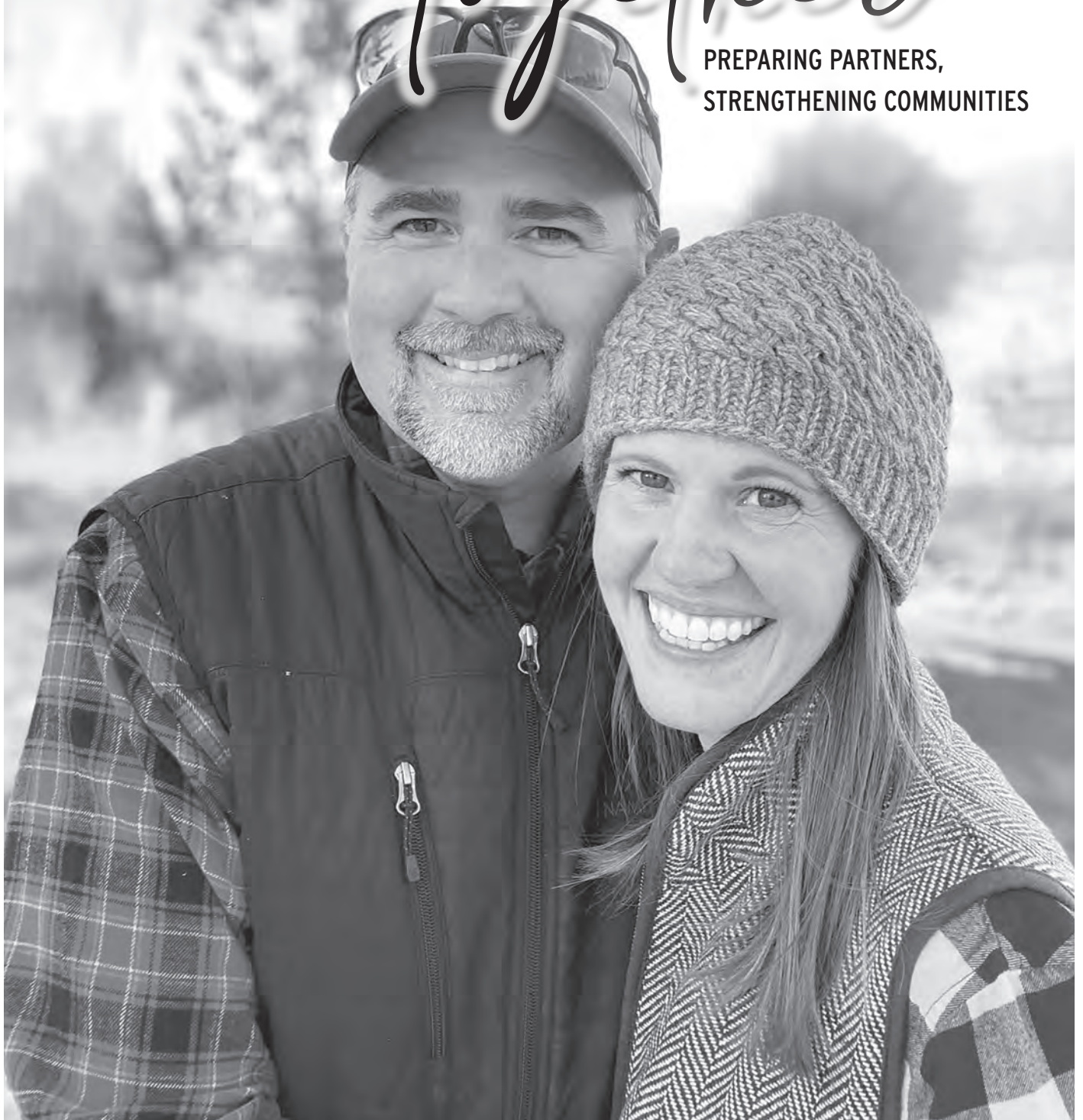




BETTER Together

PREPARING PARTNERS,
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES



Denver, Colorado, is one of the largest and fastest-growing cities in the United States, boasting 300 days of sunshine, dry air, and a professional team for every sport. Outdoor enthusiasts can take advantage of hiking, hunting, camping, mountain climbing, snow skiing, and snowboarding. Each season in the Mile High City has its allure: fall with culinary festivals and aspen trees bursting with color; winter with snowy adventures; spring with comfortable temperatures and fewer tourists; and summer with parks, gardens, and bountiful fishing.

With all Denver has to offer, Jason Tipton calls it a “beautiful, yet distracted city” and feels the challenge to place a compelling vision in front of people to follow Jesus.

