

Thank you and Pray

“Called”?

- People sometimes ask me how I was “called” to missions. I think they picture some kind of experience like Saul’s on the way to Damascus, where Jesus appeared to him in blinding light and told him he had appointed him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Well, they probably don’t picture I had that dramatic of an experience, but they at least figure God somehow spoke to me something unique that he doesn’t speak to other people.
- That struck me recently when I was talking with a friend who is thinking about joining our work overseas. She said that she has been praying about it, but recently she realized she hasn’t felt the Lord lead her there in particular. It made me realize: Well neither have I. I don’t have that experience of God leading me like that. Don’t get me wrong; I still believe God speaks that way to people sometimes. It’s just not what I experience from him. I just chose to be a part of a work that I’m convinced lines up with God’s heart. So let me tell you how that happened.
- As a 9th grader, I had just been a believer for a year when I saw a video called *Ee-Taow* about a couple empty nesters that took the gospel to a remote island. The island villagers had never heard of Jesus, much less God’s creation of the world. And over the months that they heard, they all became believers. As a young believer, I remember thinking, “How can it be that there are people who’ve never heard of Jesus? I want to help.” By a couple weeks later, I told my parents, “I want to be a missionary.”
- Fast forward a few years. When I graduated from CSU, I decided it was time for me to figure out how to help unreached peoples hear about Jesus. As I asked around at Mountain View, people pointed me to John Piper’s book *Let the Nations Be Glad* and the course called “Perspectives on the World Christian Movement,” which is a course on God’s global purposes that’s offered at various churches throughout the year.
- Once I started that, my eyes were opened to an amazing glory I had never noticed before.

Eyes Opened to Glory

- *Let the Nations Be Glad* – Chapter 1
- Perspectives on the World Christian Movement
 - Now, there are a lot of things in the Christian life that I’m not naturally good at or been faithful to do. But all through high school, though I may rarely have ever prayed during that time, I read the Bible pretty regularly as part of a guys’ Bible study. But even though I had read through the Bible so many times, there was one thing that the Perspectives course opened my eyes to that I had never noticed in Scripture.
 - I don’t know if you’ve had one of these experiences of Scripture. It’s like you’ve been watching the movie in black and white. And then someone points out to you a red, and then you start seeing the red all over the place. And it’s beautiful!
 - If you’d have asked me before, sure, I would have said phrases like “the nations” and “all peoples” seem common enough in Scripture. There are references to other nations or peoples like the Moabites and Edomites. And there are statements of

God's judgment against nations that worship idols or attack Israel. But I'd never noticed how much more pervasive verses were about people from all nations becoming believers and worshipers of God.

- Before we look at them, let me show you a bit about the underlying Hebrew and Greek words that in English Bibles are translated "the nations" or "all peoples". The OT Hebrew term *goyim* is often translated "nations" or "peoples" or "Gentiles (or non-Jews)." And the corresponding Greek term *ethne* can be translated "nations" or "peoples" or "Gentiles" or even "pagans," depending on the context.
- Its use to mean *nations* in those days did not have the modern sense of nations or nation states, where *nation* is a synonym for *country*. *Countries* in the modern sense connotes political or geographic groupings.
- So, if the notion of *nation* in Scripture doesn't mean *country*, what *does* it mean? You might guess it based on the Greek word *ethne*. It's no coincidence that it sounds like our English words *ethnic* or *ethnicity*, which came from Greek. The Greek and Hebrew words *ethne* and *goyim* were the ones used to refer to groups that surrounded the Israelites in biblical times: the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, etc. Even in English, the word *nation* can occasionally still be used to refer to an ethnic group which is *not* a country, such as the "Cherokee Nation" or "Sioux Nation". This is probably why the phrase "people groups" came to be used in Christian circles, to capture the Bible's intention in these phrases otherwise translated by various terms.
- Now, keep that in mind as we look at these verses—that these phrases translated "nations", "peoples", and "Gentiles" tend to mean something more like *ethnic groups* or *people groups*, not "countries".
- [Walk through Nations Verses]

- Genesis 12:3 [in God's call of Abraham, he says]
- "in you **all the families of the earth** will be blessed."
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- Psalm 22:27
- "**All the ends of the earth** will remember and turn to the Lord,
- And **all the families of the nations** will worship before You."
- [the psalms are just filled with these kinds of statements, but let's just see one more in the Psalms, then skip to Isaiah]
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- Psalm 86:9
- "**All the nations** you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord;
- they will bring glory to your name."
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- Isaiah 43:6
- "Bring My sons from afar
- And My daughters from **the ends of the earth**,"

