

# Team Devotions for Mission Service



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## Welcome!

We believe that our mission is really God’s mission. He works in and through us to accomplish His purposes in bringing Alaskans to faith in Jesus Christ. As you prepare to join us in God’s mission, it is important to prepare spiritually for the trip.

Our staff, board members, and team leaders have prepared brief Bible studies for you to work through with your team as you prepare to serve in Alaska. We also request that your team schedule times of regular devotions and Bible study while serving in Alaska. It is important to root yourself in God’s Word when your boots hit the ground. There will be blessings along with a few challenges during your time of service. God is with you, and He will serve you through His Word.

We also encourage you and your team to use the post-deployment devotions with your team upon the return home. Processing your experience with teammates and others is a valuable tool to carry this mission service forward to your home and community that leads to life transformation.

We are praying for you and your team. May God’s abundant blessings flow through you as you proclaim and practice the love of Jesus into the state of Alaska!

Serving with you in Joy,

Jerry Simpson  
Executive Director

Jan Bruick  
Servant Event Coordinator

## Pre-Deployment Devotions

### CHANGE

**Rev. Aaron Spratt, AMC Missionary to Southeast Alaska**

**“Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”**

Psalm 19:4

The world around us always seems to be changing. What once was trendy has now become tacky. Just look back at old photos of you or your family. Clothes, hairstyles, glasses, and shoes have gone from cool to outdated, and in some cases back to cool again. Not only do our appearances change, but car design, restaurant menus, political controversies, and interior decoration seem to change each and every day. It seems like nothing is the same but change itself.

But consistent through all this change is one thing: God’s Word. His Word that tells of His unchanging love and forgiveness for all peoples in all places. Psalm 136 speaks of this, “Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (v. 26) Alaska Mission for Christ has remained solely focused on the proclamation of God’s enduring and steadfast love in Christ Jesus. Endeavoring to serve in mission of our Lord’s great commission, we teach all that He has commanded us – all of His mercy, all of His grace, all of His forgiveness.

One thing that will change on this mission trip is you. God will give you a new perspective, a new passion for His Word, a renewed and strengthened love for those that you are blessed to serve. Some of you may see change and transformation in the lives of those in the village, but many of us will see the same pain, the same sorrow, the same hopelessness. The cure for these unchanging ailments is the unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ that can heal and cure all spiritual sickness.

There can be great temptation and the devil would have you think that we must change in order to be successful – that if we are the same, we won’t be effective. Our Lord knows our temptations, so He tells us that He is “the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) His unchanging love and unchanging Word will work. While we may feel ineffective, while we may not see the fruits of the seed sown, we can with certainty say that His Word will not return void. With this certainty, go forth and scatter the seed of His Gospel, sow it in the north, sow it in the southwest, sow it in southeast, sow it where you are!

We can give thanks to God for the great privilege to serve in this beautiful yet hurting place. It is good that we take time before going out to far-flung villages, before the adventure begins, to meditate upon God’s love and His Word. May they penetrate our hearts and give us the courage and confidence to tell of God’s enduring and steadfast love to those who desperately need to hear it.

[Jesus said] “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. <sup>6</sup> And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. <sup>7</sup> And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. <sup>8</sup> And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” – Luke 8:5-8

#### Discussion Questions

- How does knowing that the mission of the church does not change give us comfort and confidence to share Jesus’ Gospel in the villages we serve in?
- Read James 1:17, name some gifts that our unchanging God gives to us.
- Jesus Christ gives us unchanging and unending forgiveness of all our sins, how does this change our hearts?

#### Prayer

Almighty and gracious God, You have commanded us to pray that You would send forth laborers into Your harvest. Grant that as we are instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by Your holy Word, we may do those things which are well pleasing to You and profitable for our salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **BIBLE HERO: DORCAS**

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

**Acts 9:36-39:** *Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." 39 So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.*

'Heroes of the Bible' is a common Vacation Bible School theme, and we usually think of Abraham, Moses, David, etc. One could make a case for Dorcas—after all, her life was restored to her. The Book of Acts and Gospels have many instances of people being raised from the dead, both by Jesus and the disciples. Often, a family member begged for this miracle, and it's certainly understandable that the supplicant would be a bereaved parent. In this case, it was Dorcas's friends who were beside themselves with grief.

Dorcas appears to be the ideal of a faithful church woman. She made clothing for others and helped the poor with clearly an unselfish spirit. Our mission team benefited from many Dorcas-like heroes of faith. We brought handmade quilts, mittens, hats and hotpads to distribute in the village. Craft kits were assembled to save the team time in the field. Lenten suppers were held to raise funds. All of these things were done for people our 'Dorcas' women would never meet. Yet God recognized the servant heart of Dorcas and revealed both His glory and compassion by raising her from the dead.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, thank you for providing a legion of men and women like Dorcas who take to heart your command to serve others. Let us use the blessings they have provided to your glory. Amen

## **WAITING TABLES**

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

**Acts 6:7** *So the Word of God spread.*

If you just took this verse out of context, what might come before that in your imagination? Probably moving and inspiring preaching, perhaps accompanied by a first-rate choir or other music. That's somewhat true here in Acts—the apostles were preaching and winning converts by the thousands. But what church of more than one person doesn't have a disagreement? In Acts 6, there were complaints about the fairness of how Greek and Jewish widows were being treated and the task of caring for people's physical needs was burgeoning. The disciples had to solve this problem of being stretched too thin.

However, the words of the twelve disciples in Acts 6:2, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables," could strike one as arrogant. A broader view is that the early church was serving so many people and the twelve only had so much time. Feeding and caring for others was of vital importance and the twelve recognized that they could not do it all. In order to focus on spiritual ministry, they chose others to be in charge of this very important component of serving the body of Christ.

Acts 6:7 succinctly describes the result: *And so the Word of God spread.* If Alaska team members had to do all the fundraising, gathering of supplies, shipping, and planning, they might not be able to focus on the Good News message. Much support is needed to send a team to Alaska—and some of it is literally waiting tables. Picture the woman wiping down tables after a Lenten support or refilling the coffee urn. And so the Word of God spreads—by recognizing that some people were given a gift to share the Gospel with those starved for the Word and some people share the Gospel by ensuring that food is hot, there are enough napkins, and the fellowship hall is cleaned up for Sunday.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, thank you for providing so many of your faithful to spread the Word. Bless those who toil, often without proper thanks or acknowledgement. As we share the Good News of your salvation, let us remember all of our steadfast brothers and sisters in Christ who waited tables in order for us to preach Christ crucified.

## **CALLING**

Rev. Matt Troester, Team Leader to Mentasta

### **Acts 16:6-10 (NIV)**

Don't ignore the signs that God gives you. We all want clarity about what it is we are supposed to be doing. "If only God would give me a sign!" Well, He does. Yes, God does give signs. What we need to pray is that He would open our hearts and our eyes to His signs and give us a willingness to follow.

Our congregation got started in mission work because of a young woman from our church who went on a mission trip while in college. Later, she got married, and she and her husband followed the call to the Mission field. At that mission, they were forced to move to another site, because it was too dangerous for them to stay and continue the previous work. It was at the second mission site that we made our first mission trip as a congregation. Again, they left that mission. We were then faced with whether or not to continue with mission trips. We asked our former missionary family where we might go instead, and they suggested Alaska Mission for Christ. In 2021, we will serve with Alaska Mission for Christ for the eighth year.

What did we learn? Follow God's lead. You'll need to be very flexible and open to change. Just when you think you have it figured out, and you're going along smoothly, things are likely to change. God is in the details and the interruptions and the chaos. He's not rustled, we are. But take heart and follow. He works through our mess, and by His grace (and only by His Grace) we can hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

## **Prayer**

God, grant us Your grace to serve humbly and with organized flexibility. Guide and lead us to trust in You in every circumstance. Amen.

## **PERSPECTIVE**

Troy Armstrong, Team Leader to Bethel

1 Corinthians 9:24

Luke 16:13

1 Corinthians 13:4-5

Some of you, like me, may need a new perspective on what life is really about. It is so easy to be consumed with the busyness of our world, that we become overwhelmed with “tasks” that “must” be completed today in order to tackle tomorrow’s tasks. Life becomes one hurried day after another.

We all want to “succeed” in life, but that word can mean something different to each of us. The world’s view tells us that success is wealth, or fame, or owning lot of things, or anything that would take our eyes off the Lord. We want to be served rather than to serve.

Being able to break this cycle for a 10-day “work & witness” trip was one of the best things to happen to me. Experiencing life with others around the world who don’t have the luxuries of life that we take for granted was so foreign to me. I thought I was there to help them, but I know now that God put me there for them to help me gain true perspective through Christ.

Jesus always had time to love and to serve. How many times did I pass up a divine appointment to share the love of Jesus because I was too busy and had to get to a meeting or had to check off more boxes on the task list before the day ended?

Being on a work and witness trip is like hitting the “perspective reset button” for me. To experience the love of those you serve, and to work side by side with new team members that you bond with over the 10-day period, is an amazing blessing. God never fails to show up.

## **Prayer**

Jesus, You have called us to love and to serve one another. Help each of us to examine our heart, see through spiritual eyes, and to learn to love and serve like you, Lord. We all run the race of life Lord, but please help us gain perspective of the true race, the race to share your love, mercy, and grace. Amen.



## **WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO?**

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

### **Galatians 1:11-24**

Have you ever scanned through the travel guide *500 Places to Visit Before You Die*? That's how I viewed mission trips. Costa Rica? Try zip-lining over the rain forest. Brazil? Start humming "The Girl from Ipanema." Alaska? Always wanted to go but sharing a cruise liner with couples celebrating their anniversary was not appealing. Each time I witnessed a presentation in church, read a flyer, or perused pictures in a synod or district publication, that's the mission destination where I wanted to go. Sure, we'd be spreading the Gospel, but bringing back native-made baskets and returning with a tan was the real attraction for me, not to mention bragging rights of being somewhere other than Disney or the Grand Canyon. When an opportunity to be part of an Alaska Mission for Christ team arose, 'going to Alaska' was the phrase I used to describe my upcoming July 'vacation' time.

Then I arrived in the village. From most vantage points, it was as beautiful as the Alaska I wanted to see as a tourist. The experience, however, was far from those boarding a cruise line to cram in as many ports as possible in seven days. Real people were hungry to hear the Gospel. We had to work—cleaning our living quarters, sorting and assembling lessons and crafts, learning the names of at least 60 people, and cooking for ourselves. In our village, it felt like what Paul described in Colossians 3:16, teaching with "*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with the grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" The welcome and enthusiasm was infectious. As a long-time church volunteer, I've seen kids reluctantly dragged to Sunday School and a lack of interest in Bible classes. We were taken aback when children started waiting on the steps of the church well before VBS was to begin. Every night, women met for Bible class and sharing. The villagers kept the team well past lower-48 bedtimes singing hymns.

