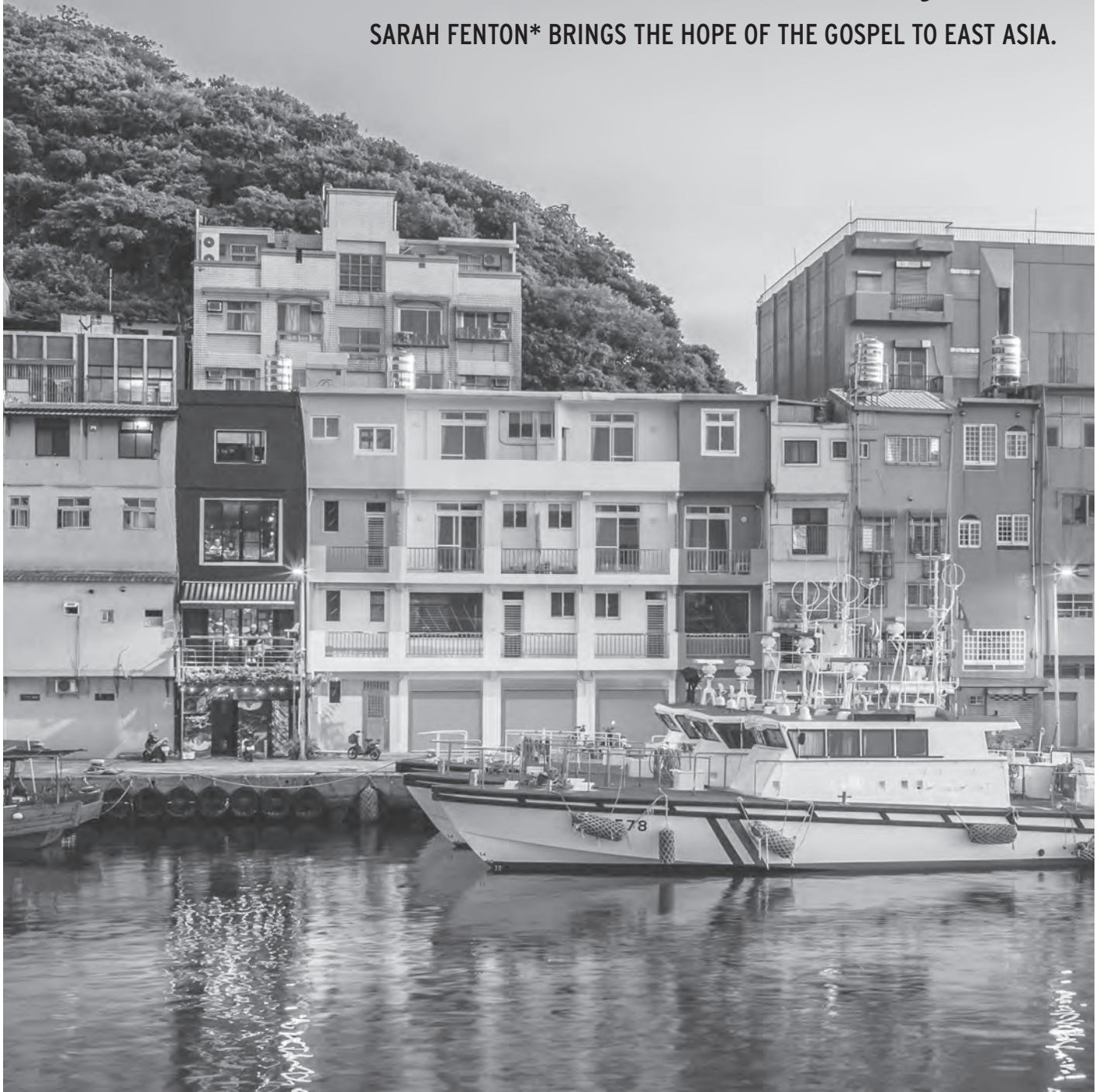




# PREPARED THROUGH *Faithfulness and Prayer*

SARAH FENTON\* BRINGS THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL TO EAST ASIA.



After years of preparing for missions and praying God would direct her steps, Sarah Fenton\* realized God “was sending me to [East Asia] to bring the hope of the gospel to those who had never heard.”

Sarah’s parents had immigrated from Asia to rural Georgia. With the loving help of a widow, the growing family became part of First Baptist Church, where Sarah made a profession of faith at age eight.

“The second significant marker in my journey to Christ came through the ministry of my youth pastor,” she said. She explained that, as a teen, her “life was transformed from being a believer in Christ to a true disciple of Christ. As Ross [Clemmons, her youth pastor] preached the Bible to us each week and as I learned more in Sunday School, God opened my eyes to the wonders of His Scriptures and gave me a true hunger to know Him more, to grow in my relationship with Him, and to follow Him wherever He led.”

God continued to prepare Sarah for missions work during her college years. She said God drew her “toward serving Him during my spring and summer breaks, but instead of domestic mission trips, God led me to serve internationally. I can still remember sitting in my freshman microeconomics class at [the University of Georgia] when I read Matthew 9:36–38, and it leapt off the page.”

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

“I had recently heard about an opportunity to serve in [East Asia] over the summer, and God used this passage of Scripture to nudge me forward into the harvest fields,” she said. “After serving in [East Asia], I later had the opportunity to serve alongside long-term missionaries in Guatemala and Jamaica. In each of those places, God was expanding my heart and exposing me to the greatness of His glory. I began to see how God was the God of *all* languages, nations, peoples, and cultures.

“He created this vast world for His glory, and He created these beautiful, diverse peoples to know and worship Him. I began to catch that Revelation 7:9 vision of ‘a great multitude . . . from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.’ During these years, I sensed that perhaps God would call me to live and serve Him overseas someday, so I prayed often that the Lord would direct my steps.”

Her training in Sunday School and mission trips throughout the Southeast provided the foundation that led her to become a journeyman, a two-year commitment to missions work through the International Mission Board (IMB). She explained how this time influenced her future:

“As a journeyman in a city of 2 million people, I had the amazing privilege of seeing many people hear the gospel for the very first time, turn to Christ for salvation, receive the gospel with joy, and grow in their faith as we studied God’s Word together.”

She described what happened to a friend named Michelle, who said, “I always knew there was a God. I just didn’t know who He was!” Another example was a woman “who, after receiving Christ, agreed to clean her home . . . of all the idols she had and burn them. She had no use for them anymore! Being a part of God’s work in East Asia was humbling and exciting. I knew that I wanted to continue long-term as a laborer in the harvest. After completing my journeyman term, I returned to the States and later enrolled as a student in Southern Seminary to prepare for long-term overseas service.”

While in seminary, she married her husband, John\*. He had also served as a journeyman in East Asia, and they met while they were both serving overseas. “We were appointed by the IMB in 2011 as career missionaries and returned to serving the peoples of East Asia along with our . . . one-year-old son,” she explained.

Sarah, her husband, and their now three children have lived in four different cities with populations ranging from 1 million to 16 million in East Asia. With each move, there have been doubts and questions, especially concerning safety and education for the children.

But she said, “At each critical step and opportunity for worry, I can remember God’s promises and His presence bringing the comfort and confidence I needed to continue following His lead in faith. ‘The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged’ (Deut. 31:8). ‘Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. . . . he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times’ (Psalm 62:5–8). ‘You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you’ (Isa. 26:3). We can easily be shaken when we forget who we are and whose we are. As God’s beloved children, we can rest in the goodness and kindness of our Father, who holds all things in His wise and loving hands. Though we may walk through valleys and unknown dangers, we need not fear because our Shepherd is always near.”

As it was for many people, 2020 was a challenging year for Sarah and her family. Due to COVID-19, her family lost everything, from their home and belongings to their ministry. She explained, “We left our home at the beginning of the year with one suitcase, expecting to return in a few weeks, but we never made it back. Instead, we lived out of suitcases for the rest of the year, moving from place to place like nomads.

“The waves of grief and uncertainty of life were overwhelming at times. The Book of Psalms became a

place of refuge and a treasure to my aching heart, putting words to what I was often feeling inside but could not verbalize. When we eventually returned to the US, we spent the first few weeks with my parents under self-quarantine. I often spent time walking around in their yard, observing trees of all kinds and studying God's creation.