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- Isaiah 56:6-7
- “And **foreigners** who bind themselves to the LORD...
- Even those I will bring to My holy mountain
- And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
- Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;
- For My house will be called a house of prayer for **all the peoples.**”
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- Isaiah 66:18-19, 23
- “the time is coming to gather **all nations and tongues**. And they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to **the nations: Tarshish, Put, Lud, Meshech, Tubal and Javan, to the distant coastlands** that have neither heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among **the nations**. ... **All mankind** will come to bow down before Me,” says the Lord.
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- Daniel 7:14 [this vision of the future or spiritual realm that Daniel saw]
- “And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that **all peoples, nations, and languages** should serve him.”
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- Matthew 24:14
- “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in **the whole world** as a testimony to **all the nations**, and then the end will come.”
- [So evidently Jesus won’t come back until the gospel has been preached to all *ethne*]
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- Matthew 28:19
- “Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations...**”
- [The Great Commission is a familiar verse to most of us. But sometimes it’s become so familiar that we forget: he didn’t tell us to make disciples of “all people” in general; he told us to make disciples of “all the *ethne*”]
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- Luke 24:47
- “and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to **all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem.”
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- Acts 1:8
- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the ends of the earth.**”

- Do you see the pattern? And this is just a sampling; I'd encourage you to watch for how frequent it is as you read the Bible this year.
- There is something in the heart of God that is not content to just save the Jews as his chosen people. In Isaiah 49:6, God says that "It is too small a thing" for his Servant, the Messiah, to just redeem the people of Israel; he says, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." It's like God is just overflowing with glory and compassion and the desire for us to know him in all that fullness—that he just has to overflow it farther and farther and farther to the most remote and unlikely people.
- Of course, that's how any of us who are not Jews were saved in the first place: it was God's heart to multiply this good news of Jesus' atonement for our sins and his reign out to people groups beyond the Jews, like ours. But just like it must not just stagnate among the Jews but must be multiplied outwards, it must not just stagnate among us either.
- I don't know a lot about water science, but I remember people pointing out to me on many wilderness trips: If water flows into a pond and then just sits there, it will stagnate and will be unsafe to drink. But if water flows into a pond at the upper end and continues flowing out at the lower end, the pond is healthier and the water is much more likely to be safe to drink.
The same is true if we expect only to receive the good news for ourselves and not to overflow it out to others who need it. And it's true not just at the individual level, but at the people group level.
- But someone always says, "But wait, we haven't yet reached all the people of our *own* culture. How dare we leave them behind to spend more money going overseas and reach people less effectively through a language we'll never speak well?" It's a good question to ask.
- There are two emphases which might seem to be competing with each other:
- [slide: two emphases]
 - A) To reach the most possible individuals in the culture I already *can* communicate with and
 - B) to reach the most possible people groups.
- And I'm not here to say, "Stop trying to reach individuals in this culture." Absolutely, God wants all people to come to repentance and faith—every last individual. But yet, of the two emphasizes, the first one is the easier more natural thing for us to do. And not only are there people groups which are less than 1% believers (like in Europe), there are still other people groups that are *totally* unreached and don't have even a single fellowship of believers among them to multiply the gospel out to that people.
- If the Lord had wanted the disciples to reach all the Jews with the gospel before going to non-Jews, they never would have finished and we who are not Jews would never have become believers. But God's heart—as torn as it must be, in his desire for every individual to come to repentance—is that the gospel keep going out to new frontiers before it has reached every individual in the previous one.

