



# ON MISSION

## GOD STORIES

**Illustrations of God at Work  
Through Everyday Missionaries**

## **Week 1: Life On Mission: The Big Picture**

### ***Epic Living in Everyday Life: Busy Moms Living On Mission***

Stephanie Copenhaver is not entirely sure why they keep coming back or why they showed up in the first place. Apart from an invitation through her kids and their friends, there was nothing else that drew six students two years ago to “learn about Jesus” in a four-week study in July. The second week, 12 students showed up, and, by the end of the study, more than 30 students had been introduced to the Good Samaritan, the Armor of God, biblical values and Jesus, of whom most knew absolutely nothing.

“These weren’t church kids, and yet most of them totally hung on every word,” says Copenhaver, a member of Northside Baptist Church in Roswell, Ga.

This all started the summer before youngest son, John’s, fifth-grade year as Copenhaver considered how privileged her kids were to know about the Bible and Jesus. She wanted other kids to experience the life God intended for them.

“I called two other mothers and asked if they wanted to get kids together to study the Bible,” she says. “They said ‘sure’ and we told our kids to invite their friends.” After a few planning meetings over lunch, the mothers had developed a few short lessons that would simply introduce unchurched, soon-to-be middle schoolers to the Bible, God and God’s plan for the people He created.

Last year the same kids returned, this time bringing some of their friends to learn about Jesus’ miracles in the Gospel of John.

As a result of this study, one student — Phillip Bruce — became a Christian and was baptized.

Two years into being with the group, Bruce says he is noticing a change in the way he thinks about life.

“I think twice about things now,” says Bruce. “I forgive more quickly, and now I go back and change my mind when I think about doing something foolish.”

Copenhaver’s evaluation of these experiences: “I stand at these meetings and I think, ‘I can’t believe He chose me to be a part of this.’”

Stephanie Copenhaver is quick to point out that she and the two other moms involved in this ministry—Pam Troutman and Jiska Van Ede—are not the heroes of this story.

They aren't really able to explain it except to say God is working through their availability and willingness to live out His mission in everyday life.

"I think if you're open to God, He will give you opportunities," says Copenhaver. "A lot of people say they don't feel like they know enough. Well, I don't either. I'm not a pastor. I've never read through the entire Bible. But I think that if you love God and make yourself available then that's all it takes. Similarly, believers like Copenhaver, Troutman, and Van Ede, who are living their lives on mission are experiencing amazing opportunities in their lifetimes and also recognizing that they are working for future generations as well.

"I feel like these kids are still open and unjaded," Copenhaver says, "but I also know they are exposed to so much at a very young age that will shape how they see the world. I feel like if we get them at a young age we can help shape future generations."

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Adapted from the article *Epic Living in Everyday Life*, by Adam Miller, published in *On Mission* magazine, Fall 2014.

To subscribe, visit [namb.net/onmission](http://namb.net/onmission). See the video *My Life On Mission Matters - Stephanie Copenhaver* at [sendnetwork.com/videos/my-life-on-mission-matters-stephanie-copenhaver](http://sendnetwork.com/videos/my-life-on-mission-matters-stephanie-copenhaver).

## **Week 2: Life On Mission: Building a Gospel Foundation**

### ***Moving Forward: The Story of Jeff Bodziony***

Early one morning while reading his Bible in his prison cell, Jeff Bodziony began his journey with Christ. In one quiet moment, his life was transformed and he began to learn that a life lived on mission with God is a calling of abandonment; the willingness to set aside one's old life and ambitions and follow God.

Jeff Bodziony's friend had been calling him all day, distressed. Even his friend's father called saying, "There's something wrong. Please come talk to him." But Bodziony was in no hurry for things that didn't affect business. When Bodziony finally arrived to meet him, his friend's car was in the river and his friend's dad was scaling a cliff to save his son.

Bodziony grew up without a father in Slavic Village, a community in Cleveland's South Broadway neighborhood, so named because of its history with Polish and Czech immigrant communities formed around the steel industry. But when Bodziony was young, the place became associated with gangs, drugs, prostitution and poverty. He says this environment helped shape how he viewed the world, women and money.

