

A close-up photograph of a horse's face, focusing on its eye and the surrounding fur. The horse has a white blaze on its face and a dark eye. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

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MUSHING **TO THE FAR NORTH**

twenty-three ministry mindsets
in preparing for missions in the far north

What is far north missions? intro

60/70 window

Are all Christians missionaries? “If everybody is doing missions, then very likely missions is going to be lost,” John Piper says in his audio sermon *Why Is Differentiating Between Evangelism and Missions Important?* So understanding the definition of a missionary is pertinent in missions. While all believers in Christ are called to evangelism, only some are called to be missionaries. A missionary is a believer who is called to go across a culture to share the Gospel. They are ones who live among a culturally different society and people—all for the purpose of sharing the Good News and making disciples.

Although this booklet is aimed at encouraging missionaries to follow hard after God, the goal of these writings is meant to encourage *every* believer to grow in their walk with Christ. Most of the lessons I learned in the far north transcend culture, temperature and ruralness. I can learn these 27 lessons more and more each day whether I’m sitting comfortably in a house with running water or if I attend tribal meetings in an octagon building. Suffering, loving, persevering, proclaiming the Gospel and living humbly are a part of a believer’s walk with Christ in this fallen world no matter in what the setting, country or culture we find ourselves.

In light of this, the lessons laid out in this booklet are specifically focused on missions in the far north—missions pinpointed above the 60th parallel in remote areas where sunlight is lacking and frost is prevalent (60/70 window). Across an Athabaskan native culture, beyond the Arctic Circle, below fifty degree temperatures, and in the midst of a land where debauchery abounds is the setting found interwoven throughout the lessons I’ve learned.

Whether you’re someone seeking the Lord for a future in missions or just someone beginning to learn about missions, my prayer is that the lessons I’m learning as a missionary in Alaska serve to strengthen your faith in the worthiness of Christ. May you relish the privilege it is to serve a Savior whose Name is worthy of proclaiming in the cold and remote areas of the 60/70 window.

A calling to far north 1 missions

1 Peter 2:21

Being called and confirming that call is different for every believer. For our family, the calling to move to Alaska was solidified by unity and prayer. My husband felt God was going to lead our family to Alaska—but he didn't go by feeling. He prayed for God to confirm this feeling by bringing me to the same place. One full year later I, for no other reason than the Spirit's leading, turned to my husband and said, "We should be missionaries to Alaska." Each step of the way the Lord opened doors, closed doors and led us as a couple to the village in which we now live. Are we called to Alaska? Right now we are. But deeper and further than a calling to a place is a calling to a Person. My husband reminds me daily that rather than 'do' we must 'be.' We are called to abide in a Person—and this calling goes far beyond any geographical location on earth.

So while I encourage the discipline of prayer and seeking God on a direction for the future, the calling you must focus on is 'being' Christ. Seek Him, serve Him, love Him, obey Him—and in doing all this, He will show you the way you should go. Each step will be laid out for you in daily obedience to Him.

God's will for all our lives is the same whether in the far north or along the equator: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances—for this is God's will for your life in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). As you seek the Lord on your knees for His direction for your future, take that strength you gain from abiding in Christ and go rejoice and give thanks in every circumstance you encounter today. And each step of your future will be lit by a God who knows the end from the beginning.

I love living in a bush village. I wake up each morning thanking the Lord for allowing me to live out my dream of sharing Christ alongside my husband as we seek to disciple the Athabaskan. But my calling remains the same if or when He leads my family elsewhere. And while the place may change as the years go by, the Person we are called to follow remains the same yesterday, today and forever.

For further study: [Ephesians 4:1-3](#); [2 Peter 1:10-11](#); [John 15:16](#)

Suffering in far north missions

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Romans 5:3-5

There are many opportunities to glory in our sufferings in the bush of Alaska. The long days of below zero, lack of sunlight and isolation are far from the proverbial 'retire and live at ease' scenario many yearn for these days. In my specific village, one small 'suffering' we deal with is the lack of running water. Yet others in villages across the state deal with frozen pipes or drafty houses. In our American world mindset, the inconveniences missionaries experience in the bush go against what is desired for a comfortable life. But as a missionary...and a believer...the insignificant sufferings dealt to us are not worth comparing to the glory of Christ Himself. Whether in the bush or on the road system, we get Christ. And that is enough to transform suffering to joy.

When we first moved to Alaska, the dark days of the interior were a suffering I failed to transform to joy on a daily basis. I suffered and it stopped there. Not only was joy absent, but my spiritual growth grew stagnant. That is, until the day I chose to embrace suffering as a way to glory in Christ Jesus—that is when my mindset embraced suffering as a privilege, if done for Christ's Name. And as the years went by, I look back on my first year in Alaska and see that as suffering produced perseverance, my character grew sturdy and unwavering—that, in turn delivered a hope that does not put me to shame because God's love was poured out in my heart. I saw progress, not perfection, in my walk with Christ. And the hope that birthed from that progress inspires me to persevere when sacrifices must be made for the furthering of His kingdom. There is no sacrifice too great of which Christ's Name is not worthy.

On the days when suffering hits hard, my husband will look me in the eyes and snap his fingers. His meaning: Life on this earth is merely a snap...then eternity. When we constantly place eternity before our eyes, then no suffering on this fleeting earth can shake our faith or call us to quit. The days will vanish like the wind and all that's left are the works done in His Name and for His purposes. No amount of suffering can squelch a faith rooted in the Savior Himself.

For further study: [1 Peter 4:12-19](#); [1 Peter 5:10](#); [Romans 8:18](#)

Having a mind to suffer in far north missions

3

Romans 8:36-39

Some suffer well while others suffer poorly. Some prosper well while others prosper poorly. It's not about the state of our situation or circumstances, but the mindset we have during prosperity and suffering.

