Missions is a race of perseverance. Whatever role God has for you, run the race. Joy is at the finish line!
I am not particularly fond of running. Okay, that is an understatement! I do not like running! Consequently, I have often quipped, “If there isn’t some kind of ball and competition involved, why in the world would a person want to run?”

Perhaps you can relate. It is no wonder that I do not associate running with joy. Yet Hebrews 12:1-2 associates running with joy. However, it isn’t running that produces the joy that is mentioned. In Jesus’s case, it was what the cross would accomplish that brought Him joy. The cross accomplished our salvation when the sinless Son of God died as our substitute, enduring the righteous wrath of God upon sin. Christ ran His race and endured that suffering and shame to provide salvation.

Just the thought of sins forgiven, our relationship with God restored, and the prospect of eternity in heaven ought to elicit exuberant joy in our hearts, like it does in the heart of Jesus Christ.

Yet billions of souls around the world today know nothing of such joy because they don’t know Christ and may have never heard the Gospel. The race that God has called all of us to run is the race of faith to take that Good News to those who desperately need it. Whether God has called you to go, to give, or to pray, your greatest joy should be seeing people come to Christ as a result of running your race.

Are you running that race faithfully? Amazing joy awaits those who have faithfully run their race!
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Only three things are eternal in nature:

God
is eternal

God’s Word
will abide forever

People
will live forever in one of two places
As we love God and get His Word into people's hearts and lives, we are directly involved in eternal pursuits. Loving God and making Him known through His Word to the nations—that is missions. I can think of no greater or nobler pursuit. Maintaining this eternal perspective is indeed challenging in the world in which we live, but the alternative—immediate gratification—is overrated and empty. Hearts anchored by an eternal perspective and eternal joy are hearts where missions thrives. Without these anchors, we could not endure the hardships and obstacles of missions or even disregard the embarrassment of language faux pas and cultural snafus.

The prophet Isaiah learned the joy of an eternal perspective. When he caught sight of the eternal God, his response was, “Woe is me, for I am undone!” With the touch of a coal to his lips, Isaiah experienced the magnificence of forgiving grace. From that moment, he eagerly accepted God’s call because he saw that God is worthy and that shaping eternity is worth the sacrifice. When missionaries answer God’s call in their own times, it’s because they see the same things: Our God is worthy, and missions is worth it.

Missions is worth it because it is God focused. Missions is the very heartbeat of God, and Jesus is the greatest missionary God ever sent to this world. There is no greater thrill than to represent our glorious Savior to the nations. We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, and that is a very high honor. The missionary Henry Martyn once said, “The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become.” Missionary zeal does not grow out of intellectual beliefs or theological arguments but out of love. Love for God and love for others. God is worthy of this.

Missions is worth it because it is Word driven. The Word of God that remains forever is the vehicle by which people are introduced to the Savior and the life-transforming work of the Holy Spirit. We never lose hope, because the Word lives and abides forever. Because of its eternal power, it will never return void but will accomplish its purposes. It is this Word that is living and active and powerful and brings eternal life change to those quickened by the Spirit.

Missions is worth it because it is people centered. Life is all about adding value to people created in God’s image. There is profound joy in finding something you have lost. Remember the time you lost your wallet or your keys? The joy and relief you felt after finding them is almost inexpressible. How much more intense is the joy that is experienced when an eternal lost soul is found. There is a cosmic celebration in heaven when just one sinner repents. And missions is the vehicle that transports that hope to the nations. Missions is worth the difficulties and challenges because temporary obstacles pale in comparison to the joy and the glory that will never fade.

Are there trials and struggles involved in missions? Of course there are. Are there burdens and weights to bear? Absolutely. But these temporary sufferings are nothing compared to the joy and glory we will experience for all eternity. Do you want to invest your life into something that will have eternal dividends? Then spend your life—or should I say invest your life—into honoring God by getting His Word into people’s hearts. And isn’t it good to know that this is something all of us can do?
Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2
We’re in a race together …

That’s how the Bible describes the Christian life. Many have already run, people like Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Joseph. Their races were all marked by faith—believing God and fulfilling His purpose for their lives.