SEND RELIEF MINISTRY

Nestled in one of the poorest areas of Denver is a Send Relief ministry center, where Jason serves as the ministry’s director. The start-up ministry center located in Denver’s urban core is one of 20 Send Relief ministry centers across the US and Puerto Rico. These compassion ministry centers are supported by the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Cooperative Program. Compassion ministry opens the door to the gospel by first meeting physical needs and then sharing the hope found in the gospel.

Send Relief: IMB and NAMB in Partnership

Areas of Focus:

1. Strengthening communities
2. Caring for refugees
3. Protecting children and families
4. Fighting human trafficking
5. Responding to crisis

Send Relief addresses widespread needs throughout the cities it serves, with each center adopting one of the five focal areas as its primary focus. The Denver ministry center emphasizes caring for refugees. With more than 100 international communities surrounding the city, strengthening these communities is a growing and vital interest.

Specific areas of ministry for the Denver center are addressing food insecurity, projects that strengthen local schools, resources for those in foster care, and job skills training for refugees. It orchestrates a collaborative effort from local churches and other nonprofit agencies to address these needs.

“I don’t believe in reinventing the wheel or starting something from scratch unless it is absolutely necessary,” Jason said. “If there is a need, however, to start something new, we will absolutely do that.”

NO PARTNERS, NO MINISTRY

The need for partners is crucial. Jason views partners as those who are being served and those who do the serving. Jason’s motto of “Better Together” demonstrates the relationship with his partners and his Send Relief ministry team.

Twice-weekly food distributions for refugee families require many delivery drivers and workers. Volunteers from short-term missions teams along with local volunteers help fill the gap.

Jason’s son, Jonathan, is one of his best volunteers. Jonathan’s whatever-it-takes attitude gets the job done as he serves alongside his dad. As a 16-year-old missionary kid, Jonathan says it is sometimes hard. “You have to sacrifice a lot of time you could be giving to other things. And there are few who really understand what you are trying to do. But if you trust in God, you know that everything will be okay.”

In addition to his work with the Denver ministry center, Jason also serves as a regional resource for all other ministry centers in the West and Midwest.

Jason’s wife, Mindy, has recently taken a position as a preschool director in the city. Much of her time is devoted to partnering with families to invest in the growth of their children. She hopes her role will cross paths with her husband’s ministry, enabling them to work together through the organizations they serve.

Jason says Mindy’s calling to missions came long before his. “She had a bigger heart for mission service than I did when we met, and still does for that matter,” he said.

Mindy’s early years in Princeton, Kentucky, were greatly influenced by her participation in Girls in Action (GA) and Acteens. These groups helped teach her to know and follow Jesus, to love God’s Word, to pray for missionaries, and to share the gospel. She served as a summer GA camp counselor and then as a missionary in South Carolina for two summers.

FACTORS INFLUENCING MISSION SERVICE

Jason is a huge fan of short-term missions. His role in mission service was introduced through short-term mission trips. As a college student, he traveled to West Virginia to do light construction work with World Changers. By the time he left, he not only changed the lives of homeowners needing a new roof and a wheelchair ramp, but he also helped change the lives of those making a decision for Christ.

The trip changed Jason’s life too. While in West Virginia, he met students from Union University and decided to transfer from Mississippi State University to complete his accounting degree at Union, something he felt God was calling him to do. He “left all to follow Jesus,” beginning the fulfillment of Mark 10 in his life.

Another short-term mission trip to Spain and northern Africa altered the way Jason viewed the world and the mission of God. “There were so many experiences that laid a deeper foundation for mission service: gospel conversations, divine appointments, meeting brothers and sisters in Christ from a different culture, being exposed to doing the long work of gospel ministry in a different culture, spiritual warfare, lack of a gospel witness, and exposure to IMB missionaries.” All of these experiences helped shape his calling to mission service.

Jason reflects upon the people and church programs God used to open his eyes and heart to mission service. Even as a child, Scripture was alive to him. He liked to pretend he was the pastor. He tried to guess what the pastor would say next during Sunday service.

Jason’s parents, grandmother, Sunday School teachers, and student pastors were instrumental in his spiritual development. While at Union University, he met Charles Fowler, who is now president of Carson-Newman University, who encouraged him to stay faithful to the plan God had for his life when he yearned to return to Mississippi. Jason now sees Charles as his “father in the faith.”

After graduating, Jason accepted a bivocational role as a student pastor and associate pastor at a church in West Tennessee while also serving on staff at Union. He loved seeing students use the evangelistic tools he taught them. He also loved seeing the local church become mobilized to share the gospel.

EMBRACING WEAKNESS TO LOVE STRONGER

Jason began to sense a fresh stirring from the Lord while in his postgraduate position. An issue of unbelief was festering in his life which needed to be acknowledged and repented of. Jason confessed he was trying to view himself through a lens of earning his way into the presence of God and gaining favor through works. He found himself in a place of extreme spiritual exhaustion, struggling to pray.

