing that your righteousness comes from God. So when Satan causes you to feel and think, 'I shouldn't be a missionary I'm not good enough or I'm not holy enough or I don't pray enough' you can fight back by standing on the truth that your righteousness comes from God. When you feel 'unqualified' for the task ahead, hold onto that breastplate, humbly acknowledging you can do nothing to make yourself righteous and be thankful it is all about Jesus and not you.

'Jesus makes you in a right relationship with God not reading the bible...'



Day 24: Ephesians 6:10-18

'Stand firm... with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace' v 15

When we enter another person's culture, it's important to take your time to acquaint yourself with how things are done: greetings, eating habits, giving of gifts, clothing etc. However there is one thing that is unchanging and that is the Good News of Jesus Christ. No matter what other things change, how you say hello or shake someone's hand or not, the language you speak or try to at least - the message of the gospel remains the same.

So though you may look different because you have to wear different clothes to what you used to, the shoes of the gospel remain the same and remember also what it says in Romans 10:15, 'And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.'

'Know the honour of helping someone to come to know Jesus'

Know the joy and privilege of bringing Good News to those who have not heard before. Know that the Good News brings not only peace to people's lives but forgiveness of sins, indescribable love from God, eternal life and life in all its fullness now. Know the honour of helping someone to come to know Jesus, the opportunities to pray with someone or explain a bible verse.

Be familiar with the readiness of those shoes of the gospel of peace and keep those feelings of willingness, eagerness and keenness to want to share Jesus with others alive. Don't get tired of the message even when you're physically tired. Engage in the word, look at it afresh and consider how you could be communicating it in a culturally relevant way to the people you are living and working with.

Day 25: Ephesians 6:10-18

'Stand firm... and take up the shield of faith.' v 16

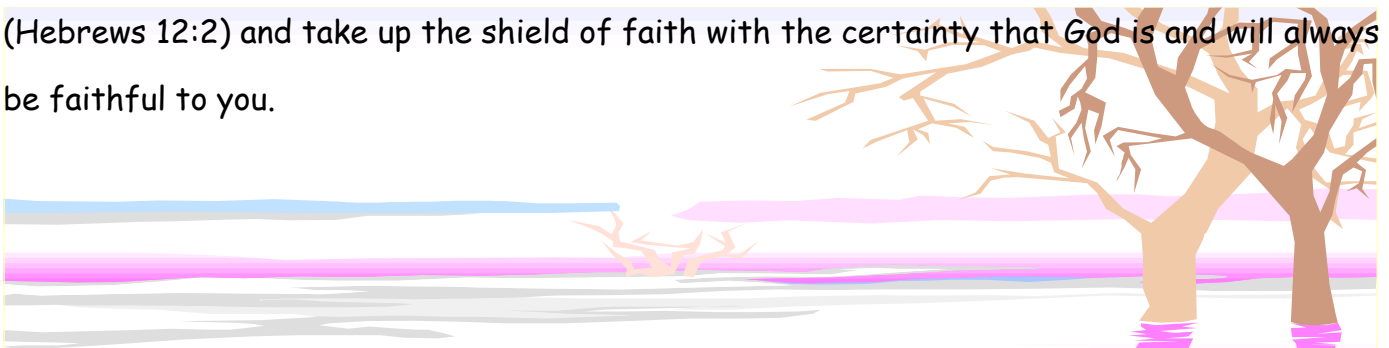
'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' Hebrews 11:1. So we come to the fourth item of the armour of God and what an important piece to take with us day by day. Trusting in an unseen God, trusting in an unseen future but being sure that whatever lies ahead is God's perfect plan for your life.

God calls you to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and I guess when you enter the mission field with all that that entails - relying on God as you step into the unknown, you have already taken a pretty big step of faith. You possibly signed up to go without ever visiting before and even if you did make a trip to check out where you would be going, you never really get the full picture in a few days or even a week or two. So as you stepped off the plane, took that drive to your new front door, you have already carried your shield of faith some distance.

However it doesn't stop once you arrive, as you begin your new life on the mission field there will be plenty of unknowns: people whose names you don't know; places that are unfamiliar; language which you can't comprehend and sometimes it will probably all feel a bit too uncertain.

*'God calls you
to live by
faith and not
by sight'*

So when from time to time you long for familiar faces and surroundings, remember to 'fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith,' (Hebrews 12:2) and take up the shield of faith with the certainty that God is and will always be faithful to you.



Day 26: Ephesians 6:10-18

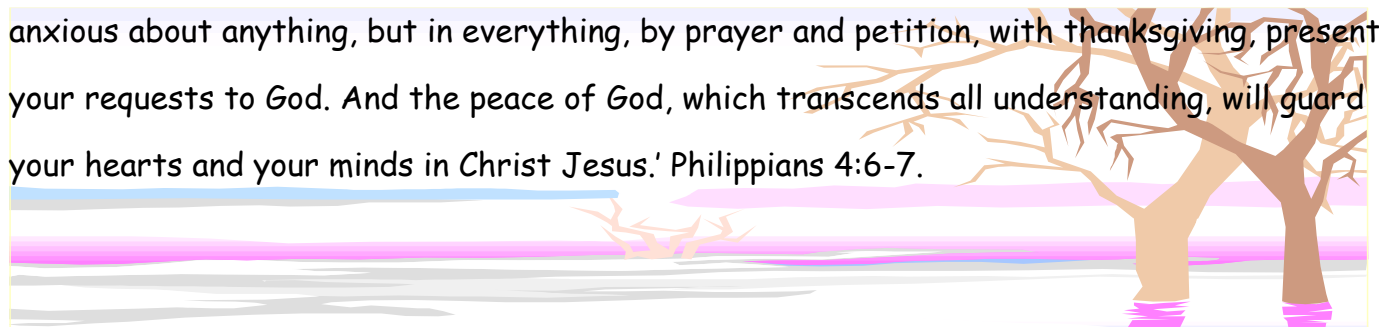
'Stand firm.... Take the helmet of salvation' v 17

I like the imagery here, a shiny helmet to put on but then I think it's probably heavy, bulking and a bit cumbersome so why not leave it at home? But actually our salvation is something we can often take for granted and almost forget about it as we get caught up with each days work. That's why Jesus commanded us to remember his death, his body broken for us, his blood shed for us, as we break bread together. Jesus knows human beings can be incredibly forgetful!

So take a moment to thank God for the wonderful gift of salvation, the incredible love Jesus showed for you on the cross bringing you forgiveness, eternal life and the life you have at this point in time. Salvation in Christ has brought you to this place today, so thank God for his saving grace and all the steps of faith he has guided you up till now.

'Salvation in Christ has brought you to this place today'

The helmet is also vital in protecting your head: thoughts and what goes on in your mind. Satan's schemes can be very cunning at attacking through your thought life and trying to shake the foundations of faith. With half truths and blatant lies he will try anything to unsettle you, not only your personal confidence but the faith and beliefs you have given your life to. Therefore keep in mind as you reflect the words of Paul to the Philippians, 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.' Philippians 4:6-7.



Day 27: Ephesians 6:10-18

'Stand firm with... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' v 17

At last a piece of offensive weaponry! All the other armour we put on is protective, it's all been about standing our ground and defending ourselves but now God gives us a most powerful piece of armour - the sword of the spirit. Hebrews 4:12 describes the Bible, God's word in potent language, 'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart' and in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul explains how 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.' It is clear the Bible is an essential part of the armour of God, if not the most powerful.

'...make reading your Bible just for you, a priority.'

So as you step onto the mission field remember to unpack your Bible and read it regularly. It's easy with moving and being out of a familiar routine to find your usual 'quiet time' or 'time with God' gets moved, but to where? As you get used to a new routine, look at what is a good time to spend time with the sword of the spirit but don't give yourself a hard time or get caught up with guilt for not doing it. Satan can cripple Christians by causing so much guilt we never get around to reading the Bible because we spend more time thinking about what stops us reading, than actually stopping and reading it. So once you've organised yourself, make reading your Bible just for you, a priority.



Day 28: Colossians 4:2-6

'And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.' v 3

As you come to the end of these reflections we consider Paul's further instructions to the brothers at Colosse and the prayer requests he asks for himself. His instructions are still relevant for missionaries today. As you settle into life on the mission field remember to devote yourself to prayer - make time in your new routine to be with the Father one to one. As you pray, remember to pray for the work you are involved in and as Paul says, pray that doors maybe opened for you to proclaim Christ. Pray also that you can proclaim the Good News in a culturally relevant way that means the message is clearly understood by your hearers.

'Finally spend time with God's word, so it becomes part of who you are'

As you live your life, be wise in the way you act towards those who do not yet know Christ. Make the most of opportunities that open up but remember to also take time to watch and learn about the new culture you are living in, don't rush in too quickly. Ask God for wisdom as doors of opportunity unlock, whether they are for you to go through. Be aware that new missionaries can be asked to do many things and it's important to pace yourself and take a step back to determine if it's a God opportunity. It can be hard if you don't feel busy, especially when you have to write reports for back home: for churches and individuals that support you. But remember in these early days, it's important to lay a good foundation of building relationships so try not to get caught up with having to be doing, enjoy just being with the people.

Finally spend time with God's word, so it becomes part of who you are and you become one who is full of salt (Matthew 5:13) light (Matthew 5:16) and the love of Jesus Christ.

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