

February 2024

# MISSIONS

## Central Asia One Year with a New Ministry in a New Country

**Special Areas**  
How You Can Pray  
for the Lord's Workers

**Global**  
Missionaries Share Their  
Language-Learning Experiences





# THINKING IT THROUGH

BY ALAN PARKS

## Voicing the Hidden Fire

One of God's greatest blessings to us is the gift of prayer. I've often thought that the godliest people of the old covenant would be dazzled by our access to the throne room of heaven. No longer must we enter with fear, with accompanying sacrifices of innocent blood, nor through any intermediary—just us alone with God. Yet do we take this gift for granted at times?

### A fire in the soul

James Montgomery's immortal words in "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire" have always thrilled me.<sup>1</sup> Often, I'll find myself singing them quietly, and I receive a blessing every time. The songwriter penned this first verse:

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.

The wisdom of this verse lies, in part, in its application to each type of prayer. Intercessory prayers—praying for the needs of others, whether for health, salvation, or restoration—come from "sincere desire." Prayers of praise arise from the same place: God's goodness, holiness, justice, and love (among other attributes) emanate from the soul's sincere desire. Very personally, prayers of petition represent our deepest requests of God, in accordance with His will. Many other forms of prayer, including confession and unity, also spring from "the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast."

### When only God is near

Will you agree that for many—or most—Christians, the second verse (below) encapsulates the prayers that we most often pray?

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye  
When none but God is near.

We've all been there, haven't we? In those stressful, agonizing periods when we feel powerless to affect change, we may feel fearful, anxious, and alone. The Lord allows difficult trials to enter our lives, such as job loss, a serious diagnosis, and persecution. The list is long.

We know that He allows these trials to mold us, to draw us closer to Himself until we live in full dependence and surrender, and to teach us lessons we'd never learn otherwise. The journey through them, however, may seem dark and unending. What an encouragement to review the similar trials that people in Scripture endured. At times, we see their finite humanity on full display, but ultimately, their total reliance on the God who delivers them becomes evident.

Dear friends—missionaries, homemakers, businesspeople, every diverse group in Him—in times of trial, we can see God most clearly. If you're trembling under the "burden of a sigh" and the "falling of a tear," remember the key to your earnest prayers: "The upward glancing of an eye when none but God is near." As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "Sorrow looks back; worry looks around; faith looks up." When we have intimate, personal access to the Sovereign of the universe, what place can worry have in our lives?

Whatever our greatest burdens are today, let us take time to be alone with God, in obedience to 1 Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." His care for us is profound. It caused Him to send His only Son to this earth to suffer agonies and die for us. He cared for us even before we knew Him. He cares enough that He wants us to live with Him forever.

He cares for us. How simply stated, yet how profound.

### Simple yet sublime

In this world of war, turmoil, and hatred, our Lord has equipped us with one of the greatest gifts possible: prayer. It is accessible to every believer, and it is powerful. The third verse of our hymn reads:

Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
That infant lips can try;  
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach  
The Majesty on high.

The church has long been borne along on the back of whispered prayers. This must remain so and increase. May we make the words of Christ's disciple our own: "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1) ■

*Alan Parks is a commended worker based in Texas.*

<sup>1</sup> *The Believers Hymn Book* (London: Pickering and Inglis, Ltd., 1818), 202.

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# A Little Creativity Goes a Long Way

## PRAYING FOR SPECIAL-AREAS MISSIONARIES REQUIRES **OUTSIDE-THE-BOX** THINKING

BY SARAH DUNLAP

Some countries are open to the Gospel. Some offer religious freedom but discourage or prohibit evangelization. Others are closed to missionaries altogether. Yet God is “not willing that any should perish,” so He calls His children to serve in countries all over the world—even “special areas.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Many of the believers whom He calls to special areas must exercise caution, primarily for the safety of themselves and their contacts and to remain in the country. On the field, those precautions take forms supporters may never be aware of. But flip to the “Special Areas” section of the *Missionary Prayer Handbook*, and you’ll notice that no locations are listed, some workers abbreviate their names, and others withhold their contact information or photos. Read their newsletters, and you may observe the care with which they write—leaving out names, dates, and locations and even avoiding words such as *God* and *Bible*. Some may be unable to distribute newsletters.

Due to these precautions, knowing how to pray for special-areas missionaries can be difficult. Creativity is essential. As the missionaries themselves seek creative methods for sharing the Gospel, you can find additional ways to pray for them if you think outside the box of seemingly limited information. Ask God to help you find those creative ways. Below, we list three categories of “tips” to help you get started.

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

One of the best ways to learn more about the missionaries you pray for is to consult good resources regularly:



- Find trusted news outlets so you can stay up to date on current events. An awareness of international situations and politics can help you understand the climate many special-areas missionaries live in—even if you don’t know their country or region.

- Rely on the information provided in the *Missionary Prayer Handbook* (MPH). Each missionary’s entry includes a ministry description, which gives you an idea of the work he or she is involved in. While you might not know the specifics of, say, the worker’s home Bible study, you can pray that God will grant the missionary special insight and strength while preparing.
- Read *Missions* magazine monthly. Missionaries, including some who serve in special areas, share updates in the “Connections” section (which, for security, appears only in the printed magazine, never online). Some even write articles on their ministries. *Missions* also publishes “May We Introduce” articles so you can get to know new missionaries.

### START TALKING

Next, look for ways to interact with the missionaries digitally and in person:



- Communicate with them if possible. Some missionaries offer contact information, such as email addresses or WhatsApp numbers, in the MPH. Send them a note of encouragement; they may provide an update in response if they can share the information. Remember to choose your words carefully until you know what the missionaries are comfortable with; avoid words like *pray*, *Bible*, and *God* or find creative alternatives.
- Talk with them in person. If you learn of missionaries coming to the US or Canada on furlough, ask your assembly leadership to invite them to share a report at your church. Often, special-areas missionaries can discuss their ministries more openly in person—and you can ask them questions.



## PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

Finally, use the knowledge you've gleaned alongside your personal understanding of everyday matters—family, health, the



Christian walk—to consider aspects of life on the mission field:

- Pray for the missionaries' protection as they build relationships and share the Gospel, as they worship in their local churches and invite people to join them, and as they go about daily life—all of which present risks.
- Ask the Lord to give special-areas missionaries opportunities for physical, mental, and spiritual rest. Besides the usual factors that cause burnout, special-areas workers may face environmental stressors, such as extreme political tension, hostility and aggression toward Christians, isolation, and wars and fighting.
- Affordable, comfortable housing may be difficult to find and keep. Ask the Lord to provide, or preserve, housing in a safe community.
- Pray for strong marriages and healthy families.
- Pray for the missionaries' children on their birthdays. In the *Missionary Prayer Handbook*, many of the entries list the kids' names and ages alongside their parents' information. You can look up the children's birthdays (when shared) in an index at the back of the MPH and pray for the kids on those days. As they age, remember their practical needs, such as education.
- Many parents have shared that missionary kids struggle with identity, so pray that their children will root themselves in Christ. Pray, too, for healthy, encouraging friendships on the field.
- Often, special-areas missionaries are far from their families, and some may fellowship with only one or two believers. They may crave the encouragement that comes from being with family and fellow believers. Pray that the Lord will give them a deep sense of fellowship with Him.

- Poverty surrounds some missionaries. They need discernment when helping their neighbors and community.
- Missionaries in areas affected by natural disasters often show Christ's love through relief work. The missionaries need wisdom to help others rebuild their lives while navigating the trauma themselves. Pray for opportunities to meet needs and present the Gospel.
- Workers devote much time and care to learning languages and cultures, especially when serving among unreached people groups in the 10/40 Window. Pray that the Lord will guide the missionaries and provide nationals who can help.
- Special-areas missionaries may find the line between ministry and local restrictions difficult to navigate. Pray for wisdom.
- Many of them are thrust into helping converts face marginalization and persecution from their own families and the society around them. Pray for wisdom to disciple new believers into grace, faithfulness, and boldness.
- In certain special-areas countries, the conditions and cultural expectations may limit women's movement and interactions. Such an environment can make ministry challenging for them and create feelings of isolation. Yet friendship evangelism can become a powerful tool when connections are forged. Pray for opportunities to build relationships.
- In a world of restrictions and security risks, special-areas missionaries need to approach their ministry with creativity. But, when they experience stress and concern, their creativity may plummet. Ask the Lord to supply new ideas, new perspectives, and strength to explore new opportunities.

### Go before the throne

All missionaries need your prayers and support—for many of the reasons listed above. But prayers for special-areas missionaries may require more creativity. Don't let limited information stop you. God knows the details. He hears your prayers, and even when you think they're too general, He fills in the gaps. God knows what His children are facing, He knows their needs, and He loves your prayers. ■

*Sarah Dunlap, Missions editor*

# Ask a Missionary?

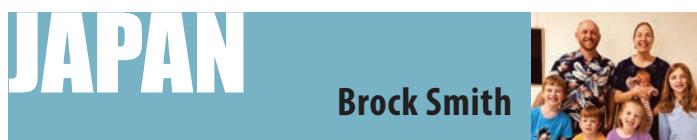
Missions work around the world is unique—different from what friends and family at home encounter day to day. So, to learn about life on the field while getting to know our missionaries better, we asked them to share their firsthand experience or advice.

**QUESTION:** What do you find most difficult about learning a language, and what tips or tricks have you discovered? (Bonus: Tell us how many languages you speak.)



Remembering the names of new acquaintances is so tough. In my mother tongue, when I hear the name John Doe, for example, my brain adds another face to its “folder” of people I know named John. But, when I meet someone in a new language, I must create a new folder for the sounds I’m hearing that form the name, try to assign the sounds to the new face, and attempt to listen to a second language and speak it in reply.

The best trick I have found is to ask people what their name means. They’ll likely ask about the meaning of your name in return, so bonus points for this trick if you have a biblical name. Also, I speak two languages and understand three.



Language learning takes lots of effort, embarrassment, and even failure before a student gets comfortable in a foreign language, like Japanese. Then, you start the uphill battle of seeking to articulate the Gospel and Bible clearly; this is where frustration can become your constant companion.

The culture in your target area might view the world very differently than the Bible does. So there will be many times when what is normal and taken for granted in the English-speaking North American culture is very confusing and even incomprehensible to your listeners. But take heart! The Spirit of God will use even your feeble attempts to save souls.



I find language learning most difficult when I have other responsibilities and the time and energy for language study are not available. For me, it helps to know my learning style and then to determine how I can wisely put it into place for my language and culture learning. Asking God to provide the language-learning opportunities that are best for me continues to encourage me as He faithfully does just that. (Bonus: I speak four languages.)



There is one big yet simple trick to making progress in a foreign language: practice. That sounds trivial and self-evident, but pacing and examining oneself is important in the language-learning process. Once a higher level is attained, it is possible to keep improving through lessons, reading, and writing exercises. But, first, get conversational—immerse yourself in conversation. That implies laying aside all timid feelings or fear of mistakes. Learn to laugh about your blunder.

Portion intentionally left blank



English is my native language, and I am currently learning Thai. Thai is a tonal language with 5 tones, 44 consonants, and 28–32 vowels (four are less common today). Thai uses tone markers, and the tones change depending on the initial consonant, length of the vowel, and ending of each syllable. To a native English speaker, the Thai words for *dog*, *horse*, and *come* would sound exactly the same, but to a native Thai speaker, the slightest inflection can make the meaning change.

Additionally, Thailand has a soft-spoken culture, so it can be difficult to hear what Thais are saying. I have learned to be OK with asking them to repeat themselves. I have also learned not to translate. If I translate, I may ascribe meaning to a word that doesn't make sense to a native speaker. Sometimes, I will ask the other person for a better way to say something, though I get very strange looks occasionally. Patience is important, and we must incorporate the language into every area of our lives from the start.