It should read: “Any time that I’ve struggled to love myself, it is always rooted in a wrong view of God. . . [in not] letting Him be ‘Abba Father,’” he said. He confronted the truth that “being a son of God comes from a deep well of God’s grace, not at all by our performance.”

God led Jason through a season to embrace weakness, which Jason believes was used to drive him to a deeper dependence on God. His fear of inadequacy finally melted

after reading John 15:4–5, which says, “Remain in me . . . apart from me you can do nothing.” John 21:1, where Jesus revealed Himself again in the midst of the disciples’ inability to catch fish, also spoke to Jason.

GOOD POSTURE

Jason dedicated his life to full-time mission service. He and Mindy were prepared to serve overseas, but that’s not where God was calling them. Through a not-so-chance meeting, the Tiptons ended up in Denver. Jason believes his calling and that of the ministry center is tied to Isaiah 58, which mandates a biblical responsibility to the underprivileged. People and relationships are the overriding themes of Jason’s life and his work at the ministry center. “We place a high value on relationships and do ministry from a posture of relationship and hospitality/service,” he said.

Zach can attest to that. One morning, Zach and his friend stood across the street, watching the ministry teams load food into cars for delivery to refugee families. “We want some food too,” they yelled. Jason walked over and attempted to engage them in conversation. Zach’s friend was resistant, so Jason turned to Zach and asked, “What’s your story?” Zach answered, “I don’t know what to tell you except that I feel lost.” Ironically, Zach was wearing a T-shirt sporting the quote “Not all who wander are lost.”

Jason knew Zach was destined to be saved that day, but Zach didn’t. By the end of the day, Zach pleaded for forgiveness and cried out for help. Jason showed Zach how to have a new life in Christ. Zach told Jason, “I’m not lost anymore.”

BE ON MISSION: PRAY AND SERVE

Full-time vocational missions work is not for everybody, but Jason says God calls everyone to have a lifelong mission with Him.

He asked for prayer for the following:

- For the Tipton family, especially for the next three years before Jonathan goes to college
- For sustaining grace to lead and to pace themselves for ministry over the long haul
- Short-term teams and long-term partners
- For the gospel to be advanced among those being served

KAREN ALLEN lives in Birmingham, Alabama, and often participates in short-term international mission trips. Read about some of those trips on her website, ewerblessed.com, and sign up for her blog.



Denver: Better Together



FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

1. If relevant, ask group members who have been to Denver, Colorado, to share their experience of the city.
2. Summarize the mission study introduction and the section, "Send Relief Ministry." Include the struggles Jason Tipton has encountered in ministering to the people of Denver.
3. Together, discuss the difficulties of trying to do ministry alone. Describe Jason's partnerships from the section, "No Partners, No Ministry."
4. Break into small groups to discuss the question: *What influences led you to your current vocation?* Compare these influences to factors that influenced Jason to pursue missions work in the section, "Factors Influencing Mission Service."
5. Stay in small groups to discuss ways weakness can make us strong. Review Jason's experience in the section, "Embracing Weakness to Love Stronger."
6. Share and pray together for Jason's prayer requests.



FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Review the introduction and the section, "Send Relief Ministry," plus the sidebar that lists Send Relief's five areas of focus.
2. Imagine your life without any ministry partners. Write thank-you notes to people who have supported you. Read Jason Tipton's experience in the section, "No Partners, No Ministry."
3. List circumstances that led you to your current vocation. Read influences on Jason's call to missions in the section, "Factors Influencing Mission Service."
4. Read the section, "Embracing Weakness to Love Stronger." Consider spiritual challenges you've faced and how God used those to made you stronger.
5. Read the section, "Good Posture." Consider ways you can invite others out of lostness into a new life with Jesus.
6. Pray for personal openness to God's leadership in missions and ministry and for Jason's prayer requests.



FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Plan an imaginary (or real) trip to Denver, Colorado. Use the mission study introduction to choose the season and activities. Include missions opportunities in this "distracted city."
2. Ask a family member to summarize the section, "Send Relief Ministry," including the areas of focus sidebar.
3. Take turns thanking family members for ways they have supported ministry efforts. Relate this to the section, "No Partners, No Ministry."
4. Enlist a family member to summarize the section, "Factors Influencing Mission Service."
5. Present information from the sections, "Embracing Weakness to Love Stronger" and "Good Posture." Explore ways your family can invite others out of their lostness into God's love.
6. Pray for guidance regarding family missions and ministry efforts and for Jason's prayer requests.

DIANA DERRINGER serves with her husband as a friendship family to international university students. You can read her *Words, Wit, and Wisdom: Life Lessons from English Expressions* at dianaderringer.com.