For all of us who are running this race of faith, we fix our eyes on Jesus. His life was poured out to bring salvation to the world, and He did it for the joy that was set before him. And so we follow His example and look to His same reward. As we carry His gift of salvation to the world, we do so for the joy set before us.

We each have a role in this race. Some run by praying for the advance of the Gospel. Others run by giving so that missions has resources necessary to move forward. And God calls some runners to go as His ambassadors. Whatever your role, run your race with faith and endurance—joy is at the finish line!

Visit www.bmm.org to view Advance magazine and download a free file of this artwork to use as computer wallpaper.
Ruth Kennedy has served as a nurse/midwife in two African nations. Now based in Scotland, she provides support for an African ministry.

When someone asks questions about a particular subject you have mentioned in a newsletter, or concern is shown about a certain individual you have referred to, you really know that they are praying. That interaction between two parties is essential for true prayer.

Recent events in northern Ethiopia have led to many stating “Praying” or showing emojis indicating prayer. That is good. There are a few faithful prayer warriors who follow up with an email or personal message asking about food supplies, safety, the babies, the children, the teens. I reply, asking them to pray especially for a specific child or need, and they again follow up with questions over time on “How is X or Y?” No one can ever know just how heart-warming and encouraging that is to know that someone cares enough to be faithful in this task of praying for one another. When my colleague telephones saying, “We have seen miracles, Ruth, real miracles!” I know exactly from whence come those miracles!

“I couldn’t do anything! All I could do was pray!” is such a silly concept—as though anything we could do would be more powerful and more effective than prayer itself! Prayer IS the greatest and most powerful tool/weapon we have—at any time, in any situation. May we truly learn the truth of that!

—Jan Santos

I have learned that saying...
in Praying

John and Debbie Poe formerly served in Peru and are now with BMM’s Spanish publications ministry, Editorial Bautista Independiente.

The day that Debbie first fell ill with her liver disease was when I saw prayer warriors come to the front lines more than ever. I was left alone at the door of the ICU and was not allowed to enter. I felt helpless and alone. I didn’t know what to do so I called family and then made a post on Facebook asking for prayer.

Within a few hours, the request had been spread around the globe. As many as 30,000 people sent notes of encouragement and promises of prayer over the next 48 hours. Then we heard that Debbie’s health need was being broadcast nationwide on Christian radio. The response was overwhelming, and the feeling of helplessness and loneliness started to fade.

That first night, doctors told me Debbie had a 30-percent chance of surviving the night. Debbie has now recovered from a liver transplant and continues to see improvements in her health each day. The ER doctor in Peru that saw her that first night commented, “I am not a religious person, but your faith seems to work. Keep having people pray.”

Dave and Jan Santos have served in Brazil since 1987.

As missionaries, we sometimes go through very difficult times—things that we don’t necessarily want to throw out there for everyone to know about—but things that are so heavy we can’t really carry them alone. Both of us have put together lists of people (men for Dave and women for me) we know we can go to when we need an army holding us up in prayer.

I begged the Lord to show me women I could truly TRUST and who would come around me and lift me before the throne. The Lord gave me some amazing women who have learned the power of prayer. When we get a call that is overwhelming, or we’re face to face with something that is just too big for us, we immediately write it out and send it to each of our prayer warriors.

I can’t tell you the comfort and encouragement I have received from their words back to me. As they tell me how God directed them and how they are praying over the situation, or they write their prayers right there for me to read … Man! It just shows us how the Holy Spirit truly guides our prayers and is interceding for us even when we don’t know what we need or how to express it properly!
Creative Access Nations missionaries critically need prayer for Gospel opportunities, wisdom, and safety. This Creative Access Nation missionary relates the story of a prayer warrior who is a special blessing to him and many others:

I wanted to share a story of a lady who has been a tireless prayer warrior for years, but even more so since retiring. This sweet 70-year old is known for her jovial personality and contagious laugh. But underneath that kind demeanor is a warrior’s heart. She regularly prays for the overthrow or conversion of dictators, the endurance of persecuted believers, and the raising up of laborers across the world. She does so not in generic prayers, but bringing specific people and places before the Lord.

Her bathroom mirror is large, but that’s not to provide more room for her to look at herself. You see, much of her mirror is covered with the prayer cards of those for whom she intercedes. And at any given time there are also maps, pictures of persecuted believers, Bible verses, and other notations to shape her prayers. This is not a dead bulletin board, but a living document that seems to often get updates snipped from prayer letters and recent headlines.

Her communication with God often spills out into communication with those for whom she prays. Any Gospel worker will count themselves blessed to find their card in her hands, for she will not only pray for them, but when prompted by the Lord she will also email them, write them, encourage them.

She’s only 5’2” but stands tall enough to reach God’s heart as she calls out for Him to save the lost, uphold His servants, and put down evil. Many who know her well are sure their own lives have been affected by her fervent prayers. What a day it will be in eternity when some precious martyr meets her and thanks her for praying for grace on the very day his testimony was sealed, or the missionary wife hugs her for upholding her children through their tough teen years and writing her to say as much.

She wouldn’t want any attention for all that she does. I know this because she’s my mom.
Joy in Giving

By Steve Brennecke

Steve and his family served in a Creative Access Nation before the Lord redirected him into BMM administration. Steve currently serves as BMM’s Administrator for Stewardship Ministries.

Abounding grace
The testimonies of joyful givers

Chuck was holding an ear of corn, standing in the field at harvest time, pulling back the husks to reveal rows of golden kernels. “There’s always an even number of rows, usually 16. Count the kernels on one ear, and you’ll find 800 on average. And that’s only one of the ears—and all from one seed.” Chuck had seen God supply and multiply his corn crop over decades of farming. He and his wife, Carolyn, bought new farms to add to their operation and lived by faith as their farm business grew. With each new farm there came a list of new tasks. The fields needed drainage tile and there were trees to clear. After each harvest season Chuck stepped out of his combine and into a bulldozer where he spent fall and winter days improving the land … but not to build an earthly kingdom.

Chuck and Carolyn have given to the Lord’s work in lean times and in times of bounty—and have encouraged others to do the same. Although farming is tightly connected to the soil, rain, and sunlight, Chuck and Carolyn have always remained focused on heavenly things. Years ago, when their church was under financial constraints and had to cut a missionary from the budget, Chuck and Carolyn personally picked up that missionary’s support so he or she could remain engaged in the ministry of the Gospel on their field. Through the years, they “adopted” many individual missionaries this way and, in the process, God increased their passion for missions.

In a modern farm operation that is rich in data (fuel bills, harvest data, soil maps, grain prices, and fertilizer, herbicide, and pesticide expenses), Chuck and Carolyn also kept track of their giving. That’s right. They kept their needs simple and tracked the amount the Lord provided for them to give to missions through the years. This was the underlying passion that drove their farming efforts. They saw themselves as a conduit—not a keeper—of God’s bounty, and perhaps because of that, the Lord found them faithful and blessed them even more. The more God blessed, the more they gave. And today, the totals are astounding: millions of dollars given in a grand effort to reach eternal souls with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And all of this from one faithful couple joyfully yielded to the Lord. “You can’t outgive the Lord!” Chuck smiles.
The Apostle Paul saw a process at work in the lives of early believers who gave of their wealth to the Lord’s work. What Paul saw so amazed him that he penned his observations into Scripture. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul noted that, when Christians gave, God responded to their giving by supplying them grace. Those who gave bountifully reaped bountifully, but as they gave away the wealth God had supplied, God provided even more “seed to the sower and bread for food.” Paul noted that the gifts they had given grew into a “harvest” of righteousness and that, in this unexpected way, the givers were enriched. What’s more, those who received their gifts were thankful to God and gave God glory. Gift giving was simply the natural outworking of the Gospel in their lives.
Chuck and Carolyn have retired from farming, yet they remain vitally engaged in ministry. Their lives can be described as a steadfast, joy-filled walk of faith.

A bedrock confidence in God is a common trait among those who give to the Lord. They have received of the Lord, and they give out of a grateful heart. A lifetime of experiencing the Lord’s provision strengthens the heart for regular gifts and for lifetime gifts.

Goldie Wagner had been a widow for many years when she walked into a “Meet the Mission” breakfast meeting. She joined a small group who gathered that morning in a local diner. After introductions were finished and the coffee was poured, Goldie listened to a description of recent developments on the fields of ministry from around the world. What she heard stirred her heart for the ministry of the Gospel.

Goldie looked back over her life. She and David, her husband, had worked hard. David worked in a local factory, and he and Goldie raised their children on a limited income. Yet even though times were difficult, she and David gave to their local church and to BMM missionaries. The Lord provided them a small farm in the countryside where she continued to live after David passed away. Her needs were simple, and her ministry was vibrant. She loved to be a blessing to others, and so she worked daily to make quilts as gifts for the homeless who were served in a local ministry. Typically, her days were filled with cutting and sewing fabric—giving of herself for the good of others. As she listened in the diner that morning, she was reminded that the Baptist Mid-Missions Global Ministry Center is also a place where people work for the benefit of others. From the Global Ministry Center, missionaries in more than 50 nations receive meaningful services that help them in their ministries. She saw the alignment of BMM’s ministry and her personal ministry.

As the small group enjoyed breakfast that morning, the idea formed in her mind that there was another way she could give to the Lord’s work. “I have an idea.” She said. “When I’m gone, I want to give my farm to the Mission.” With that, Goldie voiced the desire of her heart. As she prayed about it over the next several weeks, her idea turned to resolve. She worked closely with BMM’s Stewardship Department and her personal attorney to draw up the necessary documents to implement her future gift. Now, as Goldie sits at her sewing machine creating another quilt for someone in need, she has the pleasure of knowing that she has cared for her final gifts in a way that honors her Lord—and that’s real joy!
For some, the call into missions originates during childhood and becomes a lifelong dream eventually affirmed. For others, it comes almost out of nowhere during an established season in life. My wife, Hope, and I were settled, serving in a pastoral role, raising kids near family, comfortable in “the center of God’s will” … and forgetting that God often chooses to radically reposition His center.

Anyone who has experienced a call from God understands two fundamental and critical steps to work through: acceptance of the call and the action toward the call. Both are painful and emotional. Both require personal responses that influence effectiveness, longevity, and outcome.

Part of the beauty of God’s calling is the certainty of His voice and the conviction that builds to help make the acceptance a little easier. God used deep and lengthy Bible studies to soften my heart and gradually shift my focus from local ministry to foreign missions.

The action toward the call proved the most challenging for us. Telling Hope’s parents we were moving 9,000-miles away … to Africa … with the grandkids … was HUGE! Little did we know that God had gone before us by preparing their hearts ahead of our own announcement by leading them into a children’s ministry and moving them to another city.

Every missionary eventually discovers that the action toward the call is continuous and costly: perpetual goodbyes, letting go, emotional losses, failures, disappointments, and dependency are struggles every seasoned missionary endures, but there is also an indescribable joy in missions that every seasoned missionary enjoys!

One precious example is the video I recently received of a young Zambian pastor named Alvin baptizing his first group of new believers. I had briefly discipled Alvin 15 years ago and personally baptized him.
at the same water hole. To see him become the pastor of our first church work in Zambia, leading others to follow Christ, is truly a joy unspeakable and full of God’s glory.

In spite of the trials and hardships, we have experienced a joy that has outweighed the costs. Over the last 16 years in Africa, we have seen others respond to God’s Word through our many Bible studies and discipleship efforts. We have loved on kids and seen God’s love shine through them. We have experienced joy through transformed lives and follow-up visits and through seeing faithful followers of Christ teaching others. Joy has been found in helping pastors remain faithful, fervent, and prepared in their pulpits. And we found joy in missionaries encouraged and strengthened to remain on the field, strong and courageous. This is why we do what we do. It is worth it! There IS joy in serving Jesus.

Jim and Hope Smith’s family served with BMM in Zambia before beginning their current ministry in South Africa in 2011.
Something Greater
by Dave Kimmel

Our path to full-time ministry and missions came about primarily through a desire to see the lost won to Christ. We had already experienced the joy of serving the Lord in our local church, and we could have easily remained there for many more years. However, we sensed the Lord had something greater in store for us—something with eternal significance.

We are blessed to be serving the Lord in Romania, a wonderful country full of rich history and natural beauty. We work in the rural village of Luncsoara, and our ministry is specifically to the Roma (preferred over the derogatory term, “Gypsy”) people who are an ethnic minority in Romania and throughout the world.

Since coming to Romania in 2009, we have witnessed how the Roma people are looked down upon and openly discriminated against. Ethnic stereotypes abound, and life is particularly challenging now because of the pandemic. A further provocation is that many Roma families, which often include four or more children, have multiple family members working outside the country for months at a time as their primary income. Parents often leave children behind with grandparents or older siblings, and the family structure suffers. Young teens are thus involved in inappropriate relationships, and teenage pregnancies are the norm. Thus, we are convinced that the Roma people need the Lord now more than ever, and we are thankful for the privilege to be used by the Lord to reach them for Christ.

We have experienced the ups and downs of ministry just like our BMM colleagues around the world. Our greatest joy has been being part of a talented team that the Lord granted the responsibility of raising a new generation for Him. Many of these children have heard the Gospel from the time they could walk, and each week they are learning about God, the Bible, and their need for salvation.

Although we have not often seen or heard public expressions of faith in Christ in our ministry (it is difficult to go against family and community pressures), we do sense that the Lord is working in hearts. Our prayer is that in time some of the older children and teens who have grown up under our team’s ministry will begin to make decisions for the Lord and choose to serve Him with their lives. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to continue to remain faithful to the call that the Lord has given us and to see to fruition the outcome of years of effort. And that means a joy that will last throughout heaven!

Dave and Ruth Kimmel’s family have served with BMM since 2006.
A great way to get involved in missions is to join Baptist Mid-Missions’ Advance the Vision team. Learn more at www.bmm.org or contact us at info@bmm.org or 440-826-3930.
As we comb through recent missionary prayer letters, the highlights reveal God at work and the forward progress of the Gospel:

**From the Caribbean:**
“The disciplermakers gave incredibly positive feedback on the first two meetings they had with their disciples.”

**From North America:**
“God’s working in the life of a grandmother impacted her sister, who then shared her faith with another woman, who accepted Christ as her Savior!”

**From South America:**
“Our people are more involved in the various church ministries, like teaching in Sunday school, leading the services, serving in the nursery.”
“Recently we had five baptisms. They were done during the week in three different groups at two different locations.”

**From Europe:**
“The boys learn verses and songs by heart quickly and devour the Bible lessons.”

“On our last Sunday meeting together as a church, we welcomed seven people into our membership and are anticipating others joining in the near future.”

**From Africa:**
“I preached in English, which was translated to French, which was translated into the vernacular language. And the best news: 19 people accepted Christ as Savior!”

“On our last Sunday meeting together as a church, we welcomed seven people into our membership and are anticipating others joining in the near future.”

“Every time we sit down to write an update, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness and goodness toward us. We always have the privilege of reflecting on how God is working in the lives of individuals—and the constant obstacles by which Satan tries to disrupt God’s work. Thankfully, God is always orchestrating His perfect plan for His Glory.”

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