I speak English (my native tongue) and Spanish. For me, mastering the accent is the most difficult part. My recommendation is to go and learn in a country where they speak the language you're interested in, if you can. After three months in Peru, I understood a lot more Spanish, and after one year, I noticed I could speak a lot more.

Also, I will share the best advice I got from a Peruvian friend before going to Peru: "Do not worry about making mistakes in Spanish. Even if you mess up, the Peruvian people will love you for trying to speak their language."



The most difficult thing is training the tongue and mind to make sounds that you have never made before. But never be afraid to use what language you have, no matter how little. Those who are willing to be embarrassed about making mistakes learn quicker than those who wait to speak until their language is perfect.

I speak English and Spanish fluently, a little bit of Creole and French, and sign language (although my signing is rusty).



I speak two languages: English and Portuguese. Since I was an MK, I don't know which is my mother tongue. Because Portuguese is a phonetic language, it's easier to learn the pronunciation than the grammar, which is a lot more difficult.

I would offer this advice to a language student: don't be shy nor afraid of making mistakes. I noticed two English-speaking missionaries. One took more than a year to start teaching and preaching because he wanted to speak Portuguese well; the other, about six months because he was bold and had a good sense of humor when he made mistakes.

And a tip I would give to an English-language student would be to write the sound of the pronunciation—how the English word sounds to you—next to the correct spelling.

**ASK YOUR QUESTIONS!** Visit [CMML.us/askamissionary](https://www.cmml.us/askamissionary) to submit your question—it might be selected for a future issue!



# Everyday Encounters

The Lord Provides Opportunities to Witness for Him

BY DORLE SMITH

**“You will be my witnesses.”** (Acts 1:8) Recently, I’ve been wondering if this is not only a command but also a desire the Holy Spirit produces in us.

Every morning in my quiet time, I pray that the Lord will order my steps. As I go through my day, I want to be at the right place at the right time. I want to listen during the day. Over the years, I’ve noticed I am becoming better at listening—thanks to the Lord and His love and patience with me. I cannot imagine anything more exciting in life than walking in fellowship with the Lord of Life, who is the ruler of the universe and the lover of my soul.

Sometimes, when it does not rain, I stroll with my walker through my small town, putting flyers into mailboxes. I have done this for years, and I cannot remember having ever met a person I could have a meaningful conversation with while on my stroll. I just pray and sow—the least one can do.

Some weeks ago, walking through the fields across the street from me, I pleaded with the Lord to use me, to bring me into contact with people of His choice to witness to. I was desperate for it!

After a while, I sat down on one of the benches along the way, and within minutes, a woman came by and asked if she could sit next to me. We started talking about the beautiful sunset, and slowly, we talked about everything else. Thirty minutes later, I found out that she lives in the same house as a recently saved woman from one of my Bible studies.

How high are the chances of meeting on that same bench a young man I knew from a nearby town and talking to him? Well, God brought him to me. Being in a severe life crisis, the young man poured out his pain and frustration for more than half an hour, and he allowed me to pray for him.

Another time recently, I had to see the optician, and it was easy to start a conversation since, for years, I have been giving him Christian literature. This time, he had questions. Before I left, he asked if I would send him some YouTube links—he wanted to hear more.

Then, I was outside sweeping the sidewalk when a neighbor came over to me, wanting to talk. We spoke for more than 20 minutes, and I know that this time created the basis for further contact, which will eventually allow me to get to the spiritual essentials.

God gave me all these encounters, plus two more, in a relatively short period. I can’t help but wonder about the connection between how badly I wanted the Lord to use me and Him creating these opportunities to talk about Him. May the Lord ever increase our desire to be His witnesses and provide us with everyday encounters in which to share the Gospel. ■

*Dorle Smith serves the Lord in Germany. She is commended from Boulevard Bible Chapel in Hollywood, Florida.*



**I pleaded with the Lord to use me, to bring me into contact with people of His choice.**

