

Call to Worship

Psalm 71:19 Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you God?

Psalm 126:19 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

Prayer

Lord, if I despair, if I feel tired, powerless and weak, if I feel young and under-rated or old and past my use-by date, bring to my mind the great things you have done in me and through me, renew my strength, renew my spirit within me, give me wings like eagles to fulfil what you have prepared me to do. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Song: “Strong Tower” (by Peter Furler, Steve Taylor)

1. Strong and mighty, strong to save us, like a fortress never failing
Strong in battle, strong in kindness, when we stray Lord, You're strong to find us
When the winds come hard against us, You are steadfast, You are true
When the ground beneath us trembles, Your foundation never moves.
*Strong tower, high and glorious, strong tower, mighty in love.
Our refuge, our defender, strong tower, Lord above.*
2. Strong to lead us through the shadows, strong to carry all our sorrows.
When the enemy surrounds us, closing in as darkness falls.
Though his armies rage against us they can never scale these walls.
3. You are my shelter, my shield. You are the home I could never deserve.
Here I will serve, ever under Your gaze, here I will serve ever singing Your praise.

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Prayer of Intercession

Lord, help me not to forget the disadvantaged – the widows and the orphans.
I pray for those widows in other countries with their struggle for an income, for those orphans whose parents have died or who are absent.

And I pray for those widows and orphans in our country who live with loneliness, sometimes poverty, sometimes homelessness.

Help me not to forget them, help me to advocate for those in need.

And help me not to forget the persecuted – those who for their Christian faith are homeless or in a refugee camp, under- or unemployed, mocked and ridiculed, physically abused, imprisoned or worshipping in hiding.

I pray a blessing on organisations such as Barnabas Aid and Open Doors who feed and house them, fund small businesses for them, teach them the truths of their faith, advocate for them. And teach me to continue to pray with and for them and be generous in my support of them.

All in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Bible Reading:

- Ephesians 3:14-21 For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever! Amen

Song: MHB 795 “O Church of God, Arise” (by Annie Matheson)

1. O Church of God, arise, and take thy lamp of love,
The light that never dies on earth, in heaven above.
2. With wisdom and with truth keep quick and straight the flame,
The light of love and youth, to save a world of shame.
3. Rebuke the devil's mark, the souls in prison release,
Bid up the broken heart, give joy and mirth and peace.
4. Whatever things are fair, whatever things are just,
Go, make them free as air and plenteous as the dust.
5. In every darkest place let radiant warmth be shed,
Till in each dreary face the joy of God is read.
6. Till every man on earth, the greatest and the least,
Love called him from his birth to be a king and priest.

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Message: “More than can be Imagined”

Our team, comprising members from my home church and from a hills church in the Trinity network have just returned from our annual mission trip to Thailand, visiting the three orphanages or Children's Villages of Mercy International with whom my wife and I have over 20 years of experience and connection. After that period of time there is a temptation to think we've seen it all and done it all, but God continues to surprise us with his grace, his enabling power and his perfect timing, inspiring the above Bible Reading and particularly verses 20 and 21.

Our churches supported us in a couple of significant ways. Firstly, financially. People gave us towels, underwear, cake mixes, toys, books and other items needed for the kids and by the orphanage and to be carried over in our luggage. My wife carried the cake mixes (to celebrate kids' birthdays), and to save space, took the plastic bags out of their boxes. When she finished packing and looked at her case, she saw multiple plastic bags containing white powder! We were thankful that it didn't raise any eyebrows at the airports! The

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financial support extended by responding to a GoFundMe account meant we took over \$13,000 in cash. God's love was expressed through generous hearts.

Secondly, both churches had organised prayer support. It was so good to know that prayer was backing us each day, particularly when challenging circumstances faced us.



We spent a good deal of our time painting rooms in the Children's Villages, doing maintenance tasks, teaching English to about 600 kids at the school, many hours of playing games with the kids, and building relationships with our sponsored children. But there were some stand out events and situations where we were amazed at what God was doing and rejoiced that he was caring for these precious kids and for us. In our daily team meetings, we highlighted examples of God's grace and praised him for them. I will outline only a few events and circumstances that demonstrated that God is able to do far more than we can imagine or think of.



At two of the three sites we ran an evening Bible study with the men teaching the boys about "Becoming a Godly Man", and the women teaching the girls about "Becoming a Godly Woman". A few of the boys at Khon Kaen showed their strong biblical knowledge and deep understanding of Christian living. With both groups we played the chocolate game which many of you will have played in your younger years. On throwing a dice and getting a six, you can cut pieces from a block of chocolate and eat as much as you can before someone else throws a 6.

It was meant to show that most of us try to acquire as much as we can for ourselves, instead of showing kindness to others, but, particularly the girls, after eating a piece and no one throwing a six, would cut off pieces of chocolate and give them to those who didn't have any! Perhaps it was because of living in community with their "brothers and sisters" and being taught about sharing, but they demonstrated the fruits of the Holy Spirit, of love and kindness, and we were blessed greatly by their generous hearts. God did something we hadn't imagined.

When we reached the third Children's Village at Phrae, we discovered that a few weeks prior, two 17-year-old kids, Fern and Phil, had a serious motorcycle accident on their way home from school. A car wandered over the road and hit them. Phil was seriously injured with a compound fracture of his femur. Fern was worse though. She flew over the top of Phil, her helmet fell off and she hit a wall. She fractured her leg in two places, and lost most of her front teeth, but worse, she suffered a serious brain injury. Those who came to help thought she was dead, but they took her to hospital in an ambulance where she was in a coma for two weeks. She suffered a severe blood loss, so they went to her school and

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asked her classmates to provide blood - 9 of them gave enough blood to keep her alive. Two days after coming out of her coma, they sent her home. Such are the ways of the rural Thai medical system. We praise God that one of her carers had training as a nurse and helped her with eating and toileting. When we came to the Children's Village, her brain injury was obvious, her speaking was slow and so were her movements.



Here was God's miracle though. At just the right time we came to the Children's Village with a physiotherapist on our team. Rich (our son-in-law), with great difficulty, contacted the hospital and doctors trying to find medical reports. With limited information he developed a rehabilitation programme for her, trained some of the staff, and will follow up with zoom meetings over the coming months. Before we left, Fern had a smile back on her face, was speaking more and doing her exercises to build up her strength. Phil was also given exercises to do, but he was more concerned about Fern. When he was lying injured on the road, he kept asking, "Is Fern OK? Is Fern OK?" Even though the accident wasn't his fault he felt responsible, and he still cares for her and shows kindness to her. In the evenings he sits next to her brushing off mosquitos and other insects that might be bothering her. He is a Christian lad, and it was so good to see God's love evident in his life. Fern's "brothers and sisters" at the orphanage have also shown great love and care, wheeling her around everywhere in her wheelchair.



God does amazing things that we can't even imagine or think of, and we didn't think that God would provide exactly what Fern and Phil needed at that time. We didn't even know about the accident, but God did! What a wonderful God we have - all honour to Jesus.

The ladies in our team gave us further cause for rejoicing when they made two visits to the Phrae Provincial Prison to speak to the women in their section of the prison. Their plan was to teach English, share the gospel, and deliver gifts of special underwear, toiletries and some sweets.

They were quite nervous having done nothing like this before. They had prepared an English lesson with supporting visuals on a USB, and they thought they had 20 minutes to set up. They got in there and found over thirty women ready to go, and found there was no equipment for the USB! Panic mode! – but they had many people back here praying for them and God produced a miracle. From what they thought would be a disaster, it turned out wonderfully. There are three experienced teachers in the team and they stepped up. The women absolutely loved it, joined in enthusiastically, mingled with them afterwards and wrote thank you notes the next day. As part of the English lesson,



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they talked about love - loving ice cream, loving movies, loving family - and then spoke about the even greater love which God has for us and the love that led to Jesus dying on the cross for them. The women were again responsive, and our ladies came home rejoicing in what God had done. And there is more. The governor of the prison was so impressed that he asked if we can do something for the men next year. As there are 1200 men in there, we won't be able to do them all. But God is able to do more than we can imagine or even think of.



And a bit of fun from our stay in Phrae. Quinn, our youngest team member at 11, went back to her room and found what she thought was a yabby. She carefully guided the yabby onto a piece of paper and set it free outside. When she came back and told us about it, the cry went up, "That's not a yabby, that's a scorpion!". Well, it does look a bit like a yabby. doesn't it? And you can buy deep fried scorpions in the market to eat!



I can't finish without mentioning Kitty who has a couple of buses and organised our days of rest and recreation in Chiang Mai for 2 or 3 days. For a few years now Rich (son-in-law) and I, and other people we know, have been talking to him, a strong Buddhist believer, debating the merits of Buddhism and Christianity, and encouraging him to become a follower of Jesus. Last year he informed us he had become a Christian, and we were able to share about his growth in faith this year. God is always at work in people's lives and seeds sown over the years have borne fruit. God is able to do more than we can imagine or think of. And he loved the Crows jumper we gave him!

Three weeks of seeing God's grace and power in action. Praise him!

Song: "The Goodness of God" (Jenn Johnson)

1. I love You Lord, oh your mercy never failed 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,
and in 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

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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.
*And all my life you have been faithful, all my life you have been so, so good.
With every breath that I am able, oh I'm gonna sing of the goodness of God.*

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Benediction

Psalm 71:17-18 Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds. Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.

Go with each of us into this week Lord, to fulfil your purposes in us. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA