



Let not Satan make us busy

— Hannah McCulloh; ISM Coordinator

As I continue to study and learn from the life of Jesus, I am constantly amazed at His commitment to do only what God gave Him to do. He's not sidetracked by good things. He doesn't self-assign His own mission. He doesn't even spend time trying to appeal to big crowds. A lot of His harsh words actually seem to scare people off, and His confusing parables are rarely explained to the masses.

Instead, Jesus concentrated on only what God asked Him to do and on only a few people. When the Jews try to make Him into an earthly king after the 5,000 are fed, He retreats. When Satan taunts Him to demonstrate His power in the wilderness, He rejects the opportunity to flex His muscles. Gripped with agony in Gethsemane, He submits once more and prays, "Yet not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He could have done many things on earth, yet He stayed committed to God's Will and nothing more.

We cannot lose sight of His example, then, if we want to be fruitful in our lives and ministries. And I'd like to suggest understanding God's Will for His church is not as complicated as we think. Take a look at Matthew 28. Jesus delivers His final instructions here without strange questions, parables or figurative statements. His entire earthly life Jesus had a funny way of teaching people, but His last command is crystal clear.

"All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me," He said. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-20). Heard that before? Me too. We've heard it so many times we

can easily lose sight of its power or become numb to its meaning. But that, I believe, is our great stumbling block. We waste our time, our money and our efforts doing anything else – anything beyond what He's asked us to do.

With this in mind, we then ask ourselves whether everything we call ministry is aligned with Jesus' commandment, because it seems we're very busy these days. We have English classes, quilting group, F.I.S.H. dinners, conversation partners, tutoring,

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peer ministry, activities, visits, Bible studies and many physical needs to help meet. We've got more things to do than hours in a day, and I can assure you, they're all good things. All wonderful things. But my question is whether our programs are simply keeping us busy or actively advancing the gospel through love, relationships and truth?

If you just look at numbers there are some cool things happening. Over 93 volunteers were involved in the ministry this fall in many different ways with an increasing number of them being college students. Monthly F.I.S.H. dinners have been popular

with 370 people at one and almost 300 at another. An exploding population of especially Chinese undergraduates continues to arrive in addition to all of the visiting scholars and grad students and families.

Then there's the Sudanese refugee population and the mostly Hispanic and Korean families who have been settled here for a while, but are still internationals in many ways. And you've got needs from every angle and endless opportunities to love and serve, yet my question remains the same every day. What is most important? What is from God and purposefully advancing the gospel and what is simply keeping us busy? There's a saying I've heard for years that cautions, "If the Devil can't make you bad he'll make you busy," yet I never stopped to really pray about that in my own life until the last year or so.

The reason I bring all of this up is not to be critical, but to honestly ask for your prayers. We have many good things happening here in Ames, many wonderful things. But we need your prayers for wisdom on how to invest our time and good intentions into only the best things. Only that which God has asked of us. Someone once told me, "when all else fails, follow directions," and I like the simplicity and conviction of that. Jesus made His directions pretty clear. He left us with a model of ministry. And there is a lot to be learned from His strategic devotion to doing only what God asked. My prayer is that we would do the same here and steward our opportunities well.

That in the end, we would not only serve the nations and not only raise up laborers but most importantly, do all things so God would be known, glorified and exalted among all nations. That His Kingdom would advance in both our hearts and the world.

Opportunities – Ask and they will be given to you.

In addition to simple miracles, God has provided many opportunities to share truth, pray for others and be witnesses of the gospel and faith in Christ.

Jesus tells us in Luke 11:9, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and door will be open to you.” So we’ve been asking in our weekly peer ministry meetings for these kinds of opportunities, and God has been faithful. Here are some of the neat ones He’s provided:

- :: A Chinese man came in on a Friday, and I showed him a brochure with the English class schedule. As I pointed to my contact information, he asked what my name meant. “Grace,” I told him. “What’s grace,” he asked. Despite my lack of Chinese and his limited English, we talked for the next 45 minutes about grace, the gospel and the Bible. He has already returned home to China, but I know he left with a video about Jesus in his language, a Bible in his language and an understanding of the gospel.
- :: During lunch with a couple of English students, a Brazilian woman asked me about the difference between the Catholic church next door and the

Lutheran church. I told her there are many differences, but the biggest one is our beliefs in how we get to heaven – grace versus works. This opened up a long conversation between her, I and our third friend, a Muslim from Iran. The Iranian friend shared that many young people are looking for something else to follow in her country because the Islamic government has been so oppressive. I also learned she really loves the person of Jesus, and the three of us have been studying Bible stories together since.

- :: I noticed a man from Colombia sitting in the sanctuary during English classes. I learned he was struggling in many areas and reconsidering asking God for help. He said he lost his belief in a god after his grandmother passed away and being in a highly-academic environment. I asked if I could pray for him. He said that’d be great. We prayed, and a lot more spilled out. He didn’t want to talk to a pastor, so I gave him a Spanish Bible, invited him to Bible study and suggested he take a look at the Psalms. I told him I liked them because they are raw and honest in their emotions. The first thing he told me next time we met was that he’d been reading the Bible and really liked Psalm 91. Then

he quoted parts of verse five and seven back to me almost word for word.

- :: A former English student returned from China to support her son in Ames through a difficult time. Through Liwen, our incredible Chinese assistant, I learned she is a Christian and has become a great encouragement to fellow mothers in the basic-level English class. She encourages them to go to the Chinese church with her, study the Bible and read books about science and faith. It shows us all that English is not necessary to hear about Jesus here in Ames.
- :: Deaconess Catherine Steffen who works with ISM visited her brother’s congregation in Lexington, Kentucky to speak at a Women’s Advent Tea. She shared about how God opens doors for the gospel as we meet needs for friendship. One of the women belonged to another congregation in town and was beginning to offer English classes to the University of Kentucky international community. Encouraged by stories from MLC, she looks forward to opportunities to share the gospel that come along with hospitality and friendship.

Simple Miracles

After worship in early November, I met the new visiting scholar in service and learned he was a Christian from southern India. Ten minutes later I was busy shoos a handful of Sudanese kids out the door when I noticed him reading the bulletin board about Kebede, our agricultural missionary in Ethiopia.

He pointed to the board and said, “I’d like to support a missionary (\$50/month). I’d also like to pay for a well (\$135). How do I do this and support God’s work?” With that he pulled out two crisp \$100 bills and asked what he should do with them. We handed the money to one of our pastors. Then on his way out he said something even more humbling.

“I did not know there were such pious Christians in America but you are doing great work,” he told me. “We need Jesus in India because you know, 98 percent of people are Hindu. It is great to hear about God’s work you are doing. May He bless you.” I have no idea what he meant by pious, and before I could ask, he took off back to campus leaving me speechless. I never managed to contact him again before he left December 16.



On October 15-16, St. Paul’s congregation in Ida Grove, Iowa hosted 12 internationals from China, India and Thailand for the weekend. We saw many sites around the northwest Iowa farming community including Mission Central pictured here in Mapleton where Gary Thies shared stories of God’s provision. We also stayed with host families of the congregation that night and were blessed immensely from the trip. It was a highlight of the semester for all who went!

Our Meeting **For Pie**

— Chooi Kim Lau

Fresh hot succulent peach pie, two scoops of vanilla ice cream and a cup of hot coffee with two Bibles is how we start our unlimited topic conversations.

My relationship between teacher Pam Millen is like a lovely mother and a cute daughter. We are teacher and student, mentor and mentee.

In January 2009, my husband brought my son Sai Kit and me to Ames to fulfill his dream to become a professor. I gave up everything I had in Malaysia and brought only two bags to the USA. I only understood a few words in English, so my life suddenly dropped into darkness. I felt depressed, sad, helpless and lonely. There were no words to describe my pain.

Initially I hated staying in the USA. Here I had nothing I liked, and I felt there was no meaning for me, especially after sending my son and my husband to school. I felt lonely. I had no friends and no relatives in the USA. I also felt like I was a deaf person, like a mute person can't describe their message, I was scared to communicate with others.

God never gave up on me. God showed me a wonderful place. He guided me to Memorial Lutheran Church. In the church I felt warm. I felt like I was almost welcome. I met a lot of wonderful people, and I felt reborn again from the darkness. My life was full of energy and love.

God also sent teacher Pam to lead me. Teacher Pam is our English teacher, and she teaches me very patiently word by word. She encouraged me to speak from my heart. Sometimes when she can't understand me, we try to use body language to communicate. We also used visual aids to understand the stories from the Bible, and it helps me a lot.

One day, I found a place where we can have free pie with teacher Pam. We started meeting at Village Inn every Wednesday at 2pm. It is the most wonderful moment for me. I like to share personal feelings with teacher Pam. I enjoy talking and learning Bible with her!

She speaks slowly and clearly, so it is very easy for me to learn from her. I also learned how to volunteer and help others who need me. I wish to share with other people who are like me. "Never feel you are alone," I told them. "Come to church. Here is the place you can find yourself! We have free English classes, free exercise yoga classes and free quilting classes all open for people who are like me. Come join us."

In this period I learned life is so wonderful. Nothing is impossible if you have a dream. Try your best to do it. You will be a success someday! The most important thing is that we learn how to appreciate it. I appreciate everything I have, and I learned how to be thankful to God!

Before I came here, I was busy earning a lot of money. Was I really rich? Not at all! My life was surrounded with materialism, therefore I never had a moment to stop my step and appreciate everything on the earth. However, now I realize everything on the earth has meaning.

A few months after I came to Ames, God gave me an opportunity to become an exercise yoga instructor. That time my English level was still poor. I could not understand the meaning of the book and wondered "How can I use proper English to lead the class? How can I be a yoga instructor?"

No one was willing to give me a chance to start my exercise yoga teaching program, and I had to volunteer to teach a class for 10 hours. Without this 10 hours, I was not qualified to move forward.

When I dropped into the darkness again, teacher Pam helped me to pursue Pastor Mark who gave me an opportunity to teach in the church. Now today, I am able to become a qualified yoga instructor. Today I have taught more than 150 students, and I will keep doing this! This is the only way I can repay my love to church.

Teacher Pam also volunteered to be my conversation partner. She taught me every word from my yoga book. Sometimes we learn about the human body. Finally I graduated from my yoga teacher training. I believe she can also be yoga teacher since she understands our yoga theory book more than me.

We will keep this meeting until I move to another place. I love teacher Pam! Thank you teacher Pam. Without you I cannot be strong!



Pictured left to right: Chooi Kim Lau and Pam Millen



Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center
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From Teacher Pam:

“Kim gives me too much credit. She has so much initiative and is so outgoing. I have learned a lot from her.” Pam and Kim have been conversation partners for three years, but over time, they have become even better friends.

“Now she has the words to express herself, and we can just talk,” said Pam. “We spend at least an hour and half together on Wednesdays talking and studying the Bible.”

Kim has also become a vibrant part of the community by inviting many other internationals to programs at Memorial and around Ames.

“Kim is our ambassador. She does what we don’t do as much as we should. She goes up and invites people to everything,” said Pam. And they have come. There are people involved in exercise yoga, English classes, F.I.S.H. dinners and the Ames Toastmasters club because Kim invited them.

According to Pam, she is the international equivalent of an Iowa State men’s basketball player who recently received a scholarship and was praised by Coach Fred Hoiberg as being “a prime example of how someone can achieve their dreams through a positive work ethic.”

“That’s Kim,” said Pam with a smile and laugh. “She goes for it.”

BRIDGES

International Student Ministry
 Memorial Lutheran Church
 2228 Lincoln Way
 Ames, IA 50014
 Phone 515-292-5005
 e-mail: ism.mlchurch@gmail.com
 Hannah McCulloh, ISM Coordinator

If you would like to contribute to the support of this ministry, please send contribution to the address above.

Prayer Requests and Praises

- For friends from China, Brazil, Malaysia, Iran, India, Mexico and South Sudan who have been attending Bible studies this fall.
- For those who have expressed interest in studying the Bible but have yet to commit to meeting with someone.
- For the wonderful turnout at our monthly F.I.S.H. dinners. Pray it would continue to be an avenue for building relationships.
- For Kegeng (China) who now identifies as a Christian among her peers.
- For God’s faithful provision of volunteers, English teachers, conversation partners and ISU students involved this fall. Pray those leading and serving would also have opportunities to grow in their faith as they pour into others.
- For the five Sudanese families who have been coming to Sunday School and worship and were involved in the Christmas program. Pray more fathers would step up and come along.
- For increased opportunities to share our faith with internationals.
- For unity in South Sudan as it struggles to establish itself as a new country.
- For those who have returned home: Rakhi and Thilak (India), Inny, Amy and Susan (Taiwan), Eliana (Colombia), Youdao and Muhua (China), Yuichi, Shigeo, Sato, Junya, Kairo and Maki (Japan), Seonju and Mi Kyung (South Korea) and Carolina (Ecuador).
- For a weekly Spanish Bible study to get started among those interested who cannot meet on Sundays.