



Trusting God

IN THE EVEN-IFS

REACHING THE UNREACHED IN MEXICO WITH HUMILITY AND PRAYER.

A walk through the streets of remote mountain villages in Mexico is an experience that fills the senses. Houses are painted in bright, colorful hues, the sounds of roosters, dogs, birdsong, and fireworks fill the air, and the scent of homemade tortillas cooking over wood-burning fires serves as a reminder that it's time to eat. But in this place filled with warm, caring people, there is a sense of fear and lostness that only the hope of Christ can heal. This is the work the Armstrong family is striving to accomplish here in this hard-to-reach place. To bring the gospel to those who have never heard, they must trust and rely on God no matter what.

FROM MONTANA TO MEXICO

At the age of 25, both Chris and Sara Armstrong moved from their East Coast homes to Big Sky Montana. Neither grew up in the church and they knew little of Christ, but when they became engaged to be married, they knew they wanted a pastor to perform the ceremony. So, one Sunday, they visited a nearby church and got to know the pastor at a potluck lunch after the service. Over the next several weeks, the pastor and his wife invited them to go skiing and to attend a Bible study with other young adults in their home. Chris and Sara began to feel the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and they both gave their lives to Christ.

Several years later, while volunteering at a youth event at their church, Chris heard a young woman share how she and her family had been working to reach the unreached in another country with the love of Christ. She explained the great need for believers to share the gospel with those who have never heard it before. That day, Chris felt God's calling to go out and meet this need. But first, he had to get his wife and young family on board with the idea. In reflecting on that day, Sara said, "I had just told [Chris] a few weeks prior that I never needed to leave the country again, and I was so happy to grow old in our Montana home. When he told me the news, the Holy Spirit welled up inside me and my smile was ear to ear, and I simply said, 'When do we go?'"

Chris and Sara did an online search for information about missions, discovered the International Mission Board's Macedonian Project, and were accepted into the program. Through this unique scholarship opportunity, they received training and a seminary education that would enable them to move to Mexico, where they would be working to reach a large unreached people group (UPG) in the area with the love of Christ.

REMINDERS OF GOD'S PRESENCE

The Armstrong family's early years on the missions field were not without their struggles. Being in a new place, learning a new language, and experiencing a total upheaval in life while raising three young daughters brought about discomfort and doubts. Sickness caused by contaminated water as well as other illnesses made the transition more

difficult. But through God's healing and the provision of a water filter from the WMU Compassion Ministry Pure Water, Pure Love, the family was sustained.

In those early times of uncertainty and doubt, Chris and Sara reminded each other of everything God had already done for them—how He had cleared the path for them to be where they were and the multiple ways He had provided for them since their arrival. The ability to call upon these reminders of God's goodness would be especially useful when Chris became critically ill with an unknown lung infection and had to be hospitalized.

EVEN IF, GOD IS STILL GOOD

A few years after beginning work with the UPG in Mexico, Chris became severely ill during an outreach trip to an unreached village and was admitted to the hospital with a rare and serious lung infection. When the doctors could not find a diagnosis, Chris was transported to a hospital in the United States in hopes of finding a solution.

Throughout this time, Chris and Sara prayed. While Chris was in the hospital, Sara testified, "God helped me see that our time here is short and to trust Him in everything, and that His plans are so much better than ours." Together, they clung to the words of Daniel 3:16–18. Here, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proclaimed to King Nebuchadnezzar that God could deliver them from the fiery furnace, but even if He didn't, they still would not worship the idols the king had set up.

In the same way, the Armstrongs chose to trust God "even if" He did not heal Chris. Sara said, "I feel like the experience we had prepared us for the unknown. If we are in a trial or someone else is, we can remind them that God's plans are so much bigger than ours and that no matter what, He alone is our hope."

Three days after being admitted to the US hospital, Chris was diagnosed with histoplasmosis, a rare fungal infection of the lungs. But his doctor had surprising news: the infection was gone! Though the medical team could see evidence the infection had been there, it had miraculously left Chris's body. The Lord had answered the Armstrongs' prayers. For the next five months, the family remained in the US while Chris received "precautionary" treatment. Even in this time of waiting, God was faithful.

SURPRISING CONNECTIONS

Before their monthslong sojourn in the US, the Armstrong family had been making plans to move from their city home in Mexico to an unreached mountain village so they could more effectively evangelize to and disciple the people in the region. Though Chris's illness might have seemed like a setback, God had other plans.

One day during their stay in the US, Sara and her daughters got to know a woman at a park who they discovered was from the village they were planning to

move to. Later, the woman's mother passed away, and she asked Chris and Sara to attend the funeral, which was taking place Mexico. Going to the funeral and meeting the woman's family helped the Armstrongs gain acceptance in their new community.

While in the US, Chris and Sarah also met another woman who owned a house in their chosen village. By the grace of God, the woman agreed to rent the house to them when they returned. Chris and Sara said, "In all of God's goodness, we were able to return to Mexico and continue the work He began with the many connections [we made] with this people group in the US."

REACHING THE UNREACHED WITH HUMILITY

The task of reaching an indigenous UPG high in the mountains of Mexico is made difficult by the group's isolation from the outside world and the rough terrain in which they live. Chris said, "These communities are not easily accessed physically or spiritually. . . . Two thousand years have passed since people began telling the world about Jesus. The few [unreached] people around the world have not yet heard for a reason."