By age 18, Bodziony's enterprise had grown from selling marijuana in his high school to operating a network of dealers and warehouses throughout the Cleveland area. He moved out of Slavic Village and bought a house in the posh residential area of Willoughby Hills. "The way I knew how to get the things I wish our family had was through dealing drugs and getting involved in gangs. I bought into that hook, line and sinker. It was my life, my identity, my everything," says Bodziony. That system helped him achieve everything he thought he wanted, but he still had a lot that was missing.

He had achieved everything he wanted out of life, but no matter how much stuff or things or relationships he had, he was miserable.

Bodziony's life began to unravel the night his friend died. He remembers going home and asking God, "If You exist come into my life and do something to change things." God answered his prayer in ways Bodziony never expected. When he walked out of his office his whole life began to fall apart.

Over the next few years, as warehouses and dealers in his network began falling into the hands of law enforcement, Bodziony saw the walls closing in. The system that had brought what he thought he needed eventually brought him to the point where he could listen to God.

Bodziony was sentenced to seven years in prison on drug trafficking charges.

Immediately he began devising a plan for how he could rebuild his empire once he was paroled or released. Then two months into his sentence, a box of used books was circulated among the inmates. Amid worn out copies of romance novels, Bodziony found a well-worn Bible, a book he'd only scarcely glimpsed during his Catholic school days.

"I took it back to my bunk. It was definitely the most surreal season of my life. I would hit the bunk and God would speak," says Bodziony. Astonished by how many lies he bought into, Bodziony began to think there might actually be something to this Bible thing.

Bodziony remembers reading John at 3 a. m. "I am the vine. You are the branches," he read. In that moment, God rewound the clock and took him back to that time in his office and he realized that everything that had happened had led him to that moment. He remembers praying, "I don't have a ton to offer at this moment. I just have shower shoes. But with everything I am as a person I quit. I'll carry my corpse with me the rest of my life. I'll live the way You showed me to live."

There's no denying that something out of the ordinary happened on the bunk that night. As Bodziony walked over to the bathroom he remembers watching his feet because it felt like he was walking on clouds.

Bodziony's sentence was reduced to one and one half years, and oddly he was sent to the Ohio State Penitentiary, the state's maximum-security prison. This puzzling turn of events proved to be miraculous. It was here, at Ohio's only smoke-free prison, that Bodziony quit smoking a habit he'd been trying to kick. It was also at this prison that Bodziony met prison chaplain Leo Feher who disciplined him until his release and modeled for him how to live a life honoring to Christ.

Just a few months after his release from prison an unexpected opportunity to distribute food brought Bodziony back to his old neighborhood. When asked what he'd do with 100 pounds of chicken per week, he knew exactly what he would do. He knew where all the squatter houses and crack houses were. He knew where the homeless were. So he began showing up at the same doors where he'd provided drugs years before. He shared food but more importantly, he shared the gospel and his own story of how God had transformed his life.

Within the first month, nearly 50 people accepted Christ through his outreach, but Bodziony couldn't think of any church where he could send them. No church where they would feel comfortable—no church for addicts and homeless—existed in the city. Bodziony, who had been their drug dealer, would soon be their pastor as the seeds of Forward Church took root in Slavic Village.

Now he's living on mission on the streets of his old neighborhood. Every day Bodziony visits with residents and the homeless, and provides food and encouragement to his new congregation. After all this, Bodziony has learned to never be surprised by how God shapes circumstances in odd ways.

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Adapted from the article *Moving Forward*, by Adam Miller, published in *On Mission* magazine, Winter 2015.

View a video of Jeff Bodziony and his outreach to the people of Slavic Village in Cleveland at [namb.net/Bodziony](http://namb.net/Bodziony).

## **Week 3: Life On Mission: Real Life Faith**

### ***Beyond Bloodlines and Borders: The Story of Dahl and His New American Friends***

Dahl didn't know what to expect. He knew he was in trouble, but wasn't sure how it would all play out. How much was this incident going to cost him? Would he or his son be going to jail? Would they lose their new friends, the Esterlines? He wasn't sure what would happen but what unfolded was far from his expectations. This a snapshot of what can happen when everyday missionaries live out God's mission in their community.

