



Dear Friends,

December 2024

“Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in their sleep” (Psalm 127: 1,2).

Knowing these are the words of Solomon, they possess an edge. King Solomon built the “house” of the Lord but made many life-mistakes doing so, flagrantly violating God’s commands in Deuteronomy 17 to “not acquire great numbers of horses...not take many wives...not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold....” All of Israel’s kings violated the rules, and the populace paid the price. For myself, I appreciate the warning. I should not “build” anything that the Lord is not building. I should not “watch” for anything the Lord is not looking for. I should not “labor” apart from God’s leading.

Lots to chew on here as I orchestrate the building of Novo’s Empowering Leaders Division (EL). I’m not guilty of accumulating horses, wives, or wealth, but I *do* grapple with the “bread of painful labors.” Lots of late night “watches” for me as I’m communicating with staff in various parts of the globe, and it cranks up again mid-morning to mid-afternoon. Additionally, there’s the travel aspect to meet with staff on site. Thankfully, the Lord has blessed me with good sleep and a solid core EL Lead Team to assist me in the “build” and “watch” over our Novo mission activity.



In September, the EL Lead Team gathered at my home in Minnesota for several days of strategic planning as we evaluated EL’s past two years of global ministry and charted EL’s course for the next two years. The team is comprised of seasoned missionaries with decades of overseas living and ministry experience in China, Cambodia, Japan, Australia and Russia. I’ve learned over the years that if left to me alone, the “house” won’t be built well. I can’t effectively stand watch over everything. This gifted group of EL Lead Team staff are God’s provision for filling in my gaps.

Some weighty decisions were levied during our time together. We decided to pull our EL team from Burundi (the poorest country on earth), as a natural disaster plunged the country into deeper poverty and the ensuing civil unrest placed our staff team at physical risk. We gave the green light to an EL team in China to make the unprecedented move into the Korean peninsula. We considered what our beleaguered ministries might look like in Russia and Ukraine if this war continues into 2025. And these are just the tip of the iceberg.



Among a host of activities in the US and abroad, our primary focus is to expand God’s Kingdom far beyond the places where we are engaged in right now. Most of what we’ve done and are doing goes unmentioned in these newsletters. Our scope of reach is in every continent, but there are untouched corners in each. We’re setting the table for moving forward.

I need to do what Jesus woos me to do, namely, “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11: 28-30). As an image bearer of the Lord, I want to build new things. As a new year begins, my prayer is, “Lord, I will build, watch and labor under the sovereignty of your kingdom for your purposes, not mine. Thank you for the rest as I do this. Amen.” I’ll ask, what is your personal prayer for 2025?



Thank you for laboring, building and watching with me via your prayers and financial contributions. It doesn’t happen without you and I’m deeply grateful! Please consider a year-end donation for 2025.

For to Build and to Watch,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Cathey".

Mark Cathey
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Postscript from David Bute, Novo Director, Cherkasy, Ukraine

“Greetings from Cherkasy! Our personal mission is to bring Jesus’ love and hope into this dark situation. To share the gospel with the orphans and widows, the displaced and the mourning, with those who welcome the Trump presidency, those who are afraid of it, and even those who just don’t care. God is good - all the time!”

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