When we have visitors from outside the village come to our home, their faces contort with sympathy and a hint of compassion. Our small quarters mixed with no running water and sleeping on the floor bring many to a state of confusion. Why would a young couple choose to live in such a remote village? Why do these parents intentionally raise their daughters in a village where sexual abuse is rampant? Why didn't they at least choose a village with running water? Their questions come across in such a way that puts us on a pedestal while they observe and applaud. But may this not be! For while missionaries are chosen to cross cultures to share the Good News, all believers are chosen to suffer for Christ's name. And suffering should never be something that is only done by the 'elite,' but by all Christians no matter the culture.

The opportunity for suffering to come your way is undoubtedly true as a believer. Suffering will be part of your life, whether now or later, and the response you have to the suffering is what builds godly character and brings God glory. When we moved to our village, there was a sliver of hope that our house would have a phone line or internet accessibility. Upon arriving, neither was available. Unlike the road system, internet and phone line aren't easy to install, so weeks went by without connection to our family or friends. It might not be suffering to some, but it was to me. And years later, I look back and see that the Lord used suffering to build character and bring Him glory.

If there is only one thing my suffering accomplishes, may it be to show the world that Christ is worthy. We all have opportunities to suffer—but only few suffer well.

Each day I teach myself to have a mind to suffer, whether the day brings goodness or grief, hearty laughs or heartache—I must be ready to face either with contentment in Christ and with a satisfaction in Him so deep that nothing can change this mindset of joy in Him.

For further study: [Acts 5:41](#); [Romans 8:36](#); [Philippians 3:10](#)

Steadfast prayer in far north

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missions

Matthew 26:41

The foundation of abiding in Christ is a continual discipline of prayer. We can do nothing apart from Christ. Before we can do we must be. While I believe a strong prayer life is one of the most important spiritual disciplines in a Christian's life, I know it's the one in which I need the most growth. God calls believers to 'pray continually' (I Thessalonians 5:17), yet I find myself praying sporadically or when a need arises. The spiritual battle in the far north does not allow missionaries to falter in this spiritual discipline—to falter or lazily succumb to monotonous prayer allows the enemy ground he must never receive. The spiritual darkness in most of the bush villages reek with the enemy's presence and influence. Some of the evil is overt and obvious, while other times it's subtle and conniving. He'll influence peoples in the bush to incorporate animism with Scripture topped with their native culture—and religious figures in the church will reiterate that in their sermons, even elevating culture above the Word. At other times, his influence will involve demonic actions involving suicidal thoughts, murderous actions and drunken brawls. Men will speak in the tongue of the devil and the heaviness you feel in a village where Christ is not present weighs on your soul, which prompts your heart to fear, flee or succumb to depression. Prayer is essential in every believer's walk with Christ, but the frontlines of missions does not allow breaks from alert, sober-minded intercession. The first year we moved to our village, a man entered our home and spoke words declaring his power over the village in the name of Satan. The battle raged around us as my husband shared the truth of God's Word while the demon-possessed man spat forth the history of his hold on the village hundreds of years before we were born. The enemy was not going to let go of his village without a fight, and prayer was our weapon of choice against his schemes. The demon-possessed man said he heard our prayers in secret, so when he left we knelt and prayed all the more for the Spirit to break strongholds and make Christ's Name known in this land. Four years later, we are still praying that steadfast prayer all the more. We refuse to despair, for God is powerful and He arms us with the weapon of prayer—may we not fail in using it swiftly and steadfastly.

For further study: [1 John 5:14-15](#); [1 Chronicles 16:11](#); [Jeremiah 29:12](#)

Thankfulness in far north

5 missions

Colossians 3:15-17

The shield that blocks the enemy's arrows of doubt, discouragement, depression and despair is thankfulness. Or when the flesh rears its ugly head through feelings of frustration, comparison and fear, the protection faithfulness provides frees us to live for Christ and Him alone. No sin aimed at our hearts can penetrate when thankfulness stands guard. One area a missionary in the far north, more than likely, experiences is week upon week of darkness and cold. Whether it be damp, cloudy weather in Kodiak to bitter winds on the coast to dry, negative temperatures in the interior—all in the far north will battle the elements of weather. While many experience weather extremes, there are not many places in the world where cold and darkness lie hovering over the land for weeks on end than in the far north. And amidst all this physical darkness, we bring a spiritual light that penetrates any adversary of the Gospel. One way this light is displayed to others is through a thankful attitude and life. If people who already struggle with depression and despair in winter months, see missionaries complain or wallow in self-pity, then the Gospel is tainted and Christ's Name is not lifted up. Rather, it shows the unbelieving heart that Christ is not enough. It shows to the unbelieving heart that circumstances and outlying situations determine our attitude of thankfulness. Yet, when we fight this battle with a thankful heart, we can boldly light the darkness of the bush with a Gospel that offers a reason to be thankful—Christ Himself. For example, when our pipes freeze and the honey bucket comes out, people are watching to see if we will remain thankful or allow the negative circumstances to control our attitudes. Or when the person we spent years pouring our lives into refuses to repent and chooses the world, we remember Christ and remain thankful in Him—regardless of the disappointment it is when people choose poorly. And when the plane is unable to land and you're stuck in the village over the holidays, do you pout and cry or will you be thankful, giving glory to the God who is worth that sacrifice of praise? The message of reconciliation is proclaimed with power when done with a joyful and thankful heart—an easy concept but a hard task to complete...yet one worth fighting for.

For further study: [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#); [Psalm 107:1](#); [Ephesians 5:20](#)

Humility in far north missions

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Colossians 3:12

The art of humility is not something one learns to conquer in a lifetime of following Christ—it's an attribute that is an ongoing pursuit in a missionary's life. We may have victories, but the ultimate victory of humility has only been accomplished by Jesus Himself. Missions in the far north is propelled by missionaries who make themselves nothing by taking the very nature of a servant (cf. Philippians 2:7). With humility, we become obedient to death—not death on a cross—but death of our time, selves and space. We die to ourselves and consider others more important than ourselves. The midnight knock on the door forces missionaries to choose between self and others—between pride and humility. Will we choose to help our neighbors who need a ride uptown or ignore the urgent knocking? How about the inconvenient phone call of the single mother? She just needs two hours to do laundry. Will you babysit the twins while she does her errands or fail to return her phone message and continue on with your day? It's a hard death to die to oneself—but the One who came before us humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! How can we not also along with Him humble ourselves in a similar way? Just as thankfulness serves as an offensive battle plan against flesh and the enemy, humility propels the work we do in Christ's name to transcend the spiritual battle we face on a daily basis. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). We stand against our Lord when we approach missions with arrogance or pride. The Lord will not use a proud person to further His name—but His kingdom will go forth when we clothe ourselves in humility. One way we can fight pride is to fix our eyes on eternity. The person who steals our gasoline from our snow-go expects the missionary to spread gossip or slander the offender—but rather, when the missionary chooses to reach out to the offender in love, then humility is fully displayed and God is honored. For the missionary is not fixed upon this world, but upon a world he/she has yet to experience—and every knee will bow and tongue confess that Christ is Lord. And this truth spurs us to repent of pride and vengeance and comparison. Rather, we can settle ourselves into the pattern of humility as we fix our eyes on what is unseen—namely, Christ Himself. Let us seek humility and fight pride—one situation, one day and one person at a time.

For further study: [Proverbs 11:2](#); [Romans 12:16](#); [James 4:10](#)

Remaining joyful in far north

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missions

James 1:2-3

Sporadic joy is one thing...but to *remain* joyful is another. The key word ‘remain’ determines whether a missionary’s joy is based on circumstances or the Spirit. In far north missions, circumstances don’t always incite happiness and ease. Inconsistent Bible study attendance, uncommitted church attendees, dark days, sub-zero temperatures, inconvenient commodities and slow tangible results in ministry all attempt to push out joy. The fight to remain joyful is a battle that can be harder each year you live in the bush. Our first year in bush ministry was exciting, new and fresh. Conversations about the Gospel were easy to come by and people listened with intention and purpose. But eventually the cares of this world, the Enemy and the flesh snatched away the seeds we planted. The ones who intently listened to the Gospel were now shrugging their shoulders in disbelief. The freshness of ministry slowly turned stale as we shared again and again with the same people. The Gospel hit the walls of their stone hearts and bounced off while we tried and tried and tried again. Discouragement and lack of faith would creep in and tempt us to give up. So we would preach to ourselves, to our spouse and to our kids that the Gospel can come with power and the Holy Spirit—we just need to keep persevering. And it is during those moments that joy began to be dependent on circumstances rather than on Christ. It was harder to remain joyful when those around us continued to reject the Gospel and follow their sinful nature. We, at times, felt alone and still do. One difference bush ministry has compared to ministry in the city is that people here are few and far between. By our second year in the bush, we shared the Gospel with everyone—and by our fifth year we shared the Gospel with everyone times two. In city ministry, you can share and share and share all month long without even sharing with the same person twice. But if the Lord tarries and we stay in our village, people will hear the Gospel countless times—and when change never occurs, it can slam our faith and tamper our joy. So while ministry in the bush is difficult, we can still remain joyful because the One we preach remains the same. So keep preaching and keep sharing the Gospel—the Lord *will* work!

For further study: [John 16:24](#); [Romans 14:17](#); [Proverbs 10:28](#)

Sacrificial service in far 8 north missions

Romans 12:1-2

Serving is dirty work. Loving is dirty work. And being a missionary in the bush is dirty work. It takes sacrifice, time, effort, flexibility and a willingness to suffer in order to fully live out the Gospel in a village. And when we choose to give our love to others, it can get dirty. We can serve and smile, serve and smile, but if we put boundaries on our service, then it's not sacrificial. If we aren't willing to serve a child who has no safe place to sleep that evening, then all the serving the next day can't replace the sacrificial service and privilege it was to serve the child the night before. My family tries to keep Mondays as a Sabbath rest for our family. Yet, many Mondays aren't restful. Rather, they are filled with phone calls: Friends asking for prayer, single mothers needing water hauled, and kids wanting a friend to talk to while their parents are out gambling. And it can get dirty. Our clean, organized and refreshing Mondays can turn into babysitting a special needs three-year-old for the evening because his parents aren't capable of watching him due to drunkenness. Yes, there are Mondays that find our family relishing alone time and quiet. But may we never lose the willingness to sacrificially serve regardless of the day of the week! In small villages, more than likely there isn't a place you can hide out and find quiet. Your every move is now a part of the village's lifestyle—you are family and yet not. You're depended on and appreciated, yet taken for granted and some days forgotten. You're loved and hated, needed and pushed aside. As is in every small community, there is a propensity to feel alone and used. But when a missionary is put into a village where the Gospel is not actively preached or lived out, our expectations to be loved should drastically be dropped to mere zero. Be ready to give and love and serve and sacrifice—because the unsaved won't see Christ's love if we don't do just that. And Lord willing, there may come a day when a small bush village has a number of mature believers who serve one another and serve their community with sacrificial service as unto Christ—and on that day, we'll be ready to move to another unreached community and start the dirty process all over again. Why? Because He's worthy to do just that.

For further study: [Psalm 51:17](#); [Hebrews 13:15-16](#); [Romans 3:25](#)

The church in far north missions

9

Part I: the Word

Matthew 16:18

The church will not be built without the Word being center in your ministry. For the church cannot be stopped. Whether it be cold weather, remoteness, stubborn hearts, sickness or language barriers—all these and more are not able to halt the effectiveness of the church's forward movement and fulfillment of reaching maturity. When we moved to remote Alaska, we were told multiple times that the people are stubborn and hard-hearted toward the Gospel. We heard stories of years upon years of ministry in the bush that resulted in limited spiritual fruit. In human perspective, the statistics show that the church is far from being built in the far north—in actuality, there are over 100 villages without a Gospel witness living there. There is a wide array of villages in need of a believer to come and share the Good News. Getting to a far north village is the easy part—living among the people and building a church is the difficult part. Further, it is impossible. It's a heartbreaking, soul-stretching, faith-fighting, prayer-pressing lifestyle that depends not on us, but on God's Spirit to do the work. While the Spirit does the work to build the church, it takes effort on our part as well—it takes a solid trust in God and a faith that moves mountains. The gates of Hades will not stand in the way of the church being built in the far north. While the church in the far north might look different than in other parts of the world, the backbone is the same no matter where the church resides—the Word being center. The body of Christ must always be centered in the Word—a faith in Christ, a strive toward obedience and a unity among the believers can only be accomplished with the Word. One missionary in South America talks about a conversation he had with a younger man. The young man told the missionary that he wants to give his life for the people. When asked if he knew the Word and had a solid prayer life, the young man responded, "No, but I'm willing to give my life." The wise missionary retorted, "The people here don't need your life. They need the truth of God's Word." The Word is what converts the soul (Psalm 19:7) so the church must be built on the truth of God's Word or it will never maintain maturity in the years to come—for the gates of Hades and the schemes of the devil will never touch a church who's centered on the Word.

