

Mission Meditations by Deidra Hildabrand

Read Matthew 15:21-28

“ ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.” – Matthew 15:28b

I have grown up going on mission trips. A few years ago I went on a mission trip to the Czech Republic for the first time. When we arrived in the beautiful country, I realized that this would not be the type of mission trip that I was used to. There would be no physical labor to be done. Instead, we spent our time getting to know the people in the town. It was a far better mission to create relationships in this country than to try to step in and “fix their problems.” The pastor who was our host said that it was far more important to their church to form relationships than to fix a building. Relationships are tools that keep these faithful Czech people going when times get tough.

On mission experiences, we go into places for specific reasons. When we enter a town, we may think we know to whom we are sent to mission, and why. Just as the Canaanite woman appeared to Jesus to ask for help, so will we have unexpected people who cross our paths... and unexpected missions that come our way. When we encounter people on our journey, we must minister to each as if they are who we were sent for.

Mission is not only about putting our hands to work for God. It is also about opening our hearts to show our love of God to others. The simple act of friendship may change the life of a stranger you meet on the street in another part of the world.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to open our hearts to the unexpected opportunities to experience the power of God’s love. Amen

Read Matthew 22:1-10

“The slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.” – Matthew 22:10

An adult who participated on a recent mission trip to Juarez, Mexico, made the following observation ...

“On Monday I felt sorry, pity really, for these people who lived in such conditions. How wrong I was! Throughout the week I learned so much from them. I learned how happy they are, how appreciative they are of the simple things of life. I learned these joyous people deserve respect, not pity.”

We can work very hard to prepare something wonderful for people whom we think are worthy of it, or whom we wish to impress. As it turns out, the people who are truly worthy may not be on our radar at all. Sometimes we may need a wake-up call to help us understand that our target audience is not inclusive enough and that there are others who need to be invited. Sometimes we are even surprised to discover that the ones who are ministered to the most are ourselves.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to keep our eyes open to see the face of God in the faces of those around us. Amen

Read John 6:1-14

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.’ “ – John 6:8

The following is a journal entry from a youth participant on a recent mission trip to Juarez, Mexico ...

“As each day went on, our group grew closer together and built stronger relationships. We also began to grow lasting relationships with the children of Juarez. The children are so extremely sweet and life changing. They are always happy and grateful for our presence. They always want our attention. This week there were a lot more children at my worksite than there were last year. We even had a few children that worked side by side with us even though they did not have good shoes or any gloves. One reason that I loved going on this mission trip was that it allowed me to use every ounce of strength and energy that I have toward a cause that is God-filled and gives hope for a better life to the people of Juarez. Wednesday was the day of our hardest work. Even though it was hard work, I never wanted to stop because I knew that they really needed the house and I was determined for them to get it. This trip, as always, was an eye-opening experience that will be with me for the rest of my life. . . . We worked together so well and accomplished so much. We each had our different talents and abilities, and when all combined together we were the perfect team. This was an amazing experience. I can’t wait till next year.”

We think of ourselves as the ones who have what others need. When we go somewhere to share what we have, but often we wind up on the receiving end of sharing what others have to offer. It is not a boomerang effect. It is just what happens when we are reaching out to others in the name of Christ. How exciting that is!

Prayer: Gracious God, we want to share what we have. Thank you for the blessing of receiving what others also have to share. Amen

Read Matthew 5:13-16

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” – Matthew 5:16

In the mountains in the south of France is a village called Taize. In this village is an ecumenical monastery where people go to find a time of peace and renewal. I had the opportunity to visit Taize one March, which was also a time in my life when I found myself in need of spiritual renewal. What I found when I got there was much more than I expected.

The journey to Taize was with a group of seminarians. When I moved into my dorm, I met roommates from Brazil who spoke no English. My small group was made up of people from Germany, Japan, Bolivia, and the United States. In our prayer time, we heard scripture read and sang songs in several different languages. People from all over the world came together to find peace – peace within themselves, peace with each other, and the peace that comes from a deeper commitment to God. We learned from each other, we laughed with each other, and we created bonds that go beyond all typical boundaries.

The light of God’s love needs to be rekindled in our lives. Sometimes that happens through the work we do, sometimes we need to get away and take time for ourselves. We do not have to go half way around the world to find a peace within ourselves. We do not have to form relationships with people from other countries to find a camaraderie of people who worship God. But, what an amazing thing it is to be surrounded by a community of believers that lift each other up. In mission, we lean on those who we do not get the chance to see every week, or even every year. But the knowledge that there are people in the world who experience the same struggles and joys as you, and who are continually holding you in their prayers, is a treasure that keeps us going day after day.

Prayer: Gracious God, encourage us to know when we need to be re-charged, so that your light may shine boldly in our lives. Amen

Read Luke 1:67-80

*“By the tender mercy of our god, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
– Luke 1:78-79*

In the time before scriptures were in written form, there was the custom of telling the old stories of the faith to people as they gathered in groups. As Luke retells the story of God’s presence among the people of Israel, the presence of God in this situation gets focused on the story of the birth of John the Baptizer.

It is really clear that the Bible stories are not told simply to remind people of what happened in the past, but also to point to how God will be with future generations of people who put their trust in God. Right after this story of the birth of John the Baptizer comes the story of the birth of Jesus, and then a couple of chapters later is the story of John baptizing Jesus. John obviously did not think he was worthy to baptize Jesus, but he was willing to put himself in the position of doing what Jesus wanted him to do.

This seems to be a wonderful mission statement for people in mission. Who among us is worthy to present God to others? Who could ever live up to the standards that God wants us to set as an example for others? There is always something that needs to be done, and God can use our hands and our voices to help others to know about God’s love.

God is always able to take what we have to offer and weave it into the fabric of the unfolding story of God’s presence among the people of God. The story of God’s love started centuries ago, and it is not yet complete. I wonder what part we will play in helping someone come to know about God.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us as we find ways to offer your love to others. Amen