

TO FILL ALL THINGS

Mission Partners Study 2



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The Fellowship of Ailbe



To Fill All Things

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To Fill All Things

Contents

Welcome to <i>To Fill All Things</i>	4
1 From Heaven through All Things	5
2 Souls Overflowing	7
3 Frequenting the Spiritual Air	9
4 The Fragrance of Christ	11
5 Think: Love	13
6 On the Tip of our Tongues	15
7 Docents of Glory	17

Welcome to *To Fill All Things*

Welcome to the second in our series of Mission Partners Studies, *To Fill All Things*. The six studies in this series include:

Sent like Jesus – If we really want to live, we have to live like Jesus.

To Fill All Things – Jesus Christ through you to your world!

Seasoned with Grace – Talking with others about the grace of God.

Lived Truth – Our mission begins with *being* witnesses for Christ.

Redeeming Culture – We can't avoid or escape culture, so we need to transform it.

Confident Witness – How to be bolder and more effective in sharing your faith.

As a participant in the Mission Partners program, you will be given access to these studies as you progress through the stages of your mission over the next six months.

To Fill All Things is an investigation into the ongoing work of our ascended Lord and King, in order to discover our place in that work. Jesus has sent each of us into our own Personal Mission Field, and He intends to use us to fill that field with Himself.

What an exciting prospect!

Here are the assignments for Month 2 of your Mission Partners project:

Video: Praying for Your Personal Mission Field

Study: *To Fill All Things*

- Tasks:
1. Pray daily for the people you will see in your PMF that day.
 2. Continue learning and using the names of people in your PMF.
 3. Continue getting to know the people in your PMF.
 4. Discuss your work in your PMF with your Mission Partner.

The Mission Partners program is designed to help you understand and make the best use of those daily disciplines that can allow you to follow Jesus with into more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

These studies are designed for use with a Mission Partner. For more information on the Mission Partners program, visit our website, www.ailbe.org.

We're pleased to offer the Mission Partners program, and the studies that go with it, at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe. Information on how to contribute to The Fellowship of Ailbe can be found at the end of this study.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 From Heaven through All Things

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is also the one who ascended far above the heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephesians 4.9, 10

The purpose of the ascension

Linger with me a bit over this text, will you?

First, let’s note the action: “ascended”, “descended”, “ascended.” From above to below to above again. It’s clear that Paul is referring to the incarnation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who “descended into the lower parts of the earth.” He came from the throne of God on high and was incarnated as a lowly servant among the lowliest of people in a strictly backwater sector of the Roman Empire. He was born in a lowly stable, lived a life of poverty, died a criminal’s death, and was buried low in the ground.

But then, His work accomplished, Jesus “ascended,” first, from the grave to a new glorified life, and then from the earth to a place “far above the heavens.” The Word of God Who had become flesh now returned to His heavenly throne, still garbed in the now-glorified body of the Man from Galilee. His heavenly throne is “far above the heavens”, that is, the stars and constellations and galaxies of the night sky and deep space. Jesus is enthroned at the Father’s right hand in a realm of unseen, spiritual realities, far above and far superseding anything we might be able to see with even the most powerful astronomical instruments.

And why did Jesus take His place on this throne, far above and beyond the vast material cosmos?

In order, Paul explains, “that he might fill all things.” Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God that He might fill all things.

“All things”? The whole vast cosmos and everything in it? And fill all things with what?

The power of His rule

Let’s step back a bit. Paul reminds us elsewhere that the Word of God – Who has now taken the glorified form of our Lord Jesus Christ – created all things and in Him all things hold together (Col. 1.16, 17). Nothing that exists anywhere in the cosmos has its being from anything other than the Word of God, and nothing continues to exist apart from the powerful upholding work of that same Word of God (Heb. 1.3).

He Who descended to earth and took the lowly form of Jesus of Nazareth is the same One Who made the cosmos and all things, and in Whose power and by Whose Word the cosmos and all things continue to exist. Though Jesus our glorified King is seated at the right hand of God far above and beyond the vast cosmos, His Word continues to pervade, uphold, and sustain the cosmos and everything in it. It is as if He speaks the cosmos into being every moment, in every detail, down to the smallest sub-atomic particle.

We can neither fathom nor explain this mystery, how it works, how any Being can be of such a nature as that all being and every thing owe their existence and continuity to that Being. But this is what the Scriptures teach, and this is what Christians have always believed. The stamp of the Word of God is everywhere throughout the vast cosmos. All things are as Jesus says they should be, as He upholds them to be, and for the purposes He determines, in line with the glory of God.

It is by the power of His everywhere-rule that Jesus is now filling all things.

But filling all things with what?

To Fill All Things

In all things

In Ephesians 1.23 Paul again alludes to this mysterious doctrine of the Christ Who fills all things. In talking about the Church, Paul says the Body of Christ is the “fullness of him who fills all in all.” We might just as accurately translate this phrase, “the One Who is filling all things in all things.” So Christ – the Word of God – Who made and upholds the cosmos, is in the process of *filling* all things in the cosmos with Himself, Who is *in all things* throughout the cosmos.

Jesus, *in all things* by His powerful rule, is *filling* all things with His presence and power. Increasingly, therefore, we should expect the cosmos – let’s be specific to our part of the creation, earth – we should expect the earth, created and sustained by King Jesus, pervaded by His sovereign rule, to become filled with Him and His presence. The world is receiving a make-over; it is being reconstructed and filled to refract the beauty, goodness, wisdom, might, wonder, and lovingkindness of Jesus Christ. He is making all things new (Rev. 21.5).

And – wonder of all – Paul says Jesus is doing this for and by His Church, where His fullness is most operative and evident at this time.

Christ is filling all things with Himself and His glory, and He is doing so through His Body, the Church.

For reflection

1. How would you summarize the work Jesus came to do while He was on earth?
2. Now seated at the Father’s right hand, Jesus is advancing His Kingdom (His rule) on earth as it is on heaven. Meditate on Isaiah 9.6, 7. What should we expect as this rule of King Jesus continues?
3. “The world is receiving a make-over; it is being reconstructed and filled to refract the beauty, goodness, wisdom, might, wonder, and lovingkindness of Jesus Christ. He is making all things new (Rev. 21.5).” Do you agree? What are the implications of this for your daily life as a believer?

Next steps: What should we expect in the world as Christ is filling it with Himself? Is seeing the world becoming filled with Jesus what your church is committed to pursuing? What about you personally? Talk with your Mission Partner about these questions.

Prayer:

2 Souls Overflowing

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit... John 7.37-39

Got it, getting it

This morning, while we were registering for something or other, the woman taking our information asked us our preferred language. "English," Susie said, obviously enough.

Of course, English. We were born in an English-speaking country, learned English as children, and have spoken it in a wide variety of contexts for over 60 years. I've written millions of words of English, even some which were sufficiently well-crafted and assembled to have been brought to publication for others to consider.

And yet, here I am, with all 20 volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary* on my work table; I'm reading Steven Pinker's *The Sense of Style* in order to learn how to make better use of the English language; and I depend on my wife, Susie, to review and edit nearly everything I write in order to improve my use of the English tongue.

It's clear that, where English is concerned, I've got it. But I continue working to get it.

That's the way it is with Jesus.

The mind – and soul – of Christ

Jesus is filling the world with Himself. This includes you and me, and this filling of us is the work of Jesus' Spirit, beginning within us, in that spiritual component of our existence which we call the soul. The soul of every person who believes in Jesus is indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus. He is there. We've got Him.

But we're still just beginning to get Him.

Let me explain. The soul consists of three interacting, overlapping, inter-related spiritual components: the heart, the mind, and the conscience. What Paul says about our minds is also true about our hearts and our consciences. Paul says we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). OK, I got that. But I'm still just getting it. I have the mind of Christ, but I don't always *think* with the mind of Christ. At the same time, I have the new heart which the Spirit of Christ gives me (Ezek. 36.26, 27), but I don't always love the way Christ does. I've got His heart, but I'm still getting it. And He has redeemed my conscience – the seat of the will – from dead works (Heb. 9.14) so that He is now at work within me helping me to will and do what pleases Him (Phil. 2.13). I have the conscience of Christ, but I'm still just getting it.

Christ's filling all things with Himself begins within the souls of those who believe in Him. As we yield our minds, hearts, and consciences to Him – learning to think, feel, and will as He guides us in His Word – His Spirit "stretches out" within us and fills us so that, increasingly, the person we *used* to be in our souls is now becoming the person *Christ is making us to be*. Jesus Christ is *in* us, and from within, by His Spirit and Word, He is *filling us* with Himself, transforming us into His own image (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Life overflowing

We know this is happening. We see evidence of it all the time. We are thinking new thoughts. Overcoming negative attitudes and learning to love others more. Old things that we willed with a vengeance no longer hold their thrall, and we find ourselves increasingly *willing* to obey the Lord within us whatever He requires.

To Fill All Things

The more this occurs, the more we are transformed in our souls into the image of Jesus Christ – mind, heart, and conscience. And the more we are transformed within our souls the more consistently we will experience what Jesus promised: His true, refreshing, life-giving spiritual presence welling up, overflowing, and spilling out into all our words and deeds.

Jesus is working from within our souls to fill our souls with Himself. Are we participating in this project with Him? Do we long for the day when that river of living water will flow effortlessly from within us, to bless and renew everyone and everything? Or are we content merely to have, as it were, the 20 volumes of the *OED*, rich with their glorious verbal and linguistic potential, sitting on the desk of our soul, never used?

Devote yourself mind, heart, and conscience to Jesus. Seek Him within; submit all your thoughts, affections, values, and priorities to Him. And rejoice as He fills you with Himself, and all the spaces, places, and time of your life with rivers of living spiritual water.

For reflection

1. We have the mind, heart, and conscience of Christ. What evidence of that do you see in your own life? Are you consistent in thanking and praising the Lord for this?
2. Meditate on Philippians 2.12, 13. Summarize both *our* responsibility and *God's work* in helping us to work out more of the salvation we already possess:
3. "Jesus is working from within our souls to fill our souls with Himself." Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.12-18 and Ephesians 4.17-24. How would you explain this process of being transformed into the image of Christ to a new believer?

Next steps: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how diligently are you seeking to increase the fullness of Jesus in your mind, heart, and conscience? Go through this exercise with your Mission Partner, and talk about ways you might help one another know more of the fullness of Jesus in your souls.

Prayer:

3 Frequenting the Spiritual Air

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for to you do I cry all the day. Psalm 86.3

1s and 0s everywhere, all the time

The world which Jesus rules, and which He is filling with Himself, is a strange, wonderful, and sometimes spooky place.

The other day I downloaded the new operating system for Susie's iPad. The longer the process took, the more I began to wonder about what in the world was going on during that 30 minutes or so. I had no idea. How was that new operating system getting *to* Susie's iPad and then *in* her iPad working its wonders to transform the innards of that marvelous machine?

So I did what any sane person would do. I asked our son-in-law, David Durant.

David explained that the air around us is charged with particles of light, most of which we can't see. That light, traveling in the frequencies of waves and photons, is always operating, going here and there, in and out, through and through, and almost nothing impedes it. Now some people – engineers like David – have figured out how to tame certain frequencies of that light, teaching them to obey simple codes that reduce to 1s and 0s on a computer keyboard. Those codes can then be “written” so as to command certain kinds of behaviors on the part of material objects such as switches, turning them on or off as the code writer intends, and routing light and electrons here and there accordingly. Then – and here's the cool part – those engineers can send that stuff to Susie's iPad, right through the air from the modem in my study to me, sitting in the family room upstairs!

Constant frequencies of light, captured and formed to convey information, impacting just the right places, can have powerful effects – even though we can't see any of this happening.

And that, my friends, is what prayer is like.

Without ceasing

The Apostle Paul's ideal for prayer is, like the psalmist's, that it should be continuous (1 Thess. 5.17). The spiritual “air” around us is charged with all kinds of activity. Spiritual beings inhabit that domain, and they carry on constant communications – angels with God, demons with the devil, and each with others as they struggle to control the spiritual “airspace” of the cosmos.

People also contribute to that spiritual airspace, and, surprising as it may seem, we have the ability to code words and send them through the vast spiritual spaces beyond the cosmos to the very throne room of Christ, where, when they are received, they wield real and surprising spiritual power (Jms. 5.16).

When we bend our Christ-like minds, hearts, and consciences to the spiritual code-writing of prayer, we craft messages which shape the spiritual air as they course their way toward the Source of all living-water spiritual power, Who is filling all things with Himself. The more we pray with Christ-overflowing souls, the more we flood the spiritual airspace for the Lord, crowding out and sidelining those forces of wickedness which seek to jam those airwaves or fill them with spiritual disinformation.

So Paul, David, Jesus, and others in Scripture do not hesitate to exhort us to take as our ideal for prayer that we should practice prayer without ceasing, that we should maintain continuous spiritual communication with Him Who is the Source of all spiritual upgrades and Who is filling all things with Himself.

Is it possible?

We might ask whether it is actually possible to do nothing but pray all the time. But that's not what it means to pray without ceasing. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. Why can't we walk and pray at the same time? Because we've never learned to do so, that's why.

Prayer without ceasing is a form of continuous conversation with God, like the "continuous conversation" of mutual love that exists within the triune Godhead. The angels help us in this effort, and so do departed saints. I don't know how, exactly, and we don't have any Scriptural warrant to pray *to* these glorious spiritual beings, but the Scriptures teach they have something to do with making our prayers presentable to God (cf. Rev. 4.8, 8.3 and 4). The more we pray, the more we engage angels and departed saints in sanctifying and relaying those prayers to God, and the more both the Spirit and Jesus intercede to fill the spiritual air with holy conversation.

We pray without ceasing when prayer is the envelope in which we travel, the frequency that defines the orientation of our souls, and our first and continuous line of response to people, situations, events, and things. Jesus ever lives eternally to offer prayers to God on our behalf (Heb. 7.25). When we pray without ceasing, we unite the spiritual air of our lives with the unceasing prayers of our all-filling Christ and King.

For reflection

1. James tells us (Jms. 5.6) that prayer is effective, even powerful. In what ways do you experience this?
2. What are some things that can keep us from praying without ceasing? How can believers help one another in this effort to "frequent" the "spiritual air"?
3. In what ways is prayer without ceasing "like the continuous conversation of mutual love that exists within the triune Godhead"?

Next steps: Look through a hymnal until you find a hymn is in the form of a prayer. Find one you know and like to sing. Try singing that hymn throughout the next few days. Does this help you pray without ceasing? Share the results of this effort with your Mission Partner.

Prayer:

4 The Fragrance of Christ

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. 2 Corinthians 2.14

A pervading presence

This morning, as I headed downstairs to begin my day, the wholesome, earthy aroma of beef broth, wafting up the stairs, greeted and delighted me. With winter coming on soon, it will be good, I thought, to have those jars of beef broth in the freezer, ready to be heated up and savored.

It takes a while to cook beef broth just right – as many as 72 hours in the crock pot. As it sets up, that wonderful smell pervades the whole house, with its portent of cold days, warm hands, and fortified bodies. We know our little crock pot, no bigger than two footballs, is doing its job when the rich fragrance of its contents reaches us everywhere in the house, and delights us with the promise of warm, tasty nourishment.

Paul says God is making us a fragrance of Christ. As our souls are filled with Him Who is filling all things, and as we capture and encode the spiritual air around us with unceasing prayer, the reality of Christ in us, which is our hope of glory, begins to waft out toward others. Like that faithful crock pot, we're "cooking up Jesus" in the places we go and for the people we meet every day – simmering and simmering, wafting and wafting, day after day.

Personal Mission Field

When Jesus was on earth His presence was no secret. The gospel writers report that the knowledge and even the fame of Jesus spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and beyond. Large numbers of people, catching a "whiff" of Him in the neighborhood, were drawn by the aroma of His presence to seek Him. Just a rumor of Jesus being near would change conversations, heighten people's attention, generate anticipation and excitement, and cause the sick and oppressed to move toward Him with hope.