What started as an adventure to see Alaska in a unique way ended with a renewed faith and enthusiasm for the Great Commission. More importantly, relationships were established, and thanks to social media, maintained. Prayer requests were shared throughout the year. How could I not come back next year? It became about winning people you really know to Christ and supporting their faith rather than humblebrag (that's a real thing—Google it!) about where I'd been that someone else hadn't. The greatest missionary traveler of all, Paul, traveled approximately 10,000 miles in his journeys. Starting in Acts 13, almost every subsequent chapter begins with Paul traveling to yet another place. Yet his travels were not sight-seeing. Galatians 1:15-16 tells us why he was on the road: <sup>15</sup> *But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased* <sup>16</sup> *to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.* The remainder of the chapter summarizes more of his travels in the name of our risen Lord.

Maybe, like me, you began your Alaskan mission work as a tourist instead of a clear calling to proclaim the message of salvation through Christ. Maybe you are just thinking about joining a

mission team. Even if your motivation is sampling fresh salmon and reindeer burgers in Anchorage, you will walk away closer to Christ and with the knowledge that you reached someone with His love.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, lead me to where you want me to be to spread the Word of your Son and our Savior. Grant me the courage, resources, and skills I need to be part of the Great Commission. Bless all those who labor in the mission fields. In your name we pray, Amen.

## **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN**

Rev. Jonathon Rockey, Team Co-Leader to Eek

### **Hebrews 11:1**

In the summer of 2018, six members of St. John Lutheran Church in Palmer, Alaska, traveled to the village of Eek to lead Vacation Bible School on behalf of Alaska Mission for Christ. Perhaps the most stunning aspect of this trip was how much we did not know. None of us had been there before.

So, we had questions about the flight to Bethel, and then to Eek. We were facing the unknown. My daughter, Mary, who had taught in a native village, explained to me about traveling through the Bethel airport. Mary explained that we would need to get our luggage and take a shuttle to the “Ravn Air Airport.” That is different than my travel experience in other locations. It just shows what we didn’t know.

We talked to our local contact in Eek, George Alexie, to ask questions about what we might expect. George’s estimated 30-40 children might attend. Of course, then George told us, “I don’t know. For the last day of Sunday School we prepared 400 hot dogs. They were all eaten!” So how many children *would* attend VBS? We didn’t know!

We were blessed to be able to stay at the Ministry House next to the church. We had been told there would be two beds, and a kitchen in this house, but no running water. George told us there is a town well where we could get our water. However, even that information left questions. In truth, we just didn’t know.

I also asked about fishing. What would the river look like? What kind of equipment could I bring? Would I really be able to fish? Would the fishing lead to relationships through this recreational activity? The truth is, we didn’t know.

So, six members of St. John went to Eek for the purpose of teaching children about Jesus. Having not been there, we didn’t necessarily know what we would find. We weren’t sure how our travel would go. We didn’t know how many would attend VBS. We weren’t sure what our living arrangements would be. We were unsure about recreational opportunities. We went trusting God would provide.

Have you ever faced life as a child of God not knowing what the future holds? Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 11:1: **“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”**

We were UNCERTAIN of what we would experience and find. However, we went trusting that God would provide. With the presence and help of God, we trusted we would have what we needed to do His work. We went, not trusting ourselves, but trusting God and His eternal

love. We were UNCERTAIN of how many children would attend. But we were certain that these children, as all children, needed the savings love of Jesus.

Life is full of “unknowns.” In the midst of life’s uncertainty there is one thing certain, the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus WAS born for us. Jesus DID die for us. Jesus DID rise and DOES rule for the church.

So, our team set out for Eek, facing the unknown as we traveled, sure that the Lord who loves us eternally in Jesus would provide what we needed to do His work. . . And the Lord did provide! (Maybe that’s an Abraham lesson. See Genesis 22)

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, when doubts arise about our team’s service to a village/community this summer, increase our faith to trust in YOU. We know that you will provide all that we need. Forgive us for our fears expressed and bless us with peace and discernment for our time of service. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## **HOW FAR AWAY?**

Rev. Scott Bruick, Team Leader to Akiachak

### **Matthew 5:13-16**

JUST HOW FAR AWAY is the mission field? How far do people need to travel to be able to share their faith with someone who doesn't know Jesus Christ? 100 miles? 1000 miles? 10,000 miles? From little on up, I heard about missionaries who had been called by God to go to distant lands, into places where culture, context, and language were quite different from what they were used to. How interesting the places and the people were that they had met and with whom they had shared the hope of Jesus Christ!

Serving in Alaska, a part of our own country, can feel like a foreign mission field at times. The culture, context, and even the language can seem very different from that in a lower 48 community.

However, how far away from you is the closest mission field? The answer to that question may include:

- As close as the next piece of workout equipment at the local gym
- As close as a young lady sitting in the fourth pew from the back of the sanctuary
- As close as the young man who was preparing dinner at a downtown restaurant

You see, the distance to the mission field does not have to be measured in thousands of miles but, instead, it can sometimes be measured in the distance of a couple of feet. And whom does God send to that mission field? EVERYONE! Everyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ is sent to share the message of what He has done through the giving of His Son, Jesus Christ. Yes, there are some who receive additional training and who are sent out into unique places around the world. And for those who have those gifts and who can go to such place, we give thanks to God for equipping and sending them. But just as important as those who go to unique and distant places to share their faith in Jesus Christ are each of you, His everyday witnesses!

Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-16) You are salt to bring God's seasoning to the world that has gone bland! You are the light that God sends into the world, reflecting the light of Jesus Christ into a world that is growing darker and darker constantly. You are His witnesses, His everyday witnesses, that He sends into some amazing mission fields in your home, on your block, around the cubicle at the office, in the stands at the ballgame, or even in the pew at church.

May God fill each of us with His grace as we are reminded again that each one of us is indeed, His witness!

**Prayer**

Gracious Father, open my eyes to the needs around me today. I want to be “salt” in the world you created. Equip me to be an everyday witness for you! In Jesus name, Amen.

## **THIRSTY FOR JESUS**

Ruth Zellar, AMC Retired Servant Event Coordinator

### **Matthew 19:14**

What a blessing it is to minister to our children in Alaska. They all look forward to teams returning from year to year. With that, the team forms a relationship and trust with those children.

One of the first Bible schools that I was involved in was in Wiseman, Alaska. My husband, Gerry, and daughter, Kristy, and myself left Fairbanks for a 250-mile drive on gravel road. When we arrived, we met with the lady who was our contact person. We had the most wonderfully warm welcome as we talked and shared with her. Her 15-year old grandson asked if he was too old to attend our Bible school. Of course, we responded, "No. You are more than welcome to come and hear about Jesus."

That was a great reminder that everyone needs to hear about Jesus no matter what age. We had Bibles to hand out and enjoyed a wonderful week in this community. 100% of the children in that village attended, all 9 of them. The 15-year old was instrumental to us that week because he knew the other kids and could help with names and family connections. He even had fun gluing cotton balls on paper lambs with the smaller children.

These children were thirsty to hear about Jesus. They kept asking us to tell them more stories about Jesus and why He loved us so much. We told them that He loved us so much that He died on the cross to forgive our sins and rose again so we could be in heaven with Him.

I will never forget one little boy who came up to me and said, "You mean He died just for me?" I said "Yes, just for you". Then when his mom came to pick him up, he eagerly shared all that he had learned about Jesus that day.

These children reminded me of the song: ***Children of the Heavenly Father***

Children of the heavenly Father  
Safely in His bosom gather;  
Nestling bird nor star in heaven  
Such a refuge e'er was given.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, bless our volunteers whom You have called to travel to Alaska to share Your love with children, both young and old. Allow them to feel your presence as they tell others about you. Bless their planning time that it will be a rich and uplifting. May everything that they do be to Your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.

## **GOD'S PLAN OR MINE?**

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

### **Romans 1:8-17**

I did not return on a mission trip to Alaska in 2018. It wasn't due to work or family obligations, a bad previous experience, or cost. In fact, I planned the trip and was set to leave early to shop in Anchorage for the team. I even scheduled my long overdue routine colonoscopy so I could follow up on last minute details while stuck at home. Not to be the poster child for backing out of this life-saving procedure, but the doctor punctured my colon, so I had an ambulance ride and emergency surgery the same day. I now understand the look on the surgeon's face when I said, "I have to go to Alaska next Friday."

Since our team was a bit short-handed anyway, from my hospital bed my team and I put out social media notices to find a replacement. God provided a wonderful teacher who works with at-risk children. I had to content myself with praying for the team and exchanging text messages as team members shopped in Anchorage, got stuck overnight in Bethel, and unpacked everything we shipped.

Was I disappointed? Of course. Did I gamely realize that it must have been God's plan all along? YES! Instead of asking, "Why me?" I looked for what God might have had in mind. My replacement may not have been able to afford the full price of the trip. All new team members were able to give VBS and Bible studies a fresh look and came back with inspiring ideas. Even the greatest missionary of all, Paul, was often thwarted in his plans and knew that God was in control. Paul tells the Roman congregation *I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)* Romans 1:13. He also found people whom he trusted to share the Gospel in his place, as Titus did in Corinth: *I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you. For Titus not only welcomed our appeal, but he is coming to you with much enthusiasm, and on his own initiative.* 2 Corinthians 8:16-17. Insert "Christine" here and it applied to my Goodnews Bay replacement!

Meanwhile, I was humbled when the only visitor my hospital roommate had during the week was her landlord—who read her an eviction notice. I was thankful for daily visits from my pastor and numerous friends who popped in. It reminded me that while others were sharing the Gospel thousands of miles away, I had someone two feet from me who needed prayers too. Think about the last time your plans were thwarted. As you look back, was there perhaps a reason God chose to answer your prayer differently than you wanted? Sometimes it is more exciting to take part in a mission trip in an exotic place or with a group you like. Is there someone in your path every day that needs to hear the Gospel? How can you do share your faith in a way that will draw him or her to the Savior?



Wherever or whenever we serve, God has a plan.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, You taught me to pray “thy will be done.” Help me to look for Your will in all circumstances, even when it is not my will. Guide me to trust in You and rest in the knowledge that all things work to glorify You. Open my eyes to those around me who are waiting to hear the Good News of your Son and His saving grace. Amen

## **WHY GOD'S WILL?**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**Jeremiah 29:11**

**Romans 8:28**

**1 Thessalonians 5:18**

**Micah 6:8**

One of my favorite Christmas movies is *The Christmas Story*. The classic film follows little Ralphie around in the days preceding Christmas in his quest for a Red Rider BB gun. As he asks his parents, and even Santa about it, they all give him the classic response... (say it with me)...  
"YOU'LL SHOOT YOUR EYE OUT!"

Christmas day arrives and (spoiler alert) Ralphie receives his very own Red Rider BB gun. As he's playing with it for the first time, he does nearly shoot his eye out and is quickly humbled by his new gift.

The Israelites, God's people, as recorded in the Old Testament, were in exile and wondering if they would ever get to go back home again. As they began to get used to their new life and the despair and uncertainty it brings, the prophet Jeremiah records the above words of comfort from God.

These words have given many Christians comfort in knowing that God is gracious and has a plan for their lives. Often, we don't fully understand God's will, but we can take comfort knowing He has our best interests in mind with words like good, future, and hope. Just as Ralphie received words of caution from the adults in his life, we, too, receive words of direction from God's Word. And, just as Ralphie still wanted the BB gun even with the cautions given him, we too want our own way, even if it can be dangerous.

The good news is that God can use all to His good. He uses us despite our insecurities, our doubts, and our sin. Thanks be to God as we trust that His will is best for our lives!

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, may You truly be Lord in my life and help me to better trust in you each day. Take my need for control, help me to trust in your will, and reveal to me where you are leading me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **WHAT IS GOD'S WILL? (PART 1)**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**Matthew 6:10**

**Matthew 3:1-2**

**Matthew 6:3-4**

**Matthew 6:33**

As a huge baseball fan, one of my favorite movies is Field of Dreams. In this classic film, starring Kevin Costner, a dream field is constructed on a farm in the Midwest so that past baseball players can come out and relive their baseball dreams. One of the iconic lines is when one of the players asks, "Is this heaven?" and the main character responds with, "No, it's Iowa."

In the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays that He desires for God's Kingdom to come now, and God's will to be done just as it is in heaven. Have you ever wondered just what exactly this means and what this looks like? Should the earth even resemble heaven in any way, like Iowa resembled a heavenly baseball field?

God's desire is that earth look more like heaven each day, not in a physical manner with pearly gates, golden roads, and fluffy clouds, but with attributes like justice, mercy, love, forgiveness, and hope. When we seek to live out God's Kingdom on earth, we pray that we may see more equality, less poverty, fewer corruption, and greater forgiveness in love. These may never be fully realized here on this earth, but that is our prayer. As Christians, we don't just look for the world to come, but we seek to make this world a bit more like is was originally intended. May you seek God's will to make the world a better place that gives a foretaste of the feast we will one day experience in heaven.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, I pray that You would reveal the ways You are bringing Your Kingdom to earth this week. Make me open to what You are doing in this mission opportunity and use me in your plan of bringing greater redemption and grace to those around me. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen.

## **WHAT IS GOD'S WILL? (PART 2)**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**Luke 22:42**

**Romans 7:15-25**

**Genesis 22:9-14**

**Psalm 22:1-2**

Have you ever had to do something you just didn't want to do? For me, that time was when our dog, Homer, was locked in our bedroom while we were gone and had an explosive case of the runs... all over our carpet. Now, I have a very weak stomach, so I tried to think of everything in order to get out of this task, but it was inevitable, I had to do it. I got down on my hands and knees and cleaned up what I could while keeping my gag reflex in check as best I could. After cleaning what I could, I got the steam vacuum out and finished the task. The floor got cleaned but not without some mutterings under my breath and some unholy thoughts.

Can you imagine what it was like for Jesus as he prayed in the garden the night before his execution? The thoughts of what it would be like to be tortured in the worst possible way? The pain of what it would be like to sacrifice His life for people that despised Him? He asked God the Father if there was any other way but knew deep down that this was the only way. And instead of running or making excuses, he bravely said, "not my will, but yours be done." This is God's will for us, that our will would match His.

Dying for all of humankind is a pretty enormous task, much more so than cleaning up after your dog's accident. Thank Jesus today that He willingly gave up his life so that you and I could experience redemption and grace. May we be strengthened and transformed during our mission service so that we can more often deny our own will and do God's will with greater joy and willingness.

### **Prayer**

Father in Heaven, we thank you for sending Jesus to accomplish what we couldn't do on our own. Thank you, Jesus, that you willingly went to the cross for us, and, Spirit, may you empower us to more frequently conform to Your will rather than our own. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

### **WHAT IS GOD'S WILL (PART 3)**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**1 Timothy 2:3-4**

**Luke 15:4-10, 31-32**

In order to do get some quality bonding time with my daughter, I suggested we do a puzzle together. She was six at the time, so we decided to tackle the 100-piece puzzle. We were killing that puzzle and assembling it in record time. I was so proud of our teamwork. However, as we got toward the remaining pieces, I saw that we were one short. We looked all over the place but came up short. My daughter's eyes started welling up with tears, since we couldn't officially say we were done with the puzzle, (she has a type-A personality like her dad), and she turned to me and said, "but Dad, we need them ALL! It's not fair that they're not all here."

I think Jesus would say the same thing about humans. As the verse in 1 Timothy 2 says, God's will is that all people would know Him and be saved. But, you ask, if God is truly God, then why then would He allow anyone to not be saved?? The answer is simple, God allows us to reject him and give into our own wills, even though it's the reason He gave Jesus to suffer and die.

God's greatest desire is that all would be with Him for eternity. Some of the times when Jesus wept was when he lost His friend, Lazarus (John 11:35), and when he wept over Jerusalem because they didn't understand that He was there to be their Messiah (Luke 19:41). Jesus cared about lost people, and He still does.

Who are your neighbors, friends, or family members who don't know Jesus yet? Pray for them this week and especially that they would know Jesus and His saving love for them. Also, remember those in Alaska who may not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. May God use us in service this summer to share His love and message of salvation with those we meet. This is God's ultimate will for His people—that they would all be saved.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, help me to see others as you see them, as your created beings that are unconditionally loved. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, use me to accomplish your will of telling my neighbors, friends, and family members about Jesus, no matter how awkward it may seem, so that they can ultimately know the incredible healing and saving power of Jesus. In His name, Amen.

## **PRAYING- KNOWING GOD'S WILL**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

**1 John 5:14**

**John 14:13**

**James 1:5-6**

I was perfectly happy with my job when, out of the blue, I got an offer for another job in a different state. It sounded like a great opportunity, but I also really loved where I was currently working and living. I made a list of pros and cons for each one and thought about what life would be like for me and my family if we decided to leave. After a few days I still had no clarity, so I went to my friend and complained to him that this was just too hard. His response was one simple line that has stood out to me since, "Have you prayed about it?"

"Wow! Of course", I said, "how could I have neglected to do that?" How often do we fail to seek out God's will by forgetting to talk to Him about it? As hard-working, independent, Americans it can be really hard to go to God in prayer because we want to control our own futures and figure them out on our own.

There are times when we can logically make decisions, but I wonder if we too often try and "lean on our own understanding" rather than seek the Lord's direction? As we prepare for our service in Alaska, we may be tempted to rely on our own understanding and reason rather than turning to our Heavenly Father who can perfectly guide and direct our ways.

Coming to God in prayer is one of the best ways to discern His will. Let's seek His guidance for our plans rather than relying on our own limited wisdom and strength.

### **Prayer**

God of Peace, give me greater clarity with the decisions related to this mission service trip. As I spend time with You in prayer, guide me to listen, gain understanding, and peace about Your will as I serve. Please hear my prayers and guide me towards your path.

## **WAITING- KNOWING GOD'S WILL**

Grant Carey, Team Leader to Akiak

**2 Peter 3:9**

**Psalms 130:5-6**

**Isaiah 40:31**

**Micah 7:7**

The other day I was at the grocery store to pick up a few items for dinner. I walked through the store to pick up what I needed and then proceeded toward the checkout aisles. As I walked closer, my mind began the complicated mathematical equation of choosing the fastest line. You know how that works: the fastest employee plus the line with the fewest number of people multiplied by the number of items on the conveyor belt should be the quickest line. After making my choice based upon my "solid research method," I began to get very frustrated when my line moved slower than the others around me. Why was I so frustrated? Because I HATE WAITING!! Whether it's in a line, in traffic, or on my phone as it downloads the next picture or video- waiting is the worst!

What about you? Do you hate waiting too? Why is this? I believe that we hate waiting because we love control. When we're stripped of our ability to affect the outcome, we tend to become impatient and irritable... or is that just me??

According to our verse for today, the good news is that God is patient because he wants all to be saved and to be with Him. God's timing is often not our timing, and this can be frustrating. When we seek to understand the will of God, we usually want answers now. Most days while serving in an Alaska community, an extra amount of patient is required. Waiting is hard.

May you have greater understand of the Lord's timing as you take time to slow down and understand that God's will sometimes occurs at a different pace than your own.

### **Prayer**

Dear Jesus, help me to slow down and see that Your perfect will happens in different timing than my own. Give me the understanding and patience to wait for You, knowing that you love me and desire things greater than I can imagine. In God's perfect timing, Amen.

## **COURAGE**

**Psalm 56:3-4**

**Deuteronomy 31:6-8**

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

Fears can be of physical things like bears or plane crashes, emotional things like inadequacy, or spiritual things like knowing if this is really God's call or my own desire. What are your biggest fears as you prepare to go on this mission trip to Alaska?

Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act even in the face of fear. The Bible says that "Trusting in God" is the antidote for fear and the pathway to courage. What hinders you from trusting God as you prepare to launch out to serve him in Alaska?

God is already in Alaska. He is working to prepare the people that you will go and serve. He will travel with you when you go and will be there after you leave. How does God's presence inspire you to courage as you step out in faith to serve Him in Alaska?

## **Prayer**

Almighty Warrior God, you have always defended your people. Give us courage to trust in you even in the face of the unknown. Prepare our hearts so that we may boldly proclaim your love to the people of Alaska. Keep us in faith so that we will always know the forgiveness and life we have in Jesus. Amen.



## **HUMILITY**

**Romans 12 (esp. 3-6a)**

**John 8:7, 9-11**

**Ephesians 5:20-21**

Pride is a prominent feature in our lives. Has anyone ever told you “Be proud of who you are!” Can you be proud of yourself and also humble? Can you simultaneously be a prideful person and a Christian?

Scripture clearly states that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. Humility involves recognizing this very fact. Pride often leads us to want to cast stones at others. When you enter the mission field of Alaska you will see people filled with sin. You will see sin in the people you serve, but you will also see it in the people you serve with (teammates) and in yourself. How should we approach the sin we see in each other and the people we serve?

Read over Romans 12:3 again. Paul commands the opposite of what we usually hear in American and even Native Cultures today. He tells us that we are not to think too highly of ourselves. The entire chapter of Romans 12 is devoted to showing us the life of humility to which we are called. Which parts of the chapter really stand out for you as you prepare to come to Alaska?

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul demonstrates that we are able to boast about two different things. Check out 1 Corinthians 1:31, 15:31 and 2 Corinthians 1:14, 10:17 to find out what they are.

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, I have often thought too highly of myself, help me to think clearly about who I am and the amazing love that Christ has for me. Even while I was His enemy, He died for me. Help me to be an example of that kind of humble love to the people you have called me to serve and to serve with. In Jesus name, Amen!

## **RESPECT**

**1 Peter 2:17**

**1 Peter 3:15**

**Matthew 7:1-5, 12**

**Matthew 25:40**

Respect means “to hold in esteem or to honor”. We are called by God to honor/respect all people (1 Peter 2:17). What is the basis of this respect? (*See Genesis 1:27, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Matthew 25:40*)

The way of living in Alaska may be very different from the way you live. The sins that people struggle with in Alaska may be very different from the sins with which you struggle. How can an attitude of respect keep you from passing judgment on the people that you are going to serve?

We are called to do to others as we would have them do to us (Matthew 7:12). This is complicated when we are from very different backgrounds and cultures. On the surface, what I would like may be very different than what a person in a remote Alaskan village would like. How do we find out what the people we serve would really like?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, when you lived among us you always showed respect to those in need. We need your Spirit to guide us to respect the people we serve. Keep us from passing judgment and help us to honor each person as a person whom you created and redeemed. Thank you also for redeeming us and giving us worth and value in your sight. Amen.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

**Mark 1: 16-18**

**Proverbs 8:34**

**Colossians 3:2**

It would be wonderful to be as flexible as Simon and Andrew...drop what we are doing and follow Jesus. Our plans are not always what God's plans are. We need to listen to what God's plan is for us. What is our reaction when the direction we have planned for ourselves changes due to circumstances beyond our control?

Things don't always go the way we think that they should. Do we resist change? What do we do if we get to a community or village and no children show up? How do you find God's direction when our plans do not work out?

Not every community or village has a Lutheran church in it. In fact, there are only 13 Lutheran churches in Alaska. How flexible are you in attending another Christian church to worship on Sunday with the village?

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, be with our mission team that we will have the flexibility we need. Bless our plans so that we will accomplish what you want us to accomplish on our mission trip. If our plans change at the last minute may we have the understanding and flexibility to accept the new plan. In your name we pray. Amen

## **CULTURE**

**Acts 10:34-35, 15:6-11, 17:26-28**

**Revelation 7:9-10**

**1 Thessalonians 5:21-22**

Culture is the way that a group of people organize to solve the problems of life. Culture includes the way people think, work, interact, recreate, eat, sleep and pray. It encompasses all aspects of our lives. Each culture has good ways of doing things and bad ways of doing things. It is very hard for those outside of a culture to understand why people do things the way that they do. How can you prepare yourself to encounter a new culture in Alaska as a learner and not as a judge?

Is there ever a time that you should confront people from another culture?

God accepts and loves people from every culture. Yet our faith is often intermingled with our culture. Our culture is so deeply ingrained in us that we often cannot tell that it is influencing us. In one Church, the Native people always sat in the back at tables during worship, instead of in the chairs up front. The white believers thought that the native brothers and sisters did not really want to participate in worship. When asked, the Native believers said they liked to sit in the back to see everything that is going on. The same event (i.e., sitting in the back) was interpreted differently by each group. How do we distinguish what is cultural in our Faith from what is essential?

In Acts 15, the early church figured out that Gentiles could enter the church without becoming culturally Jewish. What parts of a person's culture do a person need to change to become a Christian?

## **Prayer**

Father of every nation, tribe and race. You accept and love all people in every culture who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Help us to see clearly to point people to you and not to our own cultural understanding of you. Fill us with your spirit so that we can love cross culturally and more and more people can come to know your wonderful love. Amen.

## **HOSPITALITY**

**1 Peter 4:9**

**Hebrews 13:2**

**Romans 12:13**

Have you ever watched someone do something because they had to and not because they wanted to? Most people come to Alaska on a mission trip because they want to, but still some volunteers grumble about weather, accommodations, price of food etc. How does your motivation for coming to Alaska affect your attitude while you are serving?

Hospitality is a value in native culture. There are two sides to hospitality—giving hospitality and receiving hospitality. It is offensive in Native culture to turn down a gift or food that is offered to you. How will you handle when you are offered food that may be very different than what you are used to? How will you handle if you are offered food that comes from a home that may not be up to your personal standards of cleanliness?

Mission trips are a great place to practice hospitality. As you meet new people on your trip it is great time to show love and kindness to everyone. Are you afraid to show hospitality to everyone that you meet? What are the limits of your hospitality?

## **Prayer**

Lord, give us the eyes of Jesus to see you in our neighbors and in the strangers we meet. Teach us what it means to love the stranger as we love ourselves. Forgive us for our selfishness, for our silence, for not caring enough for the strangers who come to our communities and the strangers we meet as we go into communities in Alaska. Teach us to love and care for the stranger the same way that you do. Amen

## **COMMUNITY**

**Galatians 3:26-29**

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

Community simply means a group of people that have something in common. According to the Scriptures you read, what do you have in common with the people you will be serving?

As a mission team coming to Alaska it is likely you will be entering a unique community with very different religious, cultural, historical, and social traits than you are used to at home. Wisdom, insights, and techniques that work well in the lower 48 can lead to frustration and difficulties when implemented in Alaska villages. What fact do we know from Galatians 3? How does this fact affect our ministry in Alaska?

You might be in a village that has homes with satellite dishes and cell phones but no running water. While this can be quite shocking to you, it is very normal in Alaska; does this mean their priorities are messed up? Or that they just live differently?

Historically the United States, and unfortunately the church at times also, have tried to remove Native Culture and Lifestyle from the villages and instill a uniquely “American” way of life. As a group that is visiting for a short time, what are ways you can instill a sense of community with the people you meet?

Don’t forget that you have a community in the Church! As you are getting ready and prepared to share the love of Christ with others, why is it important that you gather with your church community also?

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord and Savior, you have brought us all together as sinners to be strengthened and built up in your love and forgiveness. We have many different gifts and yet we are all one body in Christ. Enable us to keep meeting together to strengthen and encourage one another in that love. Amen!

## **COMPASSION**

**Exodus 34:6-7a**

**Psalm 86:15**

**Exodus 33:19**

**Matthew 9:36**

**Ephesians 4:32**

In the Old Testament books the writers generally reserve the attribute of compassion for God. In only a few instances do they give that description or even command to anyone on earth. The New Testament regularly compels us to compassion, but it is qualified as an attribute that only comes through Christ. How would you define compassion?

The Greek word translated “compassion” in the New Testament isn’t so much an emotion as it is a physical bodily response. In other words, Jesus literally became sick to his stomach as he looked over the crowds of people following him. His compassion truly was a gut-wrenching experience. Have you ever had a moment when your stomach churned because of what you saw someone else going through?

Compassion is much different than pity or feeling sorry for someone. Compassion involves being moved so much that you are compelled to do something. What has compelled you to go on this mission trip? Even if you are not compelled by compassion does this mean God cannot use you?

What did the compassion of Jesus motivate him to do for you? On your trip to Alaska be sure to share what Jesus’ compassion and action has meant to you!

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, even when I was not looking for your love, you ran and covered me with the blood of Christ that everyone might know I am one of your children. Help me to live out your compassion every day. Amen!

## **STRENGTH**

**Mark 12:28-30**

**Acts 16:5**

**2 Corinthians 12:19 (NIV)**

**Colossians 1:9-14**

**Philippians 4:13**

There are many kinds of strength and we talk about being strong in a variety of ways. What do you think it means to love God “with all your strength?”

In the Church we often speak of “being strong in the faith”; what does that mean? And how is one strengthened in the faith?

Mission trips often have two effects, they impact the people served and the people who do the serving. I have often heard people say they got more out of the trip than they gave. Personally, I believe this is true because during a mission trip we are gathered around God’s Word much more than we are in our normal lives. What might this tell you about your own personal life? What does it also say about where true strength comes from?

Philippians 4:13 is often seen at confirmations, graduations, and even in sporting events. But, take a look at the verses that precede this one (11-12). Is Paul declaring that he can accomplish anything he sets his mind to? Or is Paul specific about what it is God has strengthened him to do – be content in whatever situation he is in?

Do you think it is important to demonstrate contentment? Why? What purpose does it serve?

## **Prayer**

Gracious Lord, I often feel like I am wanting for more, but you have supplied everything I need. Enable me to be like Paul and find the strength to be content in any and every circumstance. Amen!



## **TEAMWORK**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-13**

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

Everyone has gifts and talents in different areas. It is important that if someone is talented in music that we have them work with doing music and not crafts or some other area. What are your talents? Discuss with the team what you are gifted in.

Has your team worked together before? If so, was there any area of teamwork that you need to talk about? What do you do if there is a conflict within your team when you are on your mission trip?

Make sure that you have devotions together both in the morning and evening. During that time, it is a good time to take about how your day went. Were there any problems between team members today?

## **Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for making each of us different and giving us each of us unique gifts. Thank you that when we work together we can make a team and achieve great things. Please help us to work together better and to be thankful for the role we have and the roles others play. Be with us at our servant event that we will love each other as you want us to and work together as a team. Amen

## **FORGIVENESS**

**Psalm 86:4-5**

**Isaiah 1:18**

**Ephesians 4:32**

Sometimes we want people to sympathize with us in our hurts. The truth is, sympathy can only provide temporary relief, but nothing short of forgiveness can provide lasting release. Why do you think people are content with self-pity when forgiveness is available?

There are times when team members have hurt one another. Not only do those people need to ask God for forgiveness they need to ask each other for forgiveness. Is it possible to have a team that works together if there is not forgiveness? Discuss how you can have forgiveness when there is a conflict.

Is your reaction to a hurt or offense in your life an attempt to seek revenge? To wound the person who has wounded you? If so, explain how you feel that getting revenge or wounding your offender would resolve your problem. Would that resolution bring lasting peace, or only add to your pain as a victim? Are you seeking relief or release?

### **Prayer**

Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I recognize Jesus as the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## **LOVE**

**1 Corinthians 13**

**1 John 4:10**

**John 3:16**

**Luke 10:27**

It is easy to talk about love. We all know that it is the most important thing in the world. God loves us so we love others. At the same time, we know that our society minimizes love and makes it into something very different than the Bible calls love. What is true love according to the Bible and how does it differ from the world's version?

When you are on a servant event, you will be focusing on loving those you have come to serve. At the same time, you will be working very closely with a team. Most of the conflicts and problems on mission teams are between team members rather than between team members and those they have come to serve. Those conflicts can affect your witness during your time of service and even afterward. How can you prepare as a team to truly love each other as you serve together?

Sometimes volunteers will run into people that are very difficult to love. This may be a fellow team member, a person in the community, or even yourself. Yet the bible does not make love optional. How do we, as people who are loved by God, love those who are difficult to love?

## **Prayer**

Father, You are the source of all love. You have sent Jesus to show us the ultimate love by dying for us on the cross. Fill us with that love so that it overflows into the lives of others around us. Prepare us to be conduits of your love as we serve you here at home and on our mission trip to Alaska. Amen.

## Deployment Devotions

### **THE FOCUS AND HOPE**

Martin Albright, High School Volunteer to Akiachak

My grandfather died rather suddenly in December of 2019. He was the first close relative who had died in my life. I'd had distant second cousins, uncles, and aunts who had died when I was real young, but never anybody this close to me. I remember as I was putting on my coat for the funeral I asked my dad, "what is the purpose of this?" I didn't mean to sound cold, of course, but I was genuinely wondering why exactly we had to have a funeral. He responded, "The focus isn't on us or on Grandpa, but on Jesus." The focus is on Jesus.

His father had just died, yet my dad knew where to find comfort during this time of grief. But, I mean, who else would you turn to? The rest of the family is grieving, pastors are busy, and if you went so far as to get a counselor or therapist, you'd get only an hour with them at most. Christ is constant, always there, listening for our prayers, knowing exactly what we feel in those times of loss because He felt it too.

As we grieved over my grandfather, Jesus grieved over Lazarus. What a powerful thing to think about. And what a blessing it is to have such a Savior right beside us. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." This passage makes thinking about our Savior as our gift much more overwhelming. Christ is right here beside us because God loved us so much that He could not bear to see our short lives abruptly ended in an earthly death. God made sure that through Christ, our spiritual selves continue on with Him, though our body may fade away. God didn't leave the living behind either. In His Word, God constantly gives us comfort and encouragement in death.

- Ps 33:18-19 "But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine."
- Ps 73:26 "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
- Matt 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."
- Rom 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."
- Jn 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
- James 1:2-3 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers [and sisters], whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

In the one thing in life that cannot be undone, God ensures that we won't ever feel hopeless. He is the only one that can bring comfort when the impassable barrier of mortality arrives. We

will all find joy, not in being with our loved ones long gone, but by being side to side with our Savior and Comforter.

From 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, "I declare to you, brothers [and sisters], that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed --- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself in the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the way through our Lord Jesus Christ."

**Prayer:**

Almighty Father, in You and in You alone can we find comfort for all things, especially in the utter despair that comes with the death of our earthly flesh. Help us to, in all things, focus on Christ Jesus, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Door to Heaven. There is not enough praise that can be given to you for the gift of your Son. Even so, I give you my thanks and adoration, and my life. Please use us as your faithful servants according to Your will. Remind us that in our troubles and trials, there is a purpose and a meaning. And keep in our hearts and minds that at the last trumpet, we will all be made imperishable and immortal, that death will have no sting, that you will wipe every tear from our eye and make all things new. Help us to run this short race of life while relentlessly holding onto the faith we have in you, knowing that at the end, Christ will be standing there with open arms, patiently waiting for us to meet Him face to face. In Christ's name, Amen.

## TEAM ALASKA

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

“Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying” Hymn 826, V 3, *Lutheran Service Book*

If you cannot be a watchman, Standing high on Zion’s wall,  
Pointing out the path to heaven, Off’ring life and peace to all  
With your prayers and with your bounties You can do what God commands;  
You can be like faithful Aaron, Holding up the prophet’s hands.

***Romans 12:6a*** *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them*

How many people were on your VBS team? That’s a trick question—we had eight people travel to Goodnews Bay in July, but more than 100 helped send them.

It was probably the same for your team. Allotting 10 days (not to mention a three-day time change recovery after coming back to Michigan!) to be away from home and work is just not possible for many. Most people who remain seated when our pastor says, “Please stand as you are able . . .” couldn’t climb in a bush plane. Others don’t have the funds or support from family or congregations. We were blessed to have eight wonderful people who are pictured in our presentations, our Goodnews Bay Facebook page, and got the ‘glory’ so to speak.

So many others did just as much to land that team in Goodnews Bay. A partial list includes people who made desserts for Lenten supper fundraisers, those who used their Thrivent cards for supplies, the woman who knitted potholders to give to our ladies’ Bible study group, her cousin who made wool mittens for villagers, congregants who took an ‘angel’ off our display board and purchased the requested item, the women’s group that held a spaghetti dinner, committee members of a church foundation who voted to give funding, our Airbnb host in Anchorage who gave us a discount when she learned the nature of our trip, quilters who made twelve quilts to take along and give to families, our travel agent who kept an eye on flights, the charter plane coordinator who offered her church as shelter in Bethel if weather delayed the team and many others.

Just as Paul, in Romans 12, talks about all who are in Christ being of one body with different gifts, so it was one body of believers that sent a team to spread the Good News to an Alaskan village starved for the Word. All had unique gifts bestowed by God and all used those gifts to His glory.

The hymn “Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying” is a beautiful message for those who feel they could never be brave enough or just can’t travel so far from home. If you are part of a team, please be sure to thank and acknowledge those who used God’s gifts, no matter how small a role, to further His mission of teaching all nations.

Let us close with verse 4 of the hymn:

Let none hear you idly saying, "There is nothing I can do,"  
While the multitudes are dying And the Master calls to you.  
Take the task He gives you gladly, Let His work your pleasure be;  
Answer quickly when He calleth, "Here am I, send me, send me!"

## **FOLLOW HIS LEAD**

**Rev. Aaron Spratt, AMC Missionary to Southeast Alaska**

**Psalms 107:1** “O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever.”

You all have traveled thousands of miles and each have raised hundreds of dollars to be here in Alaska. The Lord has provided you with financial support and, even this day, many people are showering your trip with their prayers. There are people that you will meet in the coming days whose lives will be transformed by God’s Word, which preaches salvation for sinners in Jesus Christ alone. Our Lord works in mysterious ways and there are no accidents in God’s Kingdom. He has brought you here to Alaska and you have followed His lead to love and serve your far-north distant neighbors.

But what has God brought you here for? What has He called you to do? First, He calls you to trust in Him. The mission work is God’s work. It is God’s Word that has the power to transform lives. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God brings people into His kingdom. God’s Word is where we hear His voice of comfort and forgiveness. Jesus says in the tenth chapter of St. John’s gospel, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) In the coming days you will be heralds of God’s Word. The psalmist says, “I rejoice at your word, like one who finds great spoil.” (Ps. 119:162) You will be proclaimers of the spoils and riches of His forgiveness, His mercy, His love, His restoration, and His salvation. Through God’s Word you will bring light amidst darkness, hope amongst despair, joy in the presence of sadness.

Second, God has called you to be patient. Jesus says, “One sows and another reaps.” (John 4:37) The growing of God’s Kingdom operates on an eternal time-scale. The Lord, even this day, is preparing peoples’ hearts to be ripe soils for the seed of His gospel. Many of you will be the broadcasting sowers of God’s Word and others will be reaping the harvest of those who have carried the saving message of the gospel before you. Resist the devil’s temptation to become impatient. The impact of the gospel is often unseen by the eyes of those who sow the first seeds. Your mission trip will never be a failure when you proclaim the gospel in its truth and purity. Take comfort that God is the Lord of the harvest and the Good Shepherd. He is the One who transforms and He is the One who brings people into His sheepfold.

Finally, pray that the Lord will give you eyes to see and ears to hear of the needs of those around you. St. John says in his first epistle, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11) Love is sacrificial, it costs you something. You have sacrificed time away from family and your jobs. You have used vacation time that could have been spent in some sunny beach resort, instead to love and serve your neighbor in Alaska. The devil will tempt you in the coming days to wonder if your sacrificial love matters. Did your love for your neighbor in this village really make a difference? St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” (Romans 8:28) God is working through your hands and your feet. Give no ear to the devil’s temptations to despair or wonder if your work matters. God has given you this blessed opportunity to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to love and serve your neighbor!



“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”  
– Philippians 4:4-7

#### Discussion Questions

- How does knowing that the Holy Spirit is the One who calls people by the gospel give you comfort and confidence for the days ahead?
- How does God define a “successful mission trip”? How might the world define a “successful mission trip”?
- What temptations might there be in the coming days that cause you and your team to doubt God’s providence?
- What are the comforts that God provides in Hebrews 4:14-16?

#### **Prayer**

“Almighty God, You have called Your Church to witness that in Christ You have reconciled us to Yourself. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may proclaim the good news of Your salvation so that all who hear it may receive the gift of salvation. Through the grace of Your Holy Spirit, pour the gifts of love into the hearts of Your faithful people. Grant Your servants health, both in mind and body, that they may love You with their whole heart and with their whole strength to perform those things that are pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

## **PERMISSION TO BE IMPUDENT**

Pat Fick, Team Leader to Chevak and Hooper Bay

### **Luke 11:5-10**

For quite some time our clothes dryer had not been drying very efficiently. We suspected that the vent might be clogged with lint. To test our theory, I climbed on top of the house and removed the vent cover and pushed this cool little lint brush (as seen on TV) down the pipe as far as possible. I didn't seem to be making much progress, so my husband, Steve, brought me a PVC pipe, and I tried jamming that through the pipe only to hit a dead end. Now what do we do?

We decided to climb into the attic and see if we could investigate further. We just happened to pick one of the hottest days in August to do this. (I didn't say our plan was intelligent.) I took apart the pipe and found that the dead end I hit was where the pipe takes a 90 degree turn to the side, and then in about one foot, it takes another 90 degree turn back down to the dryer vent. No wonder we have a stopped-up pipe – faulty design and years of accumulated lint. Inspired by the progress we were making, we kept trying to loosen the densely packed lint and were finally ready to test it. Sweaty Steve stayed in the attic while I went down to hook up the dryer and turn it on so that he could see if the pipe was truly clean now. Let's just say that whatever was left in the pipe came out quickly and stuck to his sweaty body, turning him into the gray man!

I guess you could call our behavior impudence (bold persistence). There's an amazing verse in Luke 11:8 that calls for impudence when we are praying.

Impudence has the connotation of “bugging” someone. The NIV calls it shameless audacity. The GNT says you are not ashamed to keep on asking. The AMP just calls it persistence and boldness. The ERV says continue to ask! The Phillips translation titles this section, “The Willingness of the Father to Answer Prayer!”

Join me in prayer to ask God to bring more people to faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord! He is willing to answer our impudent prayer!

### **Prayer**

Lord, we come boldly asking You to use us to proclaim your saving message to those we meet during our mission trip. Open our lips to share with others how You answer our prayers each and every day. Thank you for hearing our petitions. May Your will be done. Amen.

## **No Way, YAHWEH!**

Pat Fick, Team Leader to Chevak and Hooper Bay

### **Psalm 62**

I am writing this devotion after spending the past week doing Bible School in a Cu'pik village in southwest Alaska. We gather twice a day to celebrate Jesus with the children and then offer evening Bible studies for the youth, men, and women of Chevak. At the end of one of my women's Bible studies, Norma Tunutmoak asked if she could share a testimony of God's power and faithfulness.

When Norma's son, Joseph, was 12 years old, he became very ill and his skin started to turn yellow. Medical treatment is not readily accessible in many villages in Alaska so they flew to the bigger village of Bethel to see what could be done for Joseph. From there, they chose to medevac Joseph to Seattle, Washington, the closest facility that had doctors who deal with liver failure. It was determined that Joseph needed a liver transplant, so the search began to find a liver with a compatible blood match.

During the months of waiting, Norma felt that she would surely have to watch her son die. She was overwhelmed with that thought and wanted to run away and never come back. Then the Holy Spirit began to work powerfully, encouraging her to pray and give her problems to God. "TRUST IN HIM AT ALL TIMES, O PEOPLE; POUR OUT YOUR HEART BEFORE HIM; GOD IS A REFUGE FOR US," Psalm 62:8.

Norma cried out to the Lord, "I give my son to you, Lord, do whatever you will. If you need him, take him. I will praise you no matter what happens! You are great, and I will trust you!"

The next morning the doctor came to tell her that they had found a liver that was a blood match. Wow! Upon closer examination the doctor decided not to use that liver because it was not in good shape. What a roller coaster of emotions.

Two weeks later the doctor found a liver that wasn't a blood match but it was in good shape, so he gave the orders to go ahead with the transplant. Would Joseph's body accept the liver that was not a match? Well, when the world says, "No way!" Christians can say "Yahweh!"

After spending a total of four months in Seattle, and another month in Bethel, he was able to return home to His family and community in Chevak. Once a year he visits Seattle just to make sure everything is ok, but he is alive and well, and Norma is still praising Yahweh! (Yahweh is a Hebrew name for God, the great I AM!)

What do you need to trust God for today? "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that POWER belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord, belongs STEADFAST LOVE," Psalm 62: 11-12a.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Yahweh, for your power and love! Amen

## **BROKEN AND BEAUTIFUL (Living the Theme!)**

Pat Fick, Team Leader to Chevak and Hooper Bay

### **Psalm 34**

A few years ago, we traveled to various mission sites wearing a t-shirt that said, “Broken and Beautiful” on the front, and *“The Lord is near to the broken hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit,” Psalm 34:18*, on the back.

In preparation for serving in bush villages in Alaska, I decided to add a bunch of new VBS songs to our book of transparencies (I know that is old school, but it works well in our mission setting). First, I broke the copy machine. Then I broke the hole punch trying to make the transparencies compatible with our three ringed binder. Then I broke the end of the scissors off trying to get the transparencies unstuck from the hole punch. Later that night I opened my guitar case and found that my mission trip guitar was no longer playable. The bridge had torn the underlying wood away from the body of the guitar. About the same time both of our vehicles broke down and had to be towed to the mechanic. My amazing coworker, Andrea McDonald, suggested I pick a less destructive theme for next year. Good idea!

These broken things are small and insignificant compared to the brokenness that can be found in the lives of the Alaskan people. The social issues of suicide, alcoholism, and drug abuse destroy the HOPE that God promises. Tragedy brings with it so many opportunities to share the GOOD NEWS that we have a God who loves us so much that he was willingly broken on the cross, crucified for the sins of the whole world. He truly would rather die than live without you. Our God promises to never leave or forsake us. He promised to work all things together for good in our lives to conform us to the image of Jesus. He promises that his steadfast love will never fail us.

I have this saying on my wall, and I apologize that I don’t remember the source... “The GOSPEL weans us of our addictions to circumstances as our source of security and accomplishments as our definition of worth!”

We can’t find our security in anything this world has to offer. We must find it in Christ alone! I am praying there will be an amazing outpouring of love through mission teams serving those in Alaska. Praise God that he makes beauty out of our brokenness!

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, take my brokenness and turn it into beauty through your saving power shown on the cross for my salvation and healing. Amen!

## **LIVE IN UNITY**

Marilee Nufer, Team Leader to Eek and AMC Board Member

### **Psalm 133: 1**

Those of us who serve on mission teams plan, prepare, and work to raise money to have the privilege of sharing God's word with others. One of the great joys in serving on a team is finding unity with people who are all focused on the same goal, that of sharing God's love with others. The first verse in Psalm 133 states, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live in unity."

But living in unity between sinful people is often difficult, even for short mission trips. Just thinking about a group of people living, eating, and sleeping in close quarters, having to boil water for drinking topped off with the daily dumping of the honey bucket, might make many people run the other way. Living together as God's people in unity with each other might be very difficult without God's grace and a bit of forgiveness, patience, gentleness, and self-control thrown in for good measure.

The first verse of Psalm 133 tells us that it is "good and pleasant" when God's people can live in unity. Not only are we blessed when we can live in unity, but it can be a strong witness to those observing our tongues and actions. The secret to living in unity is to act in love toward each other (even when we don't feel loving.) The famous 13th chapter of Corinthians shows us the way, "4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres," *1 Corinthians 13:4-7*. Because we are sinful, living in unity isn't always easy, but, thankfully, God's word shows us how as he guides and strengthens us.

May we practice God's way of loving, even when faced with honey bucket duty and crowded conditions, and may we live in unity as we serve with teammates and fellow believers.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, please unify our hearts with one purpose, to serve you and share your love. Please give us unity in our teams so that we may be a blessing to each other and to the people we have come to serve. Amen.

## **HOW MANY FRIENDS DO YOU HAVE?**

Lori Milroy, Team Leader to Goodnews Bay

### **1 Samuel 20:27-42**

How many “friends” do you have on Facebook? I have 318, which seems like quite a bit to me. However, my 30-year-old daughter has 600. Some of my “friends” are merely high school acquaintances I was too polite to deny. Others are parents of former students I did not want to offend. I also have some very precious new friends from my Alaska Mission for Christ trip to Goodnews Bay.

Facebook has proven to be a useful tool in building relationships with those in the village. I have learned of illnesses, births, perfect attendance awards for some students who attended VBS, and likewise, they know I recently retired, care for my in-laws, and am awaiting a first grandchild. We are building on our relationships which started over the summer. Did you know that sharing God’s Good News starts with the development of a trusted relationship with your neighbor, co-worker, or new friend from Alaska?

Obviously, a Facebook friend may not reach the depth of the bond that David and Jonathan shared. However, Proverbs 17:17 states: *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”* This certainly points to the importance of a strong friendship built through a solid relationship in Christian love, like David and Jonathan’s.

It is difficult to establish a relationship with people you see once a year. Have you thought of using social media in a positive way to continually support and nourish a relationship which began in person? Like any social media tool, sometimes too much personal information is shared, but the frequent pictures of berry picking, fishing, school activities, and get-togethers are also a great way to share with potential team members that we are going to “love our Alaska friends at all times” because Jesus loved us, first. This concept also makes me think a little more about how I portray myself on social media. Do I share my love and concern in a grace-filled manner with the posts I write or “like”?

Social media receives some bad publicity for the pain and harm that have occurred because of abuses. However, Romans 8:28 reminds us *“And we know that in **all things** God **works** for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”*. After you return home, think about how you can nurture and maintain the relationships that began in the village. Could that be achieved through the use of social media tools? May God bless us with His wisdom to always seek to build relationships for the sake of expanding His Kingdom.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank you for providing tools to support our friends in Christ. Help us to nurture and support our brothers and sisters in the faith both in Alaska and in our own neighborhoods. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## **A “THANK YOU” WILL DO**

Used with permission: Rev. Marcus Jauss, St. John’s Lutheran Church, Columbus, IN (submitted by Anchor Point team)

### **I Thessalonians 3:9**

It is good to faithfully, honestly, sincerely GIVE thanks. But it is also important that we graciously and courteously ACCEPT honest, sincere expressions of gratitude. In Acts 20:35 the apostle Paul, quoting Jesus says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Giving AND RECEIVING, Jesus says, are BOTH blessed. While giving is MORE blessed, it is also blessed to receive. There is a graciousness in giving, but there is also a graciousness in receiving.

Most of us don’t know how to accept a compliment. We’re like Ray. Compliment Ray on a nice piece of furniture that he has made and his immediate response will be, “Aw, I could have done better.” And then he will proceed to point out areas where he should have done this, that, or the other thing. Ray – like most of – finds it difficult to simply say, “Thank you!”

We know how it hurts our feelings when our good deeds and favors are not appreciated, perhaps even criticized. From this we ought to learn to appreciate acts of kindness shown us and to be grateful for them and to express our thanks simply and honestly.

A sincere sign of appreciation really does warm us. Those who say “I don’t want any thanks” are really not being honest with themselves. It is a deep, basic human need to receive expressions of gratitude and appreciation--a few words, a warm handshake, a little hug, a letter, a card, a smile, a telephone call--all, go a long way to encourage and inspire us. I don’t believe that anyone is untouched by genuine appreciation.

Giving and receiving words of appreciation from others is one of the many reasons why people are special gifts from God. This brings up a few questions to consider:

- Are we always mindful of these special gifts of people whom the Lord gives to us?
- Do we graciously accept their compliments and words of love?
- Do we let these people know what they mean to us?
- Do we faithfully thank the Lord for them?