- Another way to see this, besides the kinds of verses we've looked at showing God's heart to take his glory and salvation to "*all nations*" and "*all peoples*"—another way to see it is to look at the vision of the future that God is intent on bringing about. In Revelation, where John is seeing a vision of the future in the heavenly realms, we read
 - [Revelation verses]
 - Revelation 5:9
 - And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God **from every tribe and language and people and nation,**"
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 - Revelation 7:9
 - After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, **from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;
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 - Revelation 15:4
 - "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
 - For You alone are holy;
 - For **all the nations** will come and worship before You,
 - For Your righteous acts have been revealed."
 - - Yes, there is a sense in which God wants every individual in his kingdom. And yet, the Scriptures are also clear that not every individual will be saved. But something God wants that's strong enough he's definitely going to bring about is people from every one of these *groups* in his kingdom. And look at how these verses also confirm what we've been saying about what the groups are he's going to bring in: they are not merely people from the broad category of "country". We already know *nations* means something more specific. But Revelation gets even *more* specific: every *tribe, people, language, and ethne*.
- The point is: God's heart is not only for all individuals in general, it's also particularly for gathering in individuals from every last "people group"—and that to the point that he has promised the second one, over and over again: the New Heavens and New Earth will be filled with people "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev 5:9; 7:9).
- Do you know that in Israel's history, many of the Jews took the truth of God's choosing them as his own people and treasured possession, and extrapolated that to despise all other nations? (e.g., Acts 22:22).
- But before we criticize the Jews for being so ethnocentric, we have to remember that most people are—that we ourselves tend to be. Sure, there is more of an acknowledgment in American society and education to value all cultures, to take pride in America being a "melting pot", to value equality and never consider

ourselves better than others, to even have a word like “ethnocentric” and know it’s negative. But if we’re honest, we generally revolve our world, our values, our money, our time spent, our thoughts and cares around those we see, know, interact with, and feel familiar with. Part of that’s natural and not blameworthy when we haven’t matured yet.

- But if we’re going to move on to maturity, to be active in valuing the things God values instead of passively doing what’s natural, to participating in God’s great passion for extending his glory to be enjoyed by all nations, then we have to move on to maturity.
 - And the good news is, it’s not some drudgery of a burden—as much as it may seem that way. Submitting to God’s way and what he delights in is always more rewarding, involves more joy and satisfaction and contentment—even if it also involves more difficulty and trial along the way.
- So now, let me tell you about the way I’m involved in this task. It’s certainly not the only way or even the primary way, but one of many ways.
- I’m a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Wycliffe’s vision is to see God’s Word made available to all people in a language they understand.
 - [Slide: 1,600 Remaining] I want to show you some language statistics on this screen. Did you know: there about 7,000 languages in use today. 3,000 have all or some Scripture, and at least 1,600 languages need someone to initiate translation in them.
 - It’s a lot of work. Translation itself generally takes 10-15 years per language, besides any other steps like language survey. You might think then, “Wouldn’t it be easier to teach people English or another major language?”
 - For the 1,600 languages that need translation, those are language communities that have been identified as particularly needing a translation *because* they don’t know a majority language well enough for Scripture to speak to them in it.
 - Let me give you an example. I would guess that most people in this room do not know another language well enough to make use of Scripture in it. Suppose for a minute though: What if it wasn’t available in English? You just became a believer, you’re hungry for what God has to teach you, you’ve heard that God’s word is available in a book called the Bible, but that book is in Russian. Now, a few people in the room are going to say, “Well fine. I’ll learn Russian.” You are the few who’ve never tried to learn a second language before—or perhaps the savant in the room who learns languages easily. The point is: language learning is hard. Most people—unless they’ve studied *in* that language in school for many years or were immersed in it since they were young—never learn a language well enough to read a book in it or otherwise understand Bible content in it.
 - So we want people to realistically have access to the Bible in a language they can realistically understand. And for people who realistically will not have ability or opportunity to learn a majority language, we have to get God’s word to them in the language they know.
 - My work in particular

- I first moved to West Asia about four years ago. I did language learning for a year, and language survey for two years. (Language survey is the process of determining how many languages there are in a given area, what access they have to education materials and Scripture, and how to best get those things to them.) More recently, I've started learning a minority language that I chose to work with long-term. I'm offering to help them develop their language in any way they're interested—creating an alphabet, producing educational materials, recording their folk stories—whatever ways they're interested. And I'm praying that God will open the door with one of them to be willing or interested in translating the Bible with me.
- The minority language I've chosen to work with—I call them the “Wunza” people (that's a pseudonym). They are a remote people up in the mountains. Their language is not a written language; it doesn't have an alphabet. So most people are illiterate, and the few people that *can* read got some education in the national language.
- In the last two years, I've become really sold on what are called “oral approaches” to “oral cultures.” Instead of teaching everyone literacy just to get them the Bible, why not just translate it in audio and oral form?
 - Of course, we can certainly offer to help the people create an alphabet, write primers, start schools, recruit students, and teach the people to eventually read in their own language. But most of the time, minority language communities don't even want that. If they want literacy at all, they only want it in a majority language that offers further education and job opportunities.
 - Have you ever noticed how the Bible assumes oral cultures as well? Granted, the Bible itself *is* a book; there has to be literacy to access it—but not by everyone. In NT times, people didn't generally own personal copies of Scripture to read at home. Scripture was read out loud at the synagogues—or, as Christianity developed, in the churches. And if anyone had a copy of Scripture, it was the cultural norm that they read it out loud so that anyone in earshot could hear.
 - Remember in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch? How was it that Philip knew what was being read as he walked by the Ethiopian's chariot? Acts 8:30 says, “Philip ... *heard* him reading Isaiah the prophet.” Or have you ever wondered why the Bible so frequently refers to those who “*hear* the word of God” (and obey it) instead of those who “*read* the word of God” (Luke 11:28; James 1:22; Romans 10:17)?
 - As a side note, don't let the culture of quiet times among believers ever make you feel less spiritual if reading is a difficult and frustrating experience for you. I have a friend who has a lot of difficulty reading—despite being a sharp computer programmer. He felt guilty for years whenever he'd try to have a quiet time; he'd