Superstition is entrenched in the villagers' daily lives. Though many communities contain a Catholic church, priests are rarely present. Instead, most follow animistic practices, with witchdoctors serving as the primary spiritual leaders. Many are bound by the fear of displeasing the spirits. Often, those who give their lives to Christ are persecuted and ostracized from their community. Because of this, great care and sensitivity must be shown when sharing the gospel.

Chris and Sara make inroads by "doing life" with the villagers and demonstrating their desire to learn and help. Chris discovered the hard way the necessity for humility in this work. He said, "I am from Montana and have split my fair share of firewood. . . . So, when I arrived in the village and saw how they split wood, I thought it seemed very inefficient. I wanted to show them how we did it because I was convinced our way was better." After a lot of effort, Chris realized he was working twice as hard as the villagers with minimal results. He was forced to admit his error and asked them to teach him their way. Chris said, "This took humility but allowed them to teach me about their culture. Later, when we began to discuss the Bible, they were happy to exchange roles." When the villagers realize the Armstrongs and their team are not there to "fix" their way of life but rather to learn and understand, their hearts and minds become more open to what they have to say.

Chris and Sara said, "Although many don't agree with us and don't want our religion, they are beginning to respect us and see we are there to help, and we are always

willing to lend a hand and contribute to the community when we can."

BROTHERS IN MINISTRY

Each month, Chris spends several days in the mountains with local brothers in Christ. Together, they travel from village to village meeting with local pastors, evangelizing, and visiting the sick and other families who belong to a church plant. On days when Chris cannot join them, these brothers boldly and faithfully spread the gospel to those who remain unreached.

One such person was a local witchdoctor who Chris said had "spent the majority of his life manipulating the powers of darkness for his own personal financial gain in his community." One day, this witchdoctor fell ill and could not find a cure despite all his purported powers and remedies. When believers from a local church heard what had happened, they visited and asked if they could pray for Christ to heal him. Chris proclaimed, "The Holy Spirit did heal him, and now he is one of the most powerful indigenous evangelists in the region." Through the Lord's healing and the care and compassion shown by local believers, the witchdoctor left his old life behind and began a new life of faith in the One True God.

PRAYER AND PRAISE

For the Armstrongs, prayer is an essential part of life and ministry. Through it, they have seen God do miraculous things. They shared, "The only reason we have seen any success in sharing the gospel and entering these closed communities is because so many people back in the US are praying for God to move daily."

Join them in praying for God to work in the following ways:

- To prepare the hearts of the people to receive the gospel
- To raise up a community leader to pastor a new church plant
- To help Chris and Sara learn the indigenous language well so they can share the gospel
- To grow the Armstrong children to be faithful Christ followers who understand their family's call to share the gospel with the unreached
- To bring more Spanish-speaking ministry partners so they can reach more places

Praise God for how He has provided for the Armstrong family:

- Healing from illness many times over the years
- Providing someone to teach the family to speak, read, and write the indigenous language
- Opening the doors for them to live in an unreached indigenous community

SARAH FREE lives in Florida with her husband and son where they work to support the efforts of missionaries around the world.



Mexico: Trusting God in the Even Ifs



BEFORE THE SESSION: Ask a volunteer whether they would be willing to share their “even if” moment where they chose to trust God in difficult circumstances.

FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

1. Ask, *How did God use the local church to lead Chris and Sarah Armstrong to Christ? In their call to serve the unreached in Mexico? What role should the local church have in sending out missionaries?*
2. Ask a volunteer to read Daniel 3:16–18. Ask, *What is the context of this passage?*
3. Ask, *What was the Armstrong family’s “even if” moment? How did they choose to rely on God?* Encourage the group to pray God would strengthen missionaries’ resolve to follow Him despite persecution or difficulty.
4. Share that even though Mexico is not considered an unreached nation, there are unreached indigenous people groups there.
5. Distribute copies of the Armstrong family’s prayer requests. Close in prayer, and encourage the group to continue praying for the Armstrong family.

FOR FAMILY STUDY:

1. Ask your children what they know about Mexico. (For example, common foods, language, cities, etc.) Ask what questions they have about Mexico.
2. Explain how God called the Armstrong family to serve an unreached people group (UPG). If needed, share what a UPG is.
3. Read Matthew 28:16–20. Ask, *What did Jesus command His followers to do? What was His promise to them?*
4. Ask, *What did the Armstrong family do when they got sick, had to learn a new language, and had a hard time adjusting to a new life?*
5. Pray for the Armstrong family. Pray about how your family can make disciples.



FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. Is a particular person or group discipling you to fulfill the Great Commission? If not, write a prayer in a journal asking God to bring people in your life who can mentor you to make disciples of the nations. And ask Him to show you who you can disciple.
2. The Armstrongs remembered God’s presence during their transition to the field and times of sickness while serving an unreached people group. Think about a time you faced discomfort or trials while serving the Lord. How did God show His presence?
3. Read Daniel 3:8–18. What “even if” moment are you facing or have recently faced? Continue reading Daniel 3:19–28. How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s lives serve as a testimony to King Nebuchadnezzar even when God allowed them to be thrown into the fiery furnace?
4. Do you think of Mexico as having unreached people groups? Search “Mexico” on Joshuaproject.net and observe the number of people groups that are unreached or contain less than 2 percent of evangelical Christians.
5. Spend time praying for the Armstrongs and their requests. Choose one unreached people group listed on the Joshua Project website to pray for.

STUDY TIP:

After you finish the study, take time to enjoy a treat like Mexican hot chocolate, horchata, or a favorite Mexican dish.

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