Dahl is the patriarch of a close-knit Nepalese family. Only two years ago he and his wife, Chhali, along with five of their children, their children's spouses and nine of their grandchildren moved from Nepal to Nashville, Tenn.

Over 150 years ago Dahl's ancestors were invited to farm an uninhibited area in the southern part of Bhutan. Many of the Nepalese, including Dahl's family, kept their language and culture intact - never assimilating to Bhutan. However, about 24 years ago, a new king required Nepalese who were not citizens and without the correct paperwork to be sent back to Nepal. Their home country did not want them either. Although they were Nepalese, they had no citizenship there either. Forced to move to a United Nations refugee camp, all 15 of his grandchildren were born there in the years that spanned their stay.

The move to the United States was a hard transition, but they were unexpectedly welcomed to Nashville by a group of friendly strangers. The first person they had met was an Ethiopian caseworker named Eden Medhin who helped them move into their new apartment and made sure they assimilated to their new culture. She also introduced them to missionary pastor, James Harvey.

Dahl and his family were excited to have friendly faces in their new home and asked for them to share their story. Medhin went on to explain the gospel. This is something she is always excited to share.

"Once I was saved I immediately went out to reach the unreached," says Medhin. "I wasn't well trained but I had this passion to be on mission. God saved me and that still burns in my heart. God continues to use me because of His mercy and love."

Dahl and his family were quick to accept this Jesus they were told about. This was the easy part. These new friends had been so sincere and loving, Dahl knew whatever god they worshiped must be a loving god as well. There was one issue though—they would not be baptized.

They were a devout Hindu family and had been for countless generations. They could easily accept Jesus as just another god. But to be baptized they knew they must accept

Jesus as the one and only true God. They were not ready for this yet.

Their home was plastered with other gods who were there to protect them, bring them success, guide them to deeper spiritual knowledge and give them everything else they felt they needed. Now they were being told to cast out their multiple gods for just one God.

Harvey continued to share the gospel over the next few weeks, asking them to repent and be baptized. Again, they continued to accept Jesus as a god but deny Him as the only God.

Harvey prayed about what he should do and felt the Lord tell him they should continue discipling them because this was a “house of peace” (Luke 10:5-6). Dahl and his family were still open to learning so Harvey began praying for a family who would disciple them. Soon, Jan and Debbie Esterline felt called to leave the comfort they had known for years inside the church and take their faith to a new level and disciple this family.

Ordinary people, the Esterlines are quick to point out that everything they do is through the strength and mercy of the Lord. They each have their own jobs but also knew God was calling them to be everyday missionaries. They adopted Dahl and his family as their own – to disciple them, love them and just live life with them. They went shopping with them, watched the grandchildren over the weekends and helped out when they faced medical emergencies or sicknesses.

The Esterlines also continued to meet with them on a weekly basis and shared stories from the Bible. It was simple. They read a story and then asked a few questions to discuss what it meant. Dahl and his family continued to learn more about Jesus and what it meant to follow Him. However, they still hadn't cast out all of their idols. Understanding change is often a process, the Esterlines were patient. Soon they began to see tremendous change in the heart of the family towards Christ.

Then their relationship took a quick turn for the worse, at least, that's what Dahl thought.

Jan Esterline had promised to teach one of Dahl's sons to drive so he could get to work. During the lesson Dahl's son completely totaled the car within the parking lot of the apartment complex. Jan took the damage in stride. After all, they were family and he loved them; accidents and mistakes made no difference.

But Dahl was terrified at what might happen. Moving to America had already been a hard enough change for the family. How much would this mistake cost him? Would the police get involved?

What followed surprised them all.

When the Esterlines continued to show up at their home, offering hugs and telling them they loved them, Dahl was surprised. They had never experienced love and compassion like this before. They charged them nothing for the damages—and no police were called. After everything that happened, the Esterlines still continued to be a part of their lives.

Dahl was blown away and so was the rest of his family. After eight months of discipleship they made the decision to cast out all of their idols and put their faith in the one and only true God.

Dahl insisted on being baptized in living (running) water. This symbolism of living water was important to him—being a farmer for over 50 years. The Esterlines, Medhin, Harvey and several others shared the excitement of the day. Even more exciting though, Dahl’s wife, children and all the grandchildren old enough to understand and accept the gospel, were baptized as well. Three generations receiving the grace, love and acceptance that comes only with being a part of the body of Christ—a family that extends far past bloodlines or borders.

The Esterlines say Dahl and his family have been an even greater blessing to them. “We all need each other so desperately, and so often the body goes off and does things as individuals,” says Jan. “God wants us to be in community.”

Debbie Esterline laughs because for years she would pray to become pregnant and others would even tell her she would one day be a “mother of many.” She never became pregnant, but God has blessed her with more than she could imagine. She watches over and lives life with all nine of Dahl’s grandchildren and truly has become a mother of many.

The Esterlines have now been discipling Dahl and his family for two years. They are looking to take on a new family soon. Dahl will take over the role of discipleship to his family and other Nepalese in the community. Six others from their Nepalese community are preparing for baptism in the same creek he was baptized in a year ago.

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Adapted from the article *Beyond Bloodlines and Borders* by Meredith Yackel, published in *On Mission* magazine, Summer 2015

## **Week 4: Life On Mission: Pitfalls and Plans of Everyday Missionaries**

### ***From Flood to Faith: The Story of Travis Kunckel and Donna Gail***

Travis Kunckel had no idea his selection of a temporary base of operation for his consulting business would lead to the proprietor's spiritual transformation. The same is true of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteers who played a role in her baptism. Throw in a local congregation focused on serving the community and Donna Gail is the newest member of East Boulder Baptist Church.

When Travis Kunckel, a Texas business consultant, contracted for an extended time in Colorado working with multiple clients, he looked for a central lodging location that would afford him flexibility in travel with the benefits of a mountain retreat. He settled on Gail's Patience Clearing Bed & Breakfast in Lefthand Canyon.

Soon Gail noticed Kunckel used his spare time at the inn for Bible study. Intrigued, Donna asked questions. Travis gave gospel conversation answers. "Finally the reality of Christ was so clear to me and I stopped resisting Him," said Donna.

After sharing the gospel, Kunckel continued to disciple Gail on his visits. He gave her a Bible and his wife, Denise, sent Bible studies and other gifts.

In the meantime, God used Baptist Relief volunteers to minister to Gail as well. She was one of the survivors of the 2013 floods that wiped out much of the nearby village of Jamestown and devastated Lefthand Canyon. Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers, hosted by East Boulder Baptist Church, worked to bring help, healing and hope to survivors in the area. East Boulder senior pastor Larry Dramann escorted SBDR assessors to locate ministry sites, but they were unable to travel up the canyon road to rescue Gail. That would take a U.S. Army helicopter.

Gail and Dramann never met, but she began to encounter SBDR volunteers. First she saw volunteers helping her friends in Jamestown. Then she encountered two SBDR volunteers at a FEMA location where she applied for aid. They prayed with her and gave her a Bible.

"It was the most uplifting prayer and they were so gracious," said Gail. "And just like all the volunteers I met, before I can even say thank you they are always thanking me for the opportunity to serve."

By December Gail was determined to find a way to say thank you. So she picked a local church, East Boulder, and attended worship, not knowing the church had served as a command center for SBDR. In fact, the day of her visit, the church thanked volunteers who were leaving to return home.

"I couldn't believe it," said Gail, who cried through most of the service.

"When Donna came up and introduced herself, I said, 'You're the one we were looking for but could not get to,'" said Dramann. "I saw her knees buckle, she was so overwhelmed by God's grace."

Dramann, who has pastored the church 13 years, served with the International Mission Board

for 15 years in southern Africa. He and his son visited Gail and asked about her spiritual journey.

“When it became apparent that she had a genuine relationship with Christ, I asked her, ‘Would you want to be baptized?’ She said, ‘