lose track of what he was reading, fall asleep, or just give up. Then he discovered audio Bibles and has used them instead ever since.

- Anyway, an oral approach recognizes that the vast majority of people in these cultures are oral learners and capitalizes on that.
 - So after learning the language, my goal is to find a mother tongue speaker who's interested in translating with me. After translating, we'll need to find an engaging speaker and do an audio recording.
 - Then eventually, we'll need to figure out how to distribute it. Local people often transfer files to each other's phones on SD cards, so that might be a way to start. And as social media and internet use increase—even in the most remote parts of the country—there may be ways to distribute it through that, or make YouTube videos to incorporate the audio into, or things like that. But we haven't gotten there yet. I *just* started learning the language! But I'm excited to see those steps happen when I get back.
- Before I wrap up, I want to share a few ways you can follow through on what I'm asking you to be a part of. Of course, I'd just be thrilled if anyone is interested in going, and I'd love to talk to you more. And if you're a regular part of Mountain View, you've already been a part of helping send me to the field and sustain my continued working there. Thank you!
 - One way to learn more about God's heart for the world is the course I mentioned called "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement." Though I became a goer, it's not actually primarily meant for goers; it's just meant for the everyday believer. There's actually one starting tomorrow night at Summit View, and you can check out the first night for free without committing. You can find more information about it in your bulletin.
 - Perhaps the most practical step you can be a part of most immediately is prayer. I want to show you this video and then I'll share a couple prayer requests.
 - [Show Prayer Video]

- There are two main things you can pray for for me and the team I'm on.
- [Create Slide: Two Prayer Requests, Introduced One by One]
- God already gave an amazing answer to prayer earlier this year. About a year ago, I transitioned to my job being to start work with the Wunza language. The Wunza people live in a mountainous region surrounded by militants. Since I couldn't go there, I had to find Wunza speakers in the capital city I live in. But in the capital, there are millions of people, but probably only a couple hundred Wunza, and I couldn't find any. So I kept doing language survey work in the meantime while I searched, and I asked people on my newsletter list to pray with me that I'd find Wunza speakers.
 - After 6 months, another American told me he had two Wunza students in a class he was teaching, and he introduced me to them. Their family has just been the perfect family to connect with. They're very warm towards me, connected with other Wunza families in the capital, and interested in connecting me with community leaders for helping them with language development. Their son in college has been teaching me the language since then, and his older brother comes to hang out at my house once a week. He loves bringing topics of deep discussion about life issues and poetry he's memorized.
 - But I still need a Wunza person willing or interested in translating the Bible into their language. Whether that's someone I already know or someone I haven't yet met, whether someone already interested in Jesus or someone who becomes interested as I talk to them, please pray with me that God provides a person of peace like that.
- Another prayer request is for three mother tongue translators of another language my colleague works with. These three guys became believers through the process of translating the word into their own language, and they just can't keep it to themselves. They're passionate about others hearing and reading about Jesus for *themselves*, and now one of them is in trouble for it. He's been accused by an extremist group of running a church (to which he says, "I'm not running a church. There aren't enough believers. If only I were!"). The extremist group has announced that they're going to "take him alive," and now all three guys' translation work has stopped while they just stay low and seek out options. They're wondering whether to leave the country or stay. If they stay, they no longer want to be full-time translators but instead have regular jobs in the community and translate on the side.
 - Please pray with for wisdom on whether they should leave the country, and for jobs and protection if they stay. And pray that their translation work will continue.