For further study: [1 Timothy 4:16](#); [Acts 15:22](#); [Acts 20:28](#); [Ephesians 1:22](#)

The church in far north missions

10 Part II: the Spirit

Matthew 16:18

The church will not be built without the Spirit being center in our ministry. We can do all the good, serve unending, sacrifice everything and preach Christ crucified—but without the Spirit involved, our ministry is dead and worthless. When we walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh, our ministry for Christ will flourish and grow. It might not grow in the areas you think it will...for some will plant seeds while others sow and reap the harvest. The resulted growth from walking in the Spirit might be faith strengthened or perseverance achieved or power over sin accomplished—or it could be countless souls turning to Christ. Either way, the church is built on the Spirit's eternal work done through someone submitted to walking in that Spirit. While living in the bush, we've come across many situations that we failed to walk by the Spirit. And each time we fail, God's kindness reminds us that repentance is seconds away—so we remember to walk by the Spirit the next time and the time after that. But with the Spirit comes doing and being—'doing' in the sense that you walk in the Spirit, and 'being' in the sense that you be with your Savior while the Spirit intercedes for you with wordless groans. The church will prevail! And we have the privilege of being used by the Spirit to accomplish this in the bush. One day the native of the north will bend their knees to King Jesus—we just cry out they do so willingly before they are forced to bend the knee on judgment day. Our time is limited as mortal beings, so we must discipline ourselves to walk by the Spirit, to pray in the Spirit and to trust in the Spirit. But just as nothing is accomplished without the Spirit's working, nothing will be fulfilled without the Word mapping the Spirit's leading in our lives. We test the Spirit's guidance with the Word of God—both go together as we seek to build His church in the bush. We do not have flexibility to separate the two essentials in a church plant—we desperately need both to accomplish an eternal work which will not burn as chaff but come forth as gold. So as we seek to proclaim Christ's name to the villages of the 60/70 window of the far north, may we always remember to walk by the Spirit as we hold the truth of God's Word as a mirror to our intentions, goals, successes and achievements in ministry.

For further study: [1 Timothy 4:16](#); [Acts 15:22](#); [Acts 20:28](#); [Ephesians 1:22](#)

Balancing life in far north

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James 4:13-17

Balance in bush ministry, whether you're single or married, demands wisdom and discernment so that Christ is exalted to the fullest. With wisdom any spiritual fatigue will fail to rob us of joy. Each decision must be made in light of eternity—whether it be an early bedtime or attending a community event in lieu of family dinner around the table. And if each decision is made with an abiding rest in Christ, then burnout will not penetrate your life. Living in a small village of 150 is a blessed privilege and an overwhelming inconvenience. There is nowhere to hide when a knock comes at 2a.m. and there is no way to wake up early without neighbors calling. From midnight phone calls to early morning visits, our lives are not our own in such a small village. While this may happen in larger villages in the far north, smaller ones are much harder to hide out—that is unless boundaries are set. One missionary family will not answer phone calls after 8p.m. while another missionary family answers each phone call no matter the time or day. While there is no wrong or right to a person's convictions on balancing life in ministry, all must be done in faith—for anything not of faith is simply sin. And as we seek the Lord for discernment and wisdom in decisions about what event to attend, who to visit, what call to answer and what call to make, we hold onto faith that He will sustain us in our ministry. He will give us the strength we need at the moment to attend the funeral and potlatch, or to bake those cookies to deliver to elders, or to arrive at the clinic with a friend's bad choices leaving them lifeless. We as missionaries must walk by faith and not by sight—and in doing so, we can trust the One who will not leave us to fend for ourselves when times get tough or free time gets limited. Our family takes Mondays off to refresh ourselves and get family time before we begin the next week. Yet countless times have found us missing those 'off' days. The community and school don't bow to our family schedule, so events are rampant on Mondays and the needs of our neighbors continue whether on a Monday or a Thursday. So we enjoy the Mondays we get to ourselves and we seek the Lord for His strength to sustain us on the Mondays that are not our own. While many times our initial attitudes toward a failed Monday is negative, we put on eternal glasses and see the end—Christ seated at the right hand of God, deserving of praise from the peoples of the far north!

For further study: Psalm 90:17; Psalm 144:4; Psalm 89:47

Speaking truth in far north

12 missions

[Ephesians 4:15](#)

The truth can be hard to hear. But it can also be hard to speak. In missions, regardless of the place or time, truth must be spoken. We can walk purely, obey fully and serve faithfully, but without speaking the truth of God's Word we won't succeed in missions. We won't succeed in our walk with Christ as a believer whether in missions or in life if truth isn't spoken. One struggle my husband and I have in bush missions is finding ourselves so busy in living life in a village that after the day is done, the truth has not been spoken. Our lives that day were lived for Christ, abiding in Him and faithfully walking with Him, yet we failed to speak to anyone about the truth of God's Word. Opportunities arose, but we failed to share the Gospel. The desire we have to see a people in the 60/70 window bow their hearts to our Savior won't be accomplished with lackadaisical living—we must not allow ourselves to forget that the Word spoken is what converts the soul. One of my fears is looking back years from now to realize I was unfaithful with the privilege I have to be here—a fear that I spent all my time and effort into living a holy life and displaying Christ to my friends here, but failing to boldly share the Gospel by which they can be saved. Some days are tiring in the bush—you have water to haul, firewood to cut, meals to make, events to attend, visitors to host and kids to babysit—so sharing truth in the midst of these requires diligence and discipline. My husband and I have made it our goal to hold each other accountable—whether I am running dogs with kids or he is hunting with men, speaking truth is essential in our ministry. When kids visit our home, our goal is to have a devotional so as to share the truth of God's Word with these children who have yet to believe. Living a life worthy of the Gospel requires actions and words. We can't have one without the other or our ministry will suffer. Before we can speak truth, we must pray that what we share is done in love. Without love, it is all in vain. While actions and words go hand-in-hand so, too, does truth and love. One without the other will not accomplish our life's goal in missions, but in the end, will pollute our ministry. Speaking the truth in love is what propels the Name of Christ to be exalted in the bush villages of the 60/70 window. Let's hold each other accountable to this!

[For further study: John 8:31-32; 1 John 3:18; John 14:6](#)

Being content in far north 13 missions

1 Timothy 6:6-8

Being content is difficult whether in a remote village or in the heart of a metropolis. The place or situation in which one finds himself does not justify discontentment—at least for a believer. We are held to a high standard when the Word calls us to be content in the midst of any situation or circumstance. The Bible does not give us a place, a time or a situation where discontentment is allowed or open for discussion. It's a hard calling for us, but a blessed one all the same. The blessing stems from not something, but Someone. If we hold onto Christ, then anything that comes our way will be seen with contented eyes. We can echo with the apostle Paul that we “have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.” When we moved to a hub village our first year in Alaska, I came onto the field without realization that a battle is waging between contentment and complaint. Rather than view the frozen pipes or negative 70 degree temperatures or dark, cold days as a blessing, I saw punishment. My mindset melded the situation with complaint and negativism the first full year of ministry. As someone who had the mind of Christ, I failed to apply it to my daily life. As the Spirit convicted, I found myself fighting for contentment—not because the pipes thawed or the temperatures rose or the sun came out—but because of Someone. Christ in me fought the good fight of being content in any and every situation. And that first year molded me into a woman who eventually moved to an even remoter village where there are colder temperatures, darker days and no running water—and I can now view these circumstances with contentment because God worked in me years beforehand. The first day we moved to our current village, the plane dropped off our belongings and flew away—minutes later, we discovered the airline forgot our food. With it being a weekend, the store was closed so we lived off of Cheerios and popcorn for two days before the store reopened that week. Years before, I would look at this circumstance with frustration and anger, but contentment had its way with me, and our family joined together to thank the Lord for calling us to this village. If we seek to be satisfied in the Someone, then the somethings in bush life will never touch our contentment. Why? Because it's based on Someone not something.

For further study: [Matthew 6:31-33](#); [Philippians 4:11-13](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)

Persevering in far north

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Galatians 6:9-10

Persevering in missions is a rare feat. Many missionaries are tempted to leave the field because perseverance in tough times is foreign to them. The culture and world we live in encourages fleeting happiness—and a change of scenery or venue or occupation is just what the world prescribes to a weary soul. But the Lord calls His followers to ‘come up higher’ in maturity—and this is done in the discipline of perseverance. In Romans 5, the apostle Paul says that suffering produces perseverance. The discipline of persevering is done through the means of suffering. The word ‘persevere’ is seldom used during vacation. One doesn’t persevere or endure comfort—one can only display perseverance while under the yoke of suffering. While under that heaviness perseverance will be practiced, shaped, molded and lived out. The temptation to give up during difficult times is similar for every Christian no matter the context. But when suffering or difficulties come our way, we can change our mindset into viewing the hardship as a tool to gain perseverance. Rather than avoid the ultimate suffering that all humans will experience in this fallen world, we can embrace suffering with the fact that perseverance produces character, and ultimately, hope. When we read about the missionaries of old like Adoniram Judson or Helen Roseveare, the hope they displayed in their lives surpassed what hardship they persevered. They are examples of ones whose hope was evident in their lives—and it didn’t come without suffering, but suffering became the conduit for the hope they held onto. They were men and women of character. How can we seek anything less than character accompanied by hope? To live for less than that is not worthy living. I want my children and those I disciple in the far north to see me as a woman who views suffering as a pull-up bar—the more I pull and embrace the hardship, the deeper my character becomes and the more hope I can display to them that following Jesus is the best and most worthy calling a human being can have. Hope never disappoints (Romans 5:5). In far north missions, as in most of the world, suffering will be evident soon enough—whether it’s through slander or loneliness or isolation or hurt or lack of conveniences or disappointment, or in some places prison and torture, the hope we can carry that only comes through the discipline of perseverance is worth it all.

For further study: [Romans 5:2-5](#); [Romans 12:12](#); [Colossians 1:11-12](#)

The Gospel in far north missions

15 Part I: in word

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Our mission is simple: Share the Gospel. We are all called to proclaim the Word. We can live it out by loving and serving others, but there is only one thing that can convert the soul—and that is the Gospel. It's a privilege for any Christian to be given the job of proclaiming the Gospel. There are some who encourage missionaries to blend into their context and culture, even in the area of changing the Gospel to placate to their audience. But no matter how your life changes on the mission field, there is one unchanging item we must never forsake, and that is the Gospel—for it does not change no matter the context or culture we are called to as missionaries. It has the power to convict, save, change and accuse a person—and we must be faithful to the message of the Word, for there is nothing in ourselves which can do any of those things on the mission field. In the far north, many live in fear and act upon that fear by prohibiting things within their culture or promoting ungodly things in their culture—all with stemming from fear. For example, in our village women are not allowed to say the word 'bear' or even look at one. This rule has been sent down from generation to generation. But as a follower of Jesus Christ, my family has been set free in Him to say bear, shoot a bear and look at a bear—because God is over the bear as its creator. Children in our area are appalled at the freedom our family has and this opens up a door for us to share the freedom the Gospel brings to those who repent and believe in Christ. We also do not have a fishtail hanging over our doorway. The Athabaskan Indians believe this fishtail will keep out bad spirits from entering the house to harm those inside. We teach kids and adults, explaining to them the reasons we will never have a fishtail atop our doorway. The Gospel we share is from the Word which can show an unbeliever their need for a Savior to save them from fear and sin and death. The unchanging, unending, soul-saving message we proclaim can dispel any cultural lie and reveal the truth found in Scripture. We can't just look at a bear or refuse to hang up a fishtail without explaining to those we minister to the reason behind these choices. And the Gospel will always be followed by these explanations because the Gospel is the only reason we do what we do. So our job in far north missions is simple—share the Gospel. It does not change, but it does have the power to change the hardness of a soul.

[For further study: Acts 13:38-39; Romans 4:25; Romans 5:8; Titus 3:4-7](#)

The Gospel in far north missions

16 Part II: in deed

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Speaking the Gospel must never be unaccompanied by the practice of the Gospel in your life. In far north missions, especially in a rural village without the presence of believers, it takes discipline to preach the Gospel to yourself. In the nine years we've been in bush Alaska, my husband has preached the Gospel to me many times. Usually this occurs when I lose focus on Christ and allow the hardship or struggle I'm going through to take precedence over my joy. I, as well, speak the Gospel to him on the days he struggles with discouragement, and together we speak the Gospel to our daughters on days they battle sin. We want our lives to match the preciousness of the Gospel. Wallowing in self-pity or allowing loneliness to take away our joy or complaining about the cold winter only ends up sucking away the effectiveness of the Gospel we proclaim in the far north. The unbelievers we minister to in the far north deal with depression, alcoholism, drug addiction and violence—and we have the blessed privilege to show them through our lives that Christ is worthy to follow and obey. So we can share and share and share the Gospel, but if our lives don't match the beauty of that Gospel, then there will be nothing for unbelievers to see as a testimony to the beauty the Gospel possesses. Some practical ways this might be displayed is by loving the community. While others complain or gossip or malign certain families, we seek to love and forgive and overlook offenses to display Christ to the village. We give of our time—on mornings when more sleep is practical, we answer the phone when it rings. We run an errand for the single mother or haul water for the man without a four-wheeler. Or we allow kids to visit while their parents drink, or visit elders who are shut in and alone. There are countless ways in the far north to extend a Christlike love to those to whom we minister—the message of the Gospel accompanied by action is what can turn the hearts of mankind to Jesus. Take one and leave the other or ignore one and focus on the other will result in a false, deceiving and watered-down Gospel. One day I unplugged the phone. It was not wrong to unplug the phone and there are times we will do that—but my heart during that time was to avoid loving. I was tired and cranky, and love was not what I wanted to give. But I preached the Gospel to myself and my attitude changed. My actions came out of that message; I plugged the phone back in; and I shared the Gospel that day in word and in deed.

For further study: [Acts 13:38-39](#); [Romans 4:25](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [Titus 3:4-7](#)

Marriage in far north

17 missions

1 Corinthians 7: 1-16

You can't get away with a poor marriage in the far north missions. Many places in the world, a husband and wife work apart during the day and come together in the evening. This is normal, healthy and good. Yet there are those in missions whose day is found constantly by each other's side—the far north missions is like that. If the Lord calls you to a bush village in the north, more than likely you will not be living in a dream home, but rather live in whatever is available. For our family, it's a small 500 square foot home which does not have running water. And for most missionaries in the bush, a small simple home is what they live in. You add this to the ministry work of the husband and wife, and the day is spent mostly together. While the wife might stay home with the kids, ministry is many times held in the home through hospitality, hosting teams, Bible programs and Bible studies. Ministering together outside the home is not uncommon; such as attending events, daily activities like hauling water, and visiting homes in the community. All this is done alongside your spouse. Far north missions cannot be done successfully without a good, strong marriage. When we moved to the bush, one missionary appointee couple said their prayer request was for them to not fight all the time, as they were used to working separately during the day, and being together 24/7 was a stretch for them. Working alongside my husband has been the biggest blessing of the ministry in the bush. Yet even a strong marriage will have times when our sinful natures will take over and sin will spew forth—that's another reason repentance and forgiveness must be practiced and practiced in marriage. Some couples in another venue might 'get away' with an argument not being resolved. They push the hurt or anger away, and continue dealing with the spouse during the short time they see each other after work. But in bush missions, there is nowhere to hide, go or run away—you are there living in a cramped space with, more than likely, no other strong believers—and your marriage needs to be strong, secure and pure for the sake of God's glory and the longevity of your ministry. When I look around at the couples who have lived for twenty years or more in a bush village, the one thing they all have in common is a strong marriage. They are best friends and are quick to forgive, forget and move on. May those of us who are married have deep, lasting and pure marriages—not just for the sake of our ministry, but for the sake of Christ and the church's reputation.

For further study: [Ephesians 5:22-33](#); [Matthew 19:4-6](#); [Colossians 3:18-19](#)

Abiding in Christ in far 18 north missions

John 15:4-9

There are times during the winter months in the far north when the sun does not appear for weeks. One winter we never saw the sun for over two months. It is during those days when the battle to fight for joy becomes the most difficult. Each day feels the same as the day before, and hope begins to dwindle. These circumstances can then tend to take over Biblical reasoning and understanding—many will say the circumstances allow for depression and sadness. But the Word calls us to come up higher—to be joyful in the midst of suffering. While the lack of sun does not compare to the suffering our persecuted brothers and sisters experience elsewhere, the hardship of winter will never allow a believer to wallow in sorrow or self-pity. So it's on these days when abiding in Christ gives more of a workout for my soul. I can abide in Christ easily on the good, bright days. But give me a dark, cold and dreary day and you'll find me sluggish and reserved—no excuse in Scripture is given for this attitude. And if I'm not diligent to abide in Christ, then I slip into self-pity and it's much harder to abide after that point. It takes work and practice to catch myself early on, before feelings take over reason. Abiding in Christ is not something done haphazardly, but rather intentionally. In the same way that we are called to pray continually, we are to abide continually. More than likely, praying and abiding are found hand in hand. Whether it's abiding through the act of obedience or abiding through the act of being still and knowing He is God, both take practice and diligence. When the sun fails to appear on a day when the temperatures reach twenty below, I train myself to abide in Jesus—to say no to the sin of self-pity and choose to be thankful in the midst of an seemingly unthankful day. We can't represent Christ well to unbelievers if our depression mimics theirs. They need to see that we have a hope that surpasses any miniscule amount of suffering that comes our way. When they watch us walk joyfully throughout the day while they push through the day with a miserable attitude, they can see that this Savior we follow is satisfying and good. The quicker I abide, the easier the day becomes. If I push aside the discipline of abiding, then it takes much more work for me to abide the next time and the next time. Yet, as I grow stronger in this discipline, I'm the happier for it. As suicide rates in the far north increase each year, may the Lord call missionaries to reach these areas with the good news displayed in a life that is fully abiding in Jesus Christ.

For further study: [John 8:31](#); [2 John 1:9](#); [Colossians 2:6](#); [1 John 2:28](#)

The Spirit's work in far 19 north missions

Matthew 28:19-20

The Spirit's work doesn't just apply to missions—it applies to life no matter the setting, culture or situation. We can do nothing that lasts apart from the Spirit of God. We might appear to be doing lasting work, but in the end when God's threshing comes, the remaining chaff will prove whether the work was done in the Spirit or in the flesh. Each morning in the far north, I wake up and beg for God's help to honor Him that day. I don't want to enter Heaven and stand before the throne of God with worthless chaff representing my life as a believer or as a missionary. I desire to come forth as gold...and this happens as I seek to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. As missionaries, we are called to cross a culture and declare the mystery of the gospel—this mystery is literally mysterious and foreign without the Spirit's mighty hand in opening the eyes of the blind to see salvation in Christ. Many days in the bush are redundant and monotonous. You will see the same people day in and day out. You will share the Gospel with the same people from one year to the next. And it can be quite discouraging if we lose our focus on the One who is worthy—Christ Jesus. So we must seek the Spirit to not only work in the hearts of unbelievers, but ask Him to work in our hearts to fight the sin of discouragement and doubt—and trust He is capable of giving us the grace we need for that day to “walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.” There is a teen girl in our village who follows Christ. Bible camp staff planted seeds long before we got there, and as we disciple her to walk worthy of King Jesus, we are witnesses of the glorious Spirit within her. We are required as we disciple her to point out sin in her life of which she needs to repent, but there are also times when we seek the Lord asking the Spirit within her to do the work of conviction. During the times we've seen God's Spirit reveal immaturity or sin in her life, we rejoice to watch her change her ways to line up with Scripture—as a believer, she is not allowed to continue sinning. The Spirit within her won't allow His child to continue walking in sin. So we watch with joy as God disciplines His child and we watch with joy when His child chooses to repent and change her actions. We as missionaries in the bush are required and sanctioned to call sin, sin. And we as missionaries in the bush are blessed and privileged to watch the Spirit do a work we cannot do in another child of God without His intervention. Seek the Spirit while He may be found!

For further study: [Acts 1:8](#); [Nahum 1:15](#); [Romans 10:13-15](#)

Discipleship in far north 20 missions

Luke 14:27

Biblical missions cannot exist without active discipleship. A missionary cannot enter another culture, share the Gospel, have converts, then leave assuming missions is done and checked off in that area. Missions will never be done until discipleship takes place. There are some called to be evangelists, some teachers and some prophets—but we are all commanded to take up our cross and deny ourselves, teaching others to do the same. A new believer is not able to understand the amazing privilege it is to take up their cross and follow Christ without being taught the importance of the Savior. In far north missions, ministry is long and hard and slow. It takes time and perseverance to live in the bush and commit to making disciples. This is true for all mission settings. Missionaries must be committed to staying long-term to make disciples who make disciples. People in the bush of the north desperately need believers who will come and stay—to live among them and show them, teach them, what following Christ means. Discipleship is such a small word and falls short of the depth of sacrifice it takes to accomplish. In discipleship, time and money and privacy and sabbaths are all subjected to this end—making disciples. That means you will not have time for yourself on most days. Your money will now be used to further the Gospel—buying Bibles for the children who want to know more about Jesus, using your own money to fly kids to a Bible conference, and buying snacks for kids who visit—all for the sake of discipleship. Your privacy will be sucked away in a small bush village setting. There is nowhere to get away or find a break from the needs of the lost and hurting. And your sabbath days of rest will sometimes be usurped by the sudden death of an elder or the hurting individual affected by their parent's drunkenness that day. Discipleship calls for a high price in missions—namely, yourself. It's not about you anymore, but about the sole purpose of making disciples who in turn make disciples. It's a high, glorious calling no matter where you live—and it's a worthy work to give ourselves to it wholeheartedly. We will fail and choose self over discipling on some days, but the more we seek the Lord and His Spirit's work in our lives, the more we will desire to put our disciples before ourselves. Christ is worthy of this calling—for He did nothing less than that while on earth. Let us follow His example to the end.

For further study: [Matthew 28:18-20](#); [2 Timothy 2:2](#); [Luke 9:23](#)

Humble obedience in far 21 north missions

1 Peter 5:5

Obedience starts with humility and ends with humility. We don't want to call people to obey without a humble, pliable and selfless heart. There are times I obey the Lord with grinding teeth and forced submission. I want to obey, but my flesh pushes aside humility and obedience is done with a bad attitude. When obedience to our Lord is done humbly and willingly, then it is truly obedience that gives glory to God. Does this mean we shouldn't obey the Lord if our hearts are fully humbled before Him? My daughters will refuse to obey, and we follow through on making them obey—they might not be at a place to obey humbly, but we require obedience nonetheless. Yet throughout the battle of wills, we seek the Lord to work humility in their hearts. And God is faithful. He eventually does work in their hearts a humbleness that admits their wrong and seeks reconciliation. So obedience is always better. But as we seek to honor the Lord as believers in the far north or anywhere, we must press on hard to obey with humility. God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. Let us take full confidence that humility is worth the sacrifice of human pride—and as we call others in the bush to this amazing relationship with Christ, may we exercise humble obedience with a joyous attitude, showing the lost that obeying is not a burden but rather a privilege. Many in our village are addicted to marijuana—actually, rather than count those who smoke weed, it's easier to count the number of those who don't smoke it. Our family comes alongside the children and elders who don't smoke pot, leaving the vast majority of our village as smokers. When some ask us why we don't smoke weed, we share with them that we do not want to be addicted to anything or anyone else but Christ Himself. They watch us obey the Lord and follow His Spirit and wonder why we obey God rather than follow the peer pressure of the village's majority. It brings God glory when we share the blessed privilege we have to follow a worthy Savior—we don't obey because we are forced to, but because we willingly want to obey, out of a deep love and worship of the One we have come to share with them about—Jesus Christ. Humility is not something that can be sought out on our own. We must allow the Spirit to do His work in our hearts so that obedience always stems from humility—and we must seek the Spirit to allow humility to carry itself through the obedience to every area of our lives.

