

Call to Worship

Isaiah 46:9, 11b,13 Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me..... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do..... I am bringing my righteousness near, and my salvation will not be delayed.

Prayer

Lord, I lift up your name, I extol you, I praise you. Fill me now with your Holy Spirit as I spend this time in worship. Give me a sense of the reality of your presence. Cleanse me from my sin so that I may be rescued, restored, and filled with your grace and righteousness. All this through the name of Jesus. Amen

Song: Goodness of God (by Ingram, Johnson, Cash, Fielding, Johnson)

1. I love You Lord, for Your mercy never fails me

All my days , I've been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up until I lay my head,
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.

*And all my life You have been faithful, and all my life You have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able, Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.*

2. I love Your voice, You have led me through the fire,

In the darkest night You are close like no other.
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend,
and I have lived in the goodness of God.

3. 'Cause your goodness is running after, it's running after me,

Your goodness is running after, it's running after me,
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You everything
'Cause Your goodness is running after, it's running after me. (Repeat)

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Prayer of Intercession

Heavenly Father, as a child of yours I pray for those who by age are still children.
I pray for those who are in the headlines ...

- Those children in Gaza who are in need of food. Please stay the hands and voices of those who would weaponize these children for their political ends, and those who would sow hatred into their minds.
- The children affected by the Ukraine/Russia war and living in fear of the sound incoming bombs and rockets.

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I pray too for those children who are not in the headlines ...

- The children in north-east Africa where the ruthlessness of men have driven them from with their families from their villages and their land and into poverty and cross-border refugee camps.
- The children of North Korea, indoctrinated and forced to betray their Christian parents.
- The children in the brick kilns of Pakistan, those sold into slavery, and those trapped in the sex-slave trade.
- Our own children who by social media and the misuse of technology are enslaved to pornography, are exposed to the devaluing of marriage, families, and the sanctity of life, and who are led astray by the ideologies of sexuality and gender,

Father, these are the children for whom Jesus said that those who lead them astray have condemned themselves to a millstone around their neck.

Help me to stand courageously for them, to model righteousness, to show the face of Jesus. It is in his name that I pray. Amen

Song: “10,000 Reasons” (by Redman, Angrisano)

Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul. Worship his Holy name.

Sing like never before, oh my soul, I'll worship your holy name.

1. The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning, it's time to sing Your song again,
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me
Let me be singing when the evening comes.
2. You're rich in love and You're slow to anger, Your name is great
And Your heart is kind. For all your goodness I will keep on singing,
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.
3. And on that day when my strength is failing, the end draws near and my time has come
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending
Ten thousand years and then forevermore, forevermore...

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Bible Reading:

- **Matthew 18:1-7** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. And he said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever welcomes such a child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

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- Matthew 19:13-15 Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.
- Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Message: “The Heart of a Child”

In a departure from my usual, I am going to share some of the impact of the gospel on children in Thailand. For over 20 years now my wife and I have been going to Thailand, including living there for 2 years, in support of Mercy International which exists to give underprivileged and disadvantaged children, including orphans, a Life, a Hope, and a Future. The organisation was founded by a Queensland pastor 40 years ago and hundreds of children have been impacted over those years in 3 orphanages, or Children’s Villages, called Ban Meata (House of Mercy).

We, and our team have just returned from Thailand, and we served by painting, teaching English in the attached schools, carrying over \$12,000 donated by our home churches, over 40kgs of underwear, babywear, medicines and milk formula. But one of the most rewarding things was interacting with the children, building relationships and seeing the difference Jesus has made in their lives. And that is what I want to share – the stories of a few of the kids and young people, although there are dozens that could be told.



I’ll start with Aileen. When we were at the Phetchabun orphanage, 2 days before we were due to travel to the next one in Phrae, we heard that they had a new baby who was to come to Phetchabun. Aileen’s mother was pregnant at 16 or 17 and her mother refused to have the baby come home with her, and although distraught, she had to leave the baby at the hospital. Aileen was born in the morning and by the afternoon was a Ban Meata Phrae. We arrived 2 days later, and Aileen went back to her new home when our mini vans returned. That baby girl, abandoned to a life of rejection and poverty, now has a Life, Hope and a Future. (Postscript: Since writing that, Aileen was in hospital last

week with RSV, but has now returned home).

Jeremiah 29:11 (above) has proven to be so true for our babies, children and young people – and carers! God has plans for us, plans that will benefit us and not harm us. I was able to preach and teach at each the 3 orphanages where the song above, “The Goodness of God”, is a very popular worship song. I spoke about how God has plans for each of us, that he loves us and is so good to us – “all my days I’ve been held in your hands”, “all my life you have been faithful and all my life you have been so, so good”. It’s been so true for our Thai kids, and so true for each of us. I asked the kids at Phrae to pray

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for each other and remind each other of that, and it was so good to see them respond to that with some of the boys putting their arms around each other as they prayed (see picture).