Jesus was sent to the world to bring near the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Everywhere He went the power of His personality, words, and works affected everyone around Him. Not everyone was pleased with His presence, it's true. But everyone was *affected* by Him. Throughout His mission field Jesus left a legacy of good works and true words, setting up multiplied thousands of people for the ongoing work of bringing in the Kingdom of God which His Spirit would accomplish after Jesus had ascended to the Father.

And Jesus said that, in the same way He was sent into the world, He is sending each of us as His followers (Jn. 20.21). Jesus had a mission field which was specific as to people, places, things, and events. Each one of us also has a Personal Mission Field, to which we have been sent, like Jesus, to be a fragrance of Christ and a herald of the Kingdom of God. From His throne in heaven, Jesus is filling the earth with "spiritual crock pots" whose purpose is to waft the fragrance of the risen Lord into every place.

Taking the measure

The Personal Mission Field assigned to each of us is defined by the way we use our time. As we are going through the time of our lives, our mandate is to "make disciples" (Matt. 28.18-20). That is, wherever we are or whatever we're doing, we are to employ our words and take up such works as will faithfully channel the overflowing presence of Christ from our souls, via our words and deeds, into the social and cultural arenas where we live, move, and have our being.

Your Personal Mission Field is first of all a collection of *places* – places you go to week-in and week-out, your

To Fill All Things

home and neighborhood, workplace or school, community, and so forth. In the places of your life you engage in cultural activities, such as working, holding conversations, eating and drinking, and so forth. The Apostle Paul reminds us that all these cultural activities are fraught with potential for filling the spaces of our lives with Jesus and the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31-11.1). But, like Jesus, we must determine that this will be our mission, and then we must prepare ourselves accordingly if we are to fill the time and spaces of our lives with the living presence of our indwelling, all-filling Lord.

Your Personal Mission Field also consists of people, the people to whom God is sending you each week for the purpose of making disciples. Some of these people are Christians, and, in general, your wafting the fragrance of Jesus their way will be received gratefully, and will contribute to their growing as His disciples. Others, who do not know the Lord, will show a mixed reaction to your living like Jesus and speaking about Him or as He would. Some will appreciate it. Others will find our bringing Jesus into their space a fragrance of death – because the life of Christ in us illuminates the odor of sin in which they live. Some who are thus affected will sense in that fragrance an opportunity to escape their malodorous condition into the fresh world of forgiveness and the love of Christ. Others will simply harden themselves against the fragrance of Christ, and perhaps even against you.

No matter. As the Father sent Jesus to affect and fill everyone and everything around Him, so He is sending us, each one, into his or her own Personal Mission Field, to fill it, by our words and deeds, with the fragrance of our Lord Jesus Christ. So make sure you're cooking-up some Jesus in your soul for the places you'll go and the people you'll meet today.

For reflection

1. Why is this metaphor of the “fragrance” or “aroma” of Christ a good one to help us in thinking about Jesus filling our Personal Mission Field with Himself?
2. Who are the Christians in your Personal Mission Field? What can you do in order to become more consistent in encouraging them in their discipleship (Heb. 10.24)?
3. Who are the unbelievers in your Personal Mission Field (first names only)? Do you have a strategy for reaching out to them with the Gospel? What might be some components in such a strategy?

Next steps: What are some things in the lives of others that savor of a pleasing “aroma”? That is, how do people act, talk, comport themselves, etc. in ways that you find pleasing, encouraging, helpful, etc.? Talk with your Mission Partner about this matter.

Prayer:

5 Think: Love

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1.5

The lovingkindness of the Lord

The various writers of the book of Psalms struggle to help us understand a most fundamental truth about God:

He love us more than we know.

David and the other psalmists want us to understand that God's love brought the world into being and continues to sustain it. By His love, God assigns the various creatures to their places and provides for their needs. His love endures forever, reaches as high as the heavens, sustains and stretches out throughout the earth, brings good things to every human being, and even takes care of those who despise the Lord and His ways (Matt. 5.43-45).

The term most frequently used to describe this everywhere-present-and-always-at-work love of God is translated as "lovingkindness" or, in some versions, "steadfast love." Especially Psalm 136, with its antiphonal arrangement of verses, insists that the cosmos is upheld, sustained, and pervaded by the lovingkindness of God. Everywhere we turn, we are confronted by the love of God. So everywhere-present-and-always-at-work is God's love that we tend to take it for granted: the air we breath, the light coming into our eyes, the blood in our veins, food on our tables, strength to work, and all the daily blessings and benefits we enjoy. It would improve our learning to pray without ceasing if we simply took some time out during the day to thank the Lord for the many ways His steadfast love surrounds, sustains, and swarms us at every moment!

Imitate Christ

This is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Seated at the right hand of the Father, and upholding the universe and everything in it by His Word of power, Jesus is filling the cosmos with Himself, with His steadfast love and faithfulness. When the Apostle Paul calls us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11.1), surely one of the things He wants us to do is work hard at filling the spaces and time of our lives with tokens of the steadfast love of the Lord.

Paul insisted that all Christian instruction should be devoted to teaching us the ways of love. Love is the theme of Scripture (Matt. 22.34-40), the greatest of all Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13.13), the firstfruit of the indwelling Spirit of God (Gal. 5.22, 23), and the crowning achievement of a community of believers (Eph. 4.16). As Jesus fills our souls with His presence, and we fill the spiritual air with prayers celebrating and drawing on His love, it's only natural – well, *supernatural*, really – that the "overflow" of our lives should take various forms of love, thus refracting the lovingkindness of the Lord that reaches us on every hand.

By focusing on the people in our Personal Mission Fields we can prepare each day to bring the love of Christ to them in ways specific to their needs and in line with the opportunities presented to us (Eph. 5.15-17). Filling the spaces of our Personal Mission Fields with love begins in prayer, where we seek the wisdom of God to help us use our time for love, and as we call upon Him to "establish" just the right works of love that will allow us to show Jesus to the people to whom we're being sent (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17).

Consistency, not enormity

How can we know what love will require of us in any situation? Jesus suggested that one could way might be to ask yourself, "How would I want someone to love me just now?" As you would like to be loved, reach out

To Fill All Things

to love someone else, and you will find yourself acting in accord with the Scriptural requirements for love (Matt. 7.12).

Think of loving others not in terms of big displays, but, like the lovingkindness of the Lord, in the small, everyday tokens of thoughtfulness, concern, and help that make others' lives a bit easier. *Consistency* in loving others is more important than *enormity*. It's also more likely to be taken for granted, since people can get used to our being kind to them, calling them by name, offering to help in a project, speaking a word of affirmation or encouragement, listening patiently as they whine and whinge about this, that, or the other, or remembering to pray for them regularly. We don't love people because *they* love *us*, but because *Christ* loves us and them, and He is filling their lives with His steadfast love, and using folks like you and me as resources in His world-filling love-project.

We will go a long way toward filling our Personal Mission Fields with the presence of Jesus Christ if we focus on showing His love, in small, everyday ways, to the people we see each day. As we are faithful in these small, daily ways of loving, we refract the lovingkindness of the Lord to the people around us, and we prepare ourselves for the greater challenges of love – such as telling someone the Good News about Jesus and His love – to which the Lord will bring us in His time.

For reflection

1. What are some things that keep us from “thinking love” as we're travelling about in our Personal Mission Fields? How can we recognize and overcome these so as to love others more consistently?
2. Why is consistency more important than enormity in loving others? Can you give some examples of each?
3. Why is telling someone the Good News of Jesus a “greater challenge” of love?

Next steps: Make a list of five things you would like someone to do today to show you love. Then, throughout the course of the day, do those things for others as often as you can. At the end of the day, reflect on your list, and your day, in prayer before the Lord, thanking Him for using you to express His lovingkindness to others.

Prayer:

6 On the Tip of Our Tongues

When [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose...And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians. Acts 11.23, 26

The hope within us

The Apostle Peter famously insisted that when people begin see the hope that is within us, they'll be curious, and ask for an explanation (1 Pet. 3.15). The hope that is within us is the hope of glory, and the hope of glory is Jesus Christ in us (Col. 1.27), filling our souls with Himself, filling the spiritual air of our lives with prayers and praises, and overflowing through our loving words and deeds to touch others with the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Can you “see” that happening in your life? What do you expect your life to look like as Jesus fills your soul, prayers, and Personal Mission Field with Himself? If you're not thinking about that – if you can't “see” it with your mind's eye – then you're not likely to realize much of His presence in or through you. But the more you focus on Christ in you as your hope for glory, and begin to envision, plan, organize, and conduct your life accordingly, the more you will actually *see Jesus* coming to expression in your thoughts, affections, choices, words, and deeds.

And the more others will see the hope within you as well.

Barnabas in Antioch

Something like this must have been Barnabas' experience as he came to Antioch to follow-up reports of the Gospel having reached the Gentile people there. I'm always arrested by the phrase, “saw the grace of God”, which describes his experience in that Roman city. What did Barnabas see that evidenced the lovingkindness of God? Undoubtedly, he saw many of the things we talked about in our previous installment, everyday deeds, small and large, of the reality of the living Christ beginning to fill Antioch with Himself through the lives of those new believers.

But Barnabas also must have seen a lot of people talking about Jesus. The believers in Antioch appear to have been very eager to chat about Christ – so much so, in fact, that their neighbors took to calling them the “Christ-ones.” Christ was the explanation for their new lives. He was always right on the tip of their tongues, to give Him praise or thanks, or to explain some aspect of their loving behavior that might have piqued a neighbor's curiosity.

As Jesus begins filling the spaces of our daily lives with loving deeds and words, we'll want to make sure that we give credit where it's due. Jesus is the source and reason for our lives, and the more we talk about Him as though this were really true, the more those around us will begin to believe it.

What to say

What do we want to say to people about Jesus? I can't imagine those believers in Antioch all learning some rote “presentation” of the Gospel. Coming from a pagan background, they would have been very familiar with the Roman practice of attributing divine influence to just about everything in life. As Augustine mockingly pointed out in *City of God*, the Romans had gods for everything. Gods for harvests, warfare, procreation, weather, and other big things in life; but also gods for noses, beards, clothing, daily food, good manners, civil authorities, sour stomachs, and bad breath. Roman cities were dotted with kiosks and altars where a person could buy a flower or some incense and offer it to the deity of his choice as he was going from home to the market or to visit a friend in another part of town. Representations of the gods were everywhere, and each had its own unique function and contribution related to human wellbeing.

To Fill All Things

What the Christians in Antioch came to understand was that all those gods were false, that Jesus is the source of every blessing and benefit, and that, rather than have to remember and placate many gods, they only had to give thanks and praise to one, even Christ. So, rather than mutter some mindless cant to this or that false deity, they began to speak openly, sincerely, and excitedly about the lovingkindness of Christ and the joy associated with His salvation.

Christ was filling their lives and, as a result, beginning to overflow into their conversations. Many of those first believers must have talked not only about their daily blessings but also of their own journey into the faith of Jesus Christ, and of how the people they saw each day could come to know Him as well.

When our lives begin to fill up with Jesus, when we are in continuous communication with Him, and when showing His love to others is part of every day's plan and activities, then we, too, will find Jesus on the tip of our tongues, and we will be ready to explain the hope that is within us to anyone who might ask.

For reflection

1. With but a few exceptions, it's safe to say that most Christians today do not have Jesus "on the tip of their tongues." Agree or disagree? Why?
2. How might learning to pray without ceasing help to keep Jesus at least a little closer to the tip of our tongues?
3. Do you want to have Jesus on the tip of your tongue? Why or why not? If Jesus *were* on the tip of your tongue, what would you expect that to look like in your daily travels through your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps: What is the Gospel? That is, how would you explain to someone who asked a reason for the hope within you what it means to become a Christian? Write down an outline of what you might share, then share your Gospel outline with your Mission Partner.

Prayer:

7 Docents of Glory

“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witnesses, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Acts 14:15-17

The witness of creation

What Paul explained to the people of Lystra must have struck them as strange. The God Who made heaven and earth has left a witness of Himself in the everyday drudgery of our work? How could that be? And more important, if it is so, why didn't we see this before?