With Paul, we ask, “How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?” (I Thessalonians 3:9)

### **Prayer**

Sometimes, Father, we forget to say “Thank you” to You and to one another. Thank You for the love You have poured on us in rich measure. Thank You also for the love we received from our fellow believers. When they encourage us or compliment us, help us to accept their love with a gracious “Thank you.” Bless us as we give and receive mutual Christian love. Amen.

## **PRAYING**

**Matthew 6:9-13**

**Philippians 1:1-19**

**Ephesians 4:13-21**

Prayer is central to the ministry in many of the villages in Alaska. While that may seem obvious on one hand as every ministry should begin with prayer. On the other hand, those reasons the other reasons are possibly different than you might expect!

When do you pray? Where do you pray? What do you pray for? And, why do you pray? The answers to those questions, I have found, differ quite a bit for folks in the Lower 48 compared with my experiences in Alaskan villages. For a lot of folks in the lower 48 the answers to all of those questions often center around church (i.e. during church; at church; the list of requests in the church bulletin; because I am supposed to). Oh, I ought to add one more...meal time! This is especially true when we think of public prayer.

Have you ever led individuals or small groups in prayer? What would you do if asked? How willing are you to offer prayer?

For the people you meet and work within the village, a time of prayer that you have with them may be one of the few opportunities they sit in prayer with another Christian. For many villages, especially the very isolated ones, there is little to no regular worship. Having someone lead them in prayer or pray for them can be rare. And often, since you are a person professing to be there on behalf of Christ, they have an expectation that you will pray.

What if someone comes to you relates the struggles they are having with addiction? What if the issue deals with family problems? Or maybe even the physical or sexual abuse of a person? The problems these folks deal with have likely been going on long before you arrived and will likely continue long after you leave. Even folks who are deeply involved with long term ministry in the villages often don't have solutions for the troubles they are experiencing. It is unlikely you will be able to solve those issues in a few short days, but what you can do is pray! You can lead them in prayer, teach them about prayer, and help them to know how to pray!

Most of all, don't be afraid to pray! It is the most powerful tool at your disposal! And the most powerful gift you can leave them with!

James 5:16 "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The **prayer** of a righteous person has great **power** as it is working."

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, you have commanded us to pray and have promised that you not only hear our prayers but that you also act on them! Help us to trust in your power and to boldly come before you with our prayers and petitions. Amen!



## **WAITING**

**Isaiah 40:31**

**Psalms 27:14**

**Luke 22:39-45**

Waiting is a part of everyday life. We wait for traffic at stop lights; we wait for our dinners to be ready; we wait for a diagnosis; we wait for good news; we wait for bad news. It seems that we are always waiting for something or someone. In Alaska, this can be magnified. Events begin when people get around to starting. This can be very frustrating for people who are used to efficiency and always starting on time. As we wait, we have two options. We can either choose to be patient or impatient. Which of these do you usually lean toward? If you struggle with patience, what makes it hard for you to wait?

The Lord has a lot to say to us in His Word about waiting. He uses waiting to teach His people patience and give them time to prepare for what is to come. Even Jesus had a time of waiting and preparation before the greatest Servant Event of all time! What did Jesus do to prepare for His Passion? (See Luke reading) How can you use the time spent waiting to prepare for what the Lord is putting before you to do?

We can follow Christ's example and our Lord's invitation to pray during our times of waiting today. We know that the Lord keeps His promises to hear our prayers. Let us pray for patience as we wait for the beginning of our servant event. What else might we pray for in reflecting on the week ahead? Add these to your prayer below.

## **Prayer**

Lord, we are blessed to be able to come to you in prayer as you lovingly invite us into conversation with you. During this exciting time of waiting and preparation, guide our hearts to Your will. (Insert prayers from above) All of these things, we ask confidently in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **RECEIVING**

**Luke 7:36-38**

**Acts 16:14-15**

**Acts 20:32-35**

What do you do when your Native friend offers you a piece of Muktuk (whale blubber) or Stink Head (Fermented Salmon head)? In native culture, it is wrong not to receive something that has been offered to you. In receiving, you acknowledge the relationship that exists between you. If you turn it down, you are saying, "I don't want to be your friend." How do we balance our own personal preferences (i.e., "I don't do whale blubber.") with our mission to love and respect the people we have come to serve?

When we go on a mission we often think about what we will be bringing to the people we serve. We will share with them the Gospel. We will love them and teach them about the Bible. Yet, as we share, we also receive from the people we serve. What blessings has God given you this week from the people you have served?

Often times when mission teams visit a community, they bring lots and lots of stuff. They are generous and want to bless the people of the community. We remember Jesus words, "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Yet, when we do all of the giving, we do not allow others to be blessed. Paul allowed Lydia to show them hospitality. Even Jesus graciously received the gift of the woman who anointed his feet. How can we cultivate an attitude that allows us to generously give while graciously receiving the gifts of others?

## **Prayer**

Father, all that we have comes from you. Thank you for supplying all of our needs. Thank you, also for supplying our needs through the people we have come to serve. May we learn to graciously receive your gifts so that we can be ever more generous in sharing those gifts with others. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who freely gives us his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. Amen

## **LEARNING**

**Proverbs 2:6**

**Proverbs 11:2**

**Psalm 49:3**

**Psalm 111:10**

From the day we are born, we begin learning about the world around us. As we grow, our cognitive ability improves, and we continue learning about different people, places, and things. Think about your time in school. How did you learn? Who helped you?

We know from God's Word that learning requires a laying down of our own pride and listening in humility to our teacher. When we are in a new or different culture, we can often let pride rule in our hearts with thoughts like "I can't believe they live like this!" or "I could never do that!" As followers of Christ, we are called to push aside those thoughts and trust in the Lord to give us understanding. Is it difficult to experience things that you might be unfamiliar with? Why do you think this is?

We listen, observe, and speak God's truth in love. Learn about the people around you with respect. For God loves all of us so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins! When we learn about others, we can see what we have in common and what we do not. The things we have in common are the starting point for discussion and friendships. What is the value in learning about the way other people live?

How will you practice being a good learner this week?

## **Prayer**

Lord God, thank you for the gift diversity in cultures. Remind us of the Truth of Christ which reaches across all cultures and peoples! Soften our hearts and open our ears to learn about those around us, so that we might be humbled before them as servants in Love. Give us tact and discernment in our conversations, that they might be glorifying to Your Holy Name. Amen.

## **SERVING**

**1 Peter 4:10-11**

**Matthew 6:24**

We all know the verse... “You cannot serve God and money” but money is not the only thing we often serve over and above God. You cannot serve two different masters no matter how hard we try. There will always be a conflict. This can even be true as we try to serve our neighbors. Temptations abound when it comes to serving our neighbor. It might seem strange but Satan relishes playing games with our efforts. Sometimes the temptation is simple pride: “I’m so good for helping!” The more difficult challenge comes when we have to decipher whether or not our efforts to help are serving our neighbor or hurting them.

How would you handle the villager who comes to you concerned that their power has been turned off? They only need \$50 to have it restored. From what they say, other villagers who “claim to be Christian” won’t help. What would YOU do? What is the Christian thing to do? Maybe you decide the Christian thing to do is help the villager by giving the money to get the power restored. After helping the villager, you find out later in the week that for this particular individual the issue is not new. This person regularly spends their limited income on alcohol and then tries to guilt people into taking care of the bills. Have you served your neighbor in this instance?

Now Let’s say you know they had a bill to pay but instead of paying the electric company went and bought alcohol. How do you serve your neighbor and God in this instance? Is there a right answer?

Is it better to leave a person in their sin so you can continue to speak God’s Word to them? Or risk offending them by speaking God’s Word to them? Chances are Satan will live up to his name and accuse your conscience either way? Can you think of situations where serving God may mean putting relationships at risk?

Serving people in Alaska is challenging but knowing how to serve also means knowing how God has gifted you to serve. For whatever reason you are here, God has a purpose for you!

Sometimes that means stepping out of your comfort zone and doing things you are not used to. In the midst of that service Satan will seek to convince us that our service is not necessary, not wanted, not good enough, etc.

Know that your service in the Lord is not in vain! The Serenity Prayer may be somewhat cliché but it certainly seems a proper prayer for anyone serving in mission:

### **Prayer**

Lord Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen!

## **ADJUSTING**

**Philippians 4:11-13**

**Romans 14:1-9**

**Proverbs 19:21**

Things do not always go as we expect. We plan and prepare but when the day comes there are always unexpected contingencies. I remember a team that planned and prepared to do a Bible School in Mentasta. When they got there, they discovered that the community had scheduled two VBS teams from separate organizations for the same week! The team had spent a lot of time and money to come to serve in Alaska. They could either choose to get angry or to adjust to the new situation trusting that God would bring good. How do you respond when your plans are changed?

All Plans Change (APC) is a missionary motto. We do our best to make sure that we have prepared for every possible contingency. Yet life and relationships get in the way of our best plans. The program is set to start at 2:00 PM but at 1:58 PM someone shows up at the church with a major crisis. How do you handle it? Do you push through with your program or do you adjust your plans to deal with the new plans that God has sent your way? As you answer this question, think of how Jesus handled intrusions into his day. (Mark 6:31-34)

Living together on a team is a challenge. Each person has their own personality and own way of doing things. How does the concept of adaptability anchored in our faith in Christ help us to deal with each other as we serve during this mission event?

## **Prayer**

Father, we know that our lives are in your hands. No matter whether today matches my plans and expectations or not, the day will always be in your hands. Help me to be flexible and adjustable while trusting that you bring good in all circumstances for those who love you and are called according to your purpose. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## **COMMUNICATING**

**James 1:19**

**Proverbs 18:13**

**Romans 10:13-17**

The best advice I ever got about serving Native Alaskans is that when I am with the elders my main job is to sit quietly and to listen. Listening is hard. I want to talk. I want to ask questions. It is hard to sit and listen, especially when others are not talking. Yet, by sitting and listening a guest gains credibility. A Jewish proverb says, "God has given us two ears but only one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak." Our listening opens up opportunities for us to speak the Gospel. Why is it so hard for us to quiet our minds and hearts and truly listen to the people we are serving? How does listening advance our mission and improve our team?

When I first started to attend Native potlatch ceremonies, I felt out of place. I spent a lot of time, just sitting and listening. Gradually, others started to notice that I was there. One ninety-year-old elder would greet me by saying, "How are you, old timer? You are always here. That is good." Gradually, people started to invite me into their conversations. How can we use our quiet presence to share the Good News of Jesus?