For further study: [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Mark 10:45](#); [Philippians 2:5-8](#)

Selfless love in far north

22 missions

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

When my husband and I got engaged we discussed what we looked forward to in marriage. My response was, “I always wanted someone to love me,” while his response was, “I always wanted someone to love.” The difference in these two perspectives revealed to me the selfish love I desired in a marriage covenant, while my husband came into marriage with selfless love desiring to serve his wife and put her above himself. Thankfully, the Lord has worked in my heart a deeper, rich selfless love for my husband—but that doesn’t come without a fight—a fight against my flesh and the sin that so easily can entangle me. This scenario is the same whether we are living in a metropolis or a bush village of one hundred—selfless love is a requirement of every believer of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth to give himself. He did not come to watch others sacrifice for him, but rather came to willingly give up his own desires, comforts and pursuits to love those who did not deserve such sacrifice. When we choose to love those in our context with a love that is not based on selflessness, then self will seek to creep into that love—thus resulting in a non-Biblical love...really, not love at all. Our world and flesh cry out to us that love should be about ourselves and what we get out of the relationship, while the Word cries out to us to put others before ourselves. This is basically what discipleship is based on—selfless love. We seek our disciple’s good and not our own. It takes sacrifice and consistent discipline to make sure all we do for others isn’t done from a selfish love that results in our good, but a selfless love that results in another’s good. Ultimately, it’s doing what Jesus did for us on the cross. He put our good above His own—it did not come without beads of bloody sweat or tears of anguish, but in the end, He chose the glory of His Father and the good of His children. And now salvation comes to us freely—how can we not do to others what He’s done for us? Our selfless love toward others fails in comparison to the massive selfless love He showed us on the cross—to even compare the two feels blasphemous! But we are called to a high standard and that standard is loving others with a selfless love—meaning our love is not based on their actions toward us, or our attitude toward them, but solely on the person of Christ Jesus Himself. It’s a huge battle we fight daily as we seek the good of others and the glory of God—and it all starts with a choice to put aside self and love.

For further study: [Mark 12:31](#); [Luke 6:27-28](#); [Philippians 2:5-8](#); [Galatians 5:13](#)

Parenting in far north

23 missions

2 Timothy 3:15

Being a parent is a blessed calling. To watch your children choose Jesus and follow hard after God is any believing parent's desire. But what about those who aren't parents? What about the singles who are called by God to remain single for the furthering of the kingdom? They, too, are parents. While their children don't have a physical parentage, the people they disciple have a spiritual parentage that is just as important and pertinent as those of us who have children with genes. The spiritual always outweighs the physical in eternity—what is done in the spirit surpasses anything done in the physical. I have two beautiful daughters who follow Christ. I've had the privilege to disciple them on a daily basis and watching them grow to obey their Savior is a joy that is even hard to express. And there are children in our village who I disciple and do not carry my last name. They are children I have given up my time and money to show them love and show them Christ. So while I'm a parent to my daughters, I am a spiritual parent to ten more children, boys and girls, who I disciple throughout the week. As a believer, we are all parents—we are called to disciple those around us with the same fervor as parents who disciple their children. Some days I look around at the singles on the mission field who feel discontent and unsatisfied in their current situation of being single...when all I see is an amazing opportunity and privilege to parent those around them with the access to time and resources a mother of five kids cannot grant outside the home. When we witness the body of believers in different realms of life discipling, it brings us pleasure to watch others do what we cannot do in our own situation. Singles and couples without physical offspring should look around them and feel blessed—they are able to do what married couples with kids cannot do. They are capable of putting their resources, time and effort into spiritual children that, in numbers, surpasses what a married couple with kids can reach. And not one of those situations is better than the other—for we all work together to disciple those before us. But we who are married with kids are not off the hook for reaching those outside our family in discipleship. We cannot just focus on our own kids and fail to be examples to them that discipleship is what we are called to do for those who do not have believing parents—they should never be neglected because our own family takes precedence. Let us all be thankful we can disciple and parent our offspring, and whether physical or spiritual, may we rejoice in the privilege to disciple others for His name and renown.

For further study: [Philippians 4:6](#); [Proverbs 22:6](#); [Deuteronomy 6:6-7](#)

About the Author



Madelyn Fox is the wife of a handsome church planter and the mother of a double blessing. She and her husband, Brad, live in a remote village in the far north above the Arctic Circle. They and their two daughters, Ruth and Naomi, have the privilege of sharing the Gospel with 150 Athabaskan natives and 20 Inupiaq. With nearly 20 dogs in her kennel, Madelyn is able to use the sport of mushing to reach children and adults in discipleship opportunities. Isolation, extreme cold, no running water and spiritual loneliness are just a few of the hardships they face on a daily basis. These are all surpassed by the joy they have to share from God's Word that Christ is worth following.

Their focus is on church planting and discipleship. They long to see the Athabaskan and Inupiaq peoples lift up Christ's name and follow hard after Him. Their days consist of feeding village kids, teaching Bible studies, giving rides, hauling water, mushing dogs, visiting homes, cutting wood and savoring Christ as a family—all with the goal of sharing the Gospel and making disciples. Madelyn and her family are with SEND North and they join many other missionaries in sharing that Christ is worthy in the far north.