"I couldn't help but notice a pear tree in their yard that was lying on its side. My parents had planted this tree over 40 years ago. A couple years earlier while they were away from home, a huge storm hit and blew it over. They used some bricks to prop it up, and to their surprise, it not only survived, but in time it proved that more fruit would come and new shoots would grow off of it. I was amazed as I examined the fruit buds and [those] new shoots growing upward toward the sky, even though the tree itself was mostly lying on the ground.

"God used [that] tree and His Word to give me great hope and comfort. [That] old tree, though blown down and now crippled-looking, never to be the same again, continues to bear fruit because its roots are deep and firmly planted . . . much like the tree in Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:8. Just as the bricks provided support to the tree, the Lord Himself was bearing us up (Psalm 68:19).

"Though circumstances may say one thing about our situation, they don't have the final say and may perhaps not even be reality. With the Lord, there is always hope for restoration and new growth. We can wait patiently on Him and lean into Him and the body of Christ to faithfully bear us up. We must simply be firmly rooted and built up in Him, setting our hope completely on His grace. . . . We can be overflowing with gratitude as we wait, because the story isn't finished. He's not done with us yet!"

*\*Names changed.*

---

**VIRGINIA KREIMEYER** is a freelance writer who writes from her home in Cedar Park, Texas.





# East Asia: Prepared through Faithfulness and Prayer



## FOR GROUP OR CHURCHWIDE STUDY:

**BEFORE THE SESSION:** visit [peoplegroups.info](http://peoplegroups.info) and scroll down to the “Search for Diaspora People” tab to find information about immigrant populations in the metro area nearest you. Print and distribute your findings to the group.

1. Ask a volunteer to read Revelation 7:9–10 aloud, and ask participants to consider the people groups nearby, especially those with little access to the gospel.
2. Distribute a list of missionaries, church planters, and other mission partners sent out from or connected to your church. Read Matthew 9:36–38. Divide into small groups to pray, thanking God for these laborers and asking Him to send more to areas unreached with the gospel.
3. In small groups, read Jeremiah 17:5–8, and ask group members to compare and contrast the two people mentioned in verses 5–6 and 7–8. On a whiteboard, draw two columns and write down the participants’ findings.
4. Ask participants to take turns reading Daniel 2:23; Psalm 52:9; Psalm 118:21; and Colossians 4:2. Together, discuss how these verses connect gratitude or thanksgiving with waiting.
5. Close in prayer for the Fenton family and other missionary families who are in seasons of waiting.



## FOR FAMILY STUDY:

**BEFORE THE SESSION:** search online for the word *hello* in a few other languages. Write them down on note cards. See who can guess what language is written on each one. Are any of these spoken in your city?

1. Explain how Revelation 7:8–9 says one day, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship God.
2. Read Jeremiah 17:7–8. Give each family member a piece of paper, and ask them to draw the tree described in verse 8. Discuss what it means to trust in the Lord.
3. Help each family member trace his or her hand on a piece of paper. Inside the hand, draw the world and some things we find in it. Write the words of Colossians 1:17 above the hand.
4. Ask volunteers to read Deuteronomy 31:8 and Isaiah 26:3 aloud. Ask, *What are some things you fear? What promises do these verses give us?*
5. As a family, pray for a deeper trust in God no matter your circumstances.



## FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY:

1. On a piece of paper or in a journal, jot down your current circumstances, whether difficult or not, and draw a circle around them. Look up Colossians 1:15–17. Around the circle, write the phrases found in these verses that describe Christ’s preeminence over everything—including your circumstances.
2. Read Matthew 5:6 and John 6:35. What is God’s promise for those who hunger and thirst for Christ or righteousness? If you find yourself hungering for things other than Christ, confess that to Him.
3. Visit [peoplegroups.info](http://peoplegroups.info) and scroll down to the “Search for Diaspora People” tab to find information about immigrant populations in the metro area nearest you. How many people have you met or observed from these people groups?
4. Turn to Luke 9:23–25. What can you learn about not just believing in Christ but being a true disciple?
5. Write a prayer to God, thanking Him for the greatness of His glory.

**ENA REDDING\*** lives and serves in the Middle East. She is passionate about discipleship and seeing others live on mission for Christ.

\*Name changed.