Whun has been our sponsored child from the age of 7. She is now 29, married and with 2 children (Captain and Anda, our “grandchildren”!). She came to the orphanage at the age of 2 with her sister Why after their mother died of AIDS. She has grown into a

wonderful Mum with a mature faith in God, despite the setback of becoming pregnant when she was 19, thus delaying her goal of becoming a teacher by about 8 years! She is now married to the father, is finally studying online to be a pre-school teacher, and testifies that God’s plan for her life is perfect even though she messed up. She is involved, with some of her contemporaries at Ban Meata, in a Bible Study group which has a wonderful outreach and prayer ministry in the surrounding villages. More of Whun next.

Cheewar (on the right with Whun and Why, a few years ago), also came to the Ban Meata

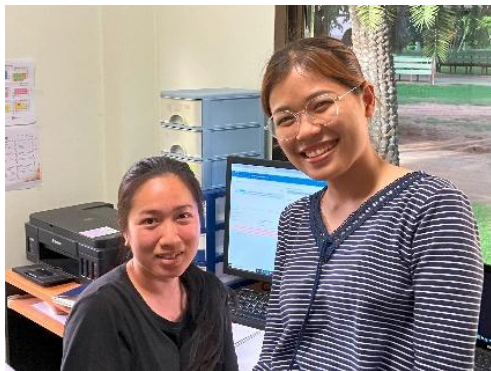


orphanage when she was quite young. She left Ban Meata after graduating from university and pursuing a job. A few months ago, on a bus trip back from Bangkok, she suffered a stroke. She was just 30. She was unable to do anything for herself and remained in hospital. We are so proud of Whun who visited regularly, praying for her, encouraging her, and rallying her friends to help supply packages of nappies which the hospital needed for her. A few weeks ago, when Whun visited her, she said she wanted to die and couldn’t understand why God would allow this to happen to her. Whun answered her that whatever circumstances she faced, God loved her, and she played the above song (10,000 Reasons) referring to verse 3. Last Saturday (as I write) Cheewar died of a brain bleed,

apparently quite peacefully, and with a full smile on her face even though for months she was only able to smile on one side of her face. We were quite close to Cheewar, and my wife tried to visit her a week before she died but went in the morning when the visiting hours were in the afternoon! She was able to speak to her on the phone and prayed with her. We believe her faith was restored – she had eternal Life, a realised hope and a future in the presence of Jesus. Praise God.

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Somo, from a very young age, came to Khon Kaen Ban Meata where we cared for babies



who were HIV+. At the time, children with HIV were commonly abandoned, born of mothers who died from AIDS, and not expected to reach their teenage years. With the love and care they received, and with the government provided anti-viral medications, in 25 years we only lost 3 children who are remembered with photos on the wall of the babies' house. Somo, (on the right) with such a strong faith in God is as healthy as she looks (she will need to take her medications for the rest of her life), has studied for

her qualifications in accountancy and is now managing the finances for Khon Kaen Ban Meata. God is blessing her mightily. This year I followed up on some of the boys who grew up with Somo and have left to find work. 4 of them have died because they gave up on their medications, probably because there is still some stigma attached to HIV, and they were embarrassed to admit they have it. Praise God for Somo, living under the grace of God and with a promised life, hope, and future.

My last one is a little girl called Donut. She was being cared for by her father, but they lived in fairly extreme poverty, he had a poorly paid job in a piggery, finding it very difficult



to look after her, and he was taking her to the piggery each day. She came to Phetchabun Ban Meata's attention, and we offered to take her. After talking to her, Glom (PBN's manager) said she could come with her straight away or she could go home to get her things. She said she would come straight away because she didn't have anything else. She was dressed in a T shirt and a pair of shorts that had no seat in them. "But that's OK", she said, "my undies are good." Then she added the strangest thing – "I think the heavens have opened for me," she said. We are not sure where those words came from because as far as we know she has no Christian background. Prophetic? It looks like it because she has a new future and we pray that as she comes under the ministry of the gospel that the Holy Spirit will

speak into her life and she will indeed have a Life and a Hope and a Future with an eternal emphasis.

You will have guessed that I came back from this visit encouraged, blessed, giving thanks and praising God for his endless grace, and understanding again that he indeed has plans for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, and to give us life and a hope. And what a joy it was to sing with those kids, "all my life you have been faithful, all my life you have been so, so good". And each of us can say, "with every breath that I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God."

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Song: “God is Over All” (*City Alight*)

1. God, You hold the world in hand, mountains move at Your command,
Yet my needs You will provide as a father loves his child.
2. God is over all, God is over all.
I can sing for it is well, my God is over all.
3. God You saw the sin in me for You reign in majesty.
Jesus died to make me clean, Jesus rose to set me free.
4. God above all time and space, You are never far away,
For in Jesus I can see how you are a friend to me.

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Benediction

Most of us reading or listening to this will not be in the bloom of youth but take heart and be lifted by the words of Isaiah that are meant for all of us, regardless of age.

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary, they will walk and not faint.

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA