

Dear Friends,

September 2024

“As they were walking along the road, someone said to Him, ‘I will follow You wherever You go.’ Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ He said to another, ‘Follow Me.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’ Still another said, ‘I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to my family.’ Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” (Luke 9:57-62)

A long introductory passage, but relevant to where many of us find ourselves. I was traveling most of this summer, including two regional conferences with Novo staff on opposite ends of the planet. This letter includes photos from those conferences. The staff I serve have ministry reach into every continent. At some point, I need to share the breadth of that reach.

I’d like to say that meeting with Novo ministry teams reigns paramount for me. In all honesty, I’ll admit that earthly demands, like unmet home projects, haunted me this summer as I traveled. Maybe it’s my age (64), or maybe it’s just the way of worldly distractions I face. Whatever, I find my divided attention disturbing and unsettling. Maybe you do, too? As I meet with Novo staff, many of whom are much younger than me, I admire their vigor and it motivates me to stay in the game.



As I lead the second largest division in Novo (a large mission organization), I have many staff looking to me for leadership. What they don’t fully get is that I look to them for inspiration. They are among those who have forsaken much to follow God’s calling, like Luke mentions (above). That was once me when I lived and ministered with my family in Russia. Now, I’m one step removed as I lead those on the front lines of ministry. It’s not exactly where I want to be, but I know without a doubt that I am playing my part and fulfilling my calling at this life stage



Jesus wants all of me where I’m at, and for the purpose God has for me right now. Jesus wants me to be wary of the three would-be followers Luke mentions as a test of loyalty. Can I leave my creature comforts behind, as so many of the Novo staff I serve have done? Can I count Jesus as my most important family member? Can I look straight ahead as I plow, ignoring my earthly distractions? That “looks back” presents a problem not simple to shake.



Following Jesus is not an easy task. Just look at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He demands of us that we love our enemies, go the extra mile, not judge others, etc. In the cross-cultural contexts where Novo staff minister, this is an even harder task. It's why conferencing together for reports and prayer are so very important. They need the support of one another for forward-focused ministry plowing. As the Apostle Paul said, "Forgetting what is past, I press on, fixing my eyes on Jesus."



Amid the spiritual ministry endeavors, I hope to address some of the mundane worldly items, like installing a deck staircase railing before winter sets in, replacing my worn-out flooring, and other home repairs. It's a matter of finding the balance between the temporal and the eternal, and I'm not confident that I've figured that piece out. I can't change yesterday or last year's plowing results, so I just need to stay forward focused, "fixing my eyes on Jesus," just like the Novo staff depicted in these photos who inspire me to "press on."



Always forward, fixing our eyes on Jesus, I'm deeply grateful for your prayers and financial backing!

For Looking Forward, Not Back,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Cathey". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mark Cathey
Director, Empowering Leaders Division, Novo
651-800-5667 (Mobile)
mark.cathey@novo.org (Email)
www.novo.org/give (Donations)



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