In his little book, *Instruction in Faith*, John Calvin crisply summarized the teaching of Scripture about the witness of God in creation. By paying careful attention to the works of creation – the world itself, together with culture and the workings of conscience – we can learn a great deal about God. Calvin wrote, “We contemplate, therefore, in this universality of things, the immortality of our God, from which immortality have proceeded the beginning and origin of all things; his power which has created such a great system and now sustains it; his wisdom which has composed and rules with such a distinct order such a great and complex variety of beings and things; his goodness which has been the reason in itself why all these things have been created and now subsist; his justice which manifests itself in a marvelous way in the protection of good people and in the retribution of the bad; his mercy which endures our iniquities with such a great kindness in order to call us to amendment.”

If God is showing us so much of Himself, why didn't the people of Lystra see Him? And why don't people today see God in all these many and wonderful works?

They didn't see, and don't, because they don't know what they were looking for!

But we do.

See that?

Have you ever had the experience of someone saying to you, “Wow! Did you see *that?*” as they point off somewhere in the distance. “See *what?*” you ask, because you have no idea what has arrested their attention with such surprise and wonder. “Right over there; can't you *see* it?” they reply. “No, I can't see it because I don't know what you're pointing at!” you say with growing exasperation.

This is the way God appears in creation and culture to those who don't know Him. Since they don't know Him, they don't know what to look for amid all the wonders, marvels, and witnesses of creation and culture all around them. We might be able to look at a glorious sunset, a painting by Rembrandt or Wyeth, or even a well-executed long forward pass and say, “Wow! Did you see *that?*” meaning, as we see it, something like, “Man, God is so beautiful, wise, powerful, glorious, and grand to make a scene like that, or to enable people to do things like that!”

But the people to whom we're trying to point out the witness of God in creation and culture can only respond “See *what?*” unless we are more specific in explaining what they should be observing.

Docents of glory

The world is a museum of the mighty works of God. It's like one huge, continuous Rorschach Test. If you know what you're looking for, and how to observe it, everything displays the glory of God. The heavens, the

To Fill All Things

creation as a whole, the works of human culture and society, even the make-up of human beings themselves: According to Scripture every created thing bears the stamp of God's creating and sustaining work and so, in some way, gives evidence of His glory.

In this world-museum, most people wander around gawking without really understanding what they're seeing. Our job, as we participate with Jesus in filling the world with Himself, is to act as museum docents – like Paul in Lystra – explaining to people all the evidence of God's eternity, power, wisdom, order, goodness, justice, and mercy as these “flash forth” and “ooze” out from the creation all around us. And then, moving on from this *general* revelation of God, we can explain to them from the *special* revelation of His Word the story of our all-glorious, filling-everything Savior and King.

But in order to imitate Paul in this function, who, after all was only imitating Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1), we'll need to apply ourselves to discerning the glory of God which He has concealed throughout the vast cosmos, in things grand and ordinary (Prov. 25.2; 1 Cor. 10.31). Then as often as the opportunity allows, we can point to anything around us – even the daily drudgery of our work – and say to people, “Wow! Did you see *that*?”

And when they ask, “See *what*?” we can show them Jesus, filling the world with Himself, unto the knowledge of God and His glory, which it is our privilege and calling to make known (Hab. 2.14).

For reflection

1. Meditate on Psalm 19.1-4, Romans 1.18-21, and Habakkuk 2.14. How do these passages build on one another?
2. What do we mean by saying that the world is a “museum” of God's glory? Can you give an example or two from your own experience?
3. What will it require for you to become a “docent of glory”? Are you willing to prepare for this high and holy calling? What are the consequences for your Personal Mission Field if you do not?

Next steps: Today, reach out to someone in your Personal Mission Field with a “Did you see that?” Then, be ready to “docent” the glory of God.

Prayer:

To Fill All Things

Next steps

Make sure you have completed each of the *Next steps* exercises before you meet with your Mission Partner to discuss the following questions. Below, list the *Next steps* efforts and results you'd like to share with your Mission Partner:

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you expect others to know when Jesus was filling your Personal Mission Field through you?
2. How's your prayer life? Do you pray for the people in your Personal Mission Field? Are you working hard at praying without ceasing?
3. What does it mean for you to be a doцент of glory for the people in your Personal Mission Field? Suggest some ways you could improve in this part of your mission.
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?
5. How you are working to incorporate that lesson to your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.