Ultimately, we do want to speak. The reason we serve in Alaska is so that people can hear the Good News of Jesus. They cannot hear that message unless we speak it. But we cannot speak that message unless we first hear it from God. Just as listening precedes speaking in our relationship with the people we serve so also listening to God's Word precedes speaking that Word to the people God to whom God has sent us. What is the message from God that you want to communicate to the people whom you are serving and working alongside of this week?

### **Prayer**

Father, open our ears to listen to the people whom we have come to serve. Open our hearts to understand your word and your love for us. Then open our mouths so that we can speak clearly the message you have given us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **FORGIVING**

**Matthew 6:14-15**

**Matthew 18:21-22**

**Ephesians 4:32**

Let us not mince words today - forgiveness is hard for us. It seems like we should easily forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us, but so often we simply cannot seem to truly forgive. We hold onto hurt, deny our potential responsibility in the situation and hold a grudge out of pride. The issue festers like a nasty sore and bitterness begins to take root. This is not how our Lord would have us deal with disagreements. How should we handle these tense issues that arise between us as the Body of Christ? (See Matthew 18:15-16)

When we hurt someone, it is much easier to become defensive instead of humbly coming to them to seek forgiveness. Why do you think that is?

When we are the one who is hurt, it is much easier to lash out instead of offering forgiveness in love. Why do you think that is?

Dear friends, let us seek the Lord's guidance and Spirit that He might enable us to treat one another in Christian Love. Take some time to think about any conflict you might have had this week and how it you might be reconciled to one another. After all, our Lord loved us enough to offer His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our own transgressions. He loves you; He loves the person you hurt; He loves the person who hurt you - He loves US.

## **Prayer**

End this day by praying as Jesus taught... the Lord's Prayer.

## **LEAVING**

**Acts 1:9-11**

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Are you one of those who doesn't like to say goodbye? Do you get easily overwhelmed in emotional moments? Do you try to avoid such times?

Generally speaking, one of the most emotional times of a mission trip comes when it is time to depart. The connections that have been made, the experiences that have been had, the longing for home and family which are far away, and the love for people you want to still see again all come to a head on that last day.

Two words of advice for any group when they leave a village:

1. Be sure to say Goodbye!
2. Do not make a promise you cannot (or might not) keep!

The timing of when you leave a village is more than likely a set time without much flexibility. However, whether or not you find time to say goodbye should not be optional! Oh, and telling someone WHEN you will leave is not the same as saying GOODBYE! (Just in case you didn't know!) The reality is, that for most folks who participate in a mission trip, the moment before you leave is the last moment you will spend on earth around the people you have been ministering to for the past week. What have been your joys? What have been your hardships? What are you looking forward to? What will you miss?

When you are saying goodbye, what truth of the Gospel can you share?

When the time for departure comes, often times, in an effort to comfort someone (or ourselves) promises are made to stay in touch or return. What is the danger of making such a promise? Remember: good intentions get you nowhere and broken promises litter the landscape of Native Alaskan lives! This is not meant to guilt you into coming back or to stay in touch, but rather to encourage you to be honest with yourself and the people you leave behind.

Why might it be difficult to stay in touch once we return home? Why might it be difficult to return?

What about the use of technology, what are the advantages/disadvantages of keeping up via technology?

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, by your grace you brought us to this place to share in the work of your kingdom. Be with the people of this village and with us until that time when we shall be reunited wither here on earth or in the victory of the resurrection. In Jesus name, Amen.



## **RETURNING**

**Luke 4:14-15, 28-30**

**2 Timothy 1:3-4**

When Jesus returned to his hometown, everyone was excited to see him. They gave him a wonderful welcome. Unfortunately, after a while the people heard Jesus' message and turned against him. Volunteers often go home and tell their story. Everyone is excited to hear of their wonderful experiences of sharing the love of Jesus in Alaska. After a while, people start to lose interest in how God worked through you and in you on this mission trip. How will you keep your own zeal for the work of spreading the love of Jesus after you go home?

Out of sight, out of mind. While you were serving in Alaska you saw many needs and met many people. Hopefully, you will keep these people in your prayers and communicate with them while you are away. It will be hard to think of Alaska as you become inundated with the busyness of your ordinary life. How will you keep the needs of the people you serve in your heart as you return to your life outside of Alaska?

You are returning home now, but hopefully you will return again to Alaska next year. People hear the Gospel most clearly from people that they know and trust. It takes more than a one-week summer program to build that trust. That is why AMC encourages volunteers to come back year after year and to work to continue to strengthen the relationships you have started to develop. Why would you come back to Alaska? What would keep you from coming back?

## **Prayer**

Father, we are returning to our homes and our lives. We are leaving behind friends whom you have given us. Help us to keep these friends in our hearts and prayers throughout the year. Help us to continue to love them, pray for them, and communicate with them as we go back to our lives outside of Alaska. Help us to take the lessons we have learned this week back to our homes so that we can share your love there as we have shared your love here. Thank you for this awesome experience, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Post-Trip Reflection

### **STORIES!**

Psalms 71: 14-18

Psalms 145:3-6

Stories...Mission trip stories...Has anyone asked you one of these questions since you returned: "How did your mission trip to Alaska go?" "Did you eat any weird food?" "How did you sleep in the midst of 20+ hours of daylight?" How does one explain all that was experienced in a week's time on a mission trip to Alaska?

One option would be to describe the beauty of the mountains or the lush landscape and bright flowers thriving in all that daylight. Or maybe it was describing the incredible flavors of the delicious, fresh salmon that you caught or were given as a gift to prepare. Perhaps the trip was not so glamorous. Maybe your week included going without a daily shower. Maybe it consisted of more pb&j sandwiches than you could count.

How do you share your Alaskan mission experience? In the Psalmist's description of his daily "mission trip" with the Lord, he describes God's worthiness of praise, such greatness no one can comprehend. He encourages telling others about God's majesty, generation to generation. Yes, it's "headline news"! GO and TELL! Did you do that in Alaska? Did you GO and TELL others about God's greatness, and saving power in your life? Did you hear others proclaim it? Maybe teammates, children, or Elders shared their stories of God's goodness in their own lives. It's important to remember that God does His work of faith creating and strengthening in us. Sometimes we are given a glimpse of our "seed planting" in others and at other times we trust His Spirit is at work.

A well-respected Elder in southwest Alaska shared his story of hopelessness. He had lost his wife and children in lieu of the lure of the "bottle." He became despondent, wandering onto the tundra with plans to end his life. As he prepared to pull the trigger, a song rang out through his memory: "Jesus loves me this I know...". God allowed him to recall his Sunday school days when he was taught about God's goodness and love in sending His Son to die on the cross in his place. That simple song is what reminded this man of God's loving work in his life. He now shares His story of God's splendor and majesty of life-saving grace with the next generations.

So, how will you describe your mission trip to Alaska? We pray that it is shared through the lens of God's majesty in sending His Son for each one of us! "Jesus loves me this I know!"

**Prayer:** Gracious Father, you are indeed worthy of our praise. Your majesty and glory are beyond our comprehension. Thank you for the opportunity to GO and TELL of your unfathomable goodness and saving grace in my life. Enable me to have that same boldness in my own community where I live, work, or go to school. Open my lips that I may declare your praises! In Jesus name, Amen.

## **LET'S DIG DEEPER**

Whew! What a trip! Now that you are home, you may be seeing the world around you in a new way. You may be on a “spiritual high” from the mission trip experience. Your life was changed through this experience...but maybe not for long.

The return to “normal life” can be challenging. You’ll share your experiences or pictures with others, and they won’t fully understand. The close bond you felt and experienced with your team will fade. You’ll go back to “normal life” and your mindset and heart will return to the way it was before you left...if you don’t make intentional changes.

The God who gave you an incredible experience in Alaska is the same God who is with you when you’re at home. It is *you* that changed and your eyes that were opened when you traveled for mission service. Now that you know what He is capable of, it’s time to bring it home.

Answer the following questions to assist in reflecting on the trip. These questions will help to ensure that the life change you experienced is lifelong.

1. What did I learn about myself during the trip?
2. What did I learn about God during the trip?
3. How did God change me during the trip?
4. What can I do now to strengthen that change so that it sticks with me?
5. What have I learned about God's purpose for my life?
6. What is the invitation from God, moving forward, from this experience? Is it clear or is more time needed to process this?

## **Prayer**

Lord, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to serve in Alaska. My eyes were opened to the needs in our village. However, there are needs right here where I live. Open my eyes to see someone in need, and then equip me to share Your love through mission service right in my community. In Jesus name, Amen.

## **TEACH ME LORD**

Pat Fick, Team Leader for Chevak and Hooper Bay

### **Psalm 25:4-6**

What has the Lord been teaching you? This is a question we use at the end of every mission trip to help us process what God has been doing in our lives as we have focused on serving and sharing Jesus! I am writing this devotion from a small village in Alaska. Our Chevak VBS team flew home today, and Bettie and I were supposed to fly to a neighboring village, Hooper Bay, to meet a new team. We loaded up all our gear (VBS supplies, the guitar, clothes, sleeping bags, and Bibles) in the back of one of the few vehicles that travel the gravel road from downtown to the gravel air strip. We put our bags on the nine-seat plane and then the pilot kindly informed us that Hooper Bay was on a weather hold so we would have to take all our gear off the plane and wait until the weather improved. Sometimes the weather clears quickly and sometimes you are on weather hold for days. We have to trust that God's timing is always best!

I want to share some of the insights our team shared about what God had been teaching them during this mission trip. I pray these insights will encourage you in your walk with Jesus!

- I can't stand on my own two feet. I must depend on God.
- To serve Jesus I need humility.
- We are powerless. Only God can change us.
- Love people the way they need to be loved, not the way you want to love them.
- We are called to weakness so God can shine through us.
- God wants me to open up and not be so shy.
- Don't be preoccupied and miss out on time with God and people.
- Be present! Enjoy where you are.
- Rely on God. He goes with you everywhere!
- Be thankful for what you have.
- People are starved for love. Support them and pray for them.
- I got a wake-up call from God telling me to shut up and listen to Him!
- I reconnected with God.
- Go to God's Word for wisdom.
- I don't have to be put together because he can use my brokenness.

God is such a good teacher! If you are a Christian, every day is a mini mission trip, so may I ask you... "What is God teaching you?"

## **Prayer**

Lord, open my eyes to the needs around me—for my teammates, and for all who live in this village/community. Teach me to love and care for others in humility. In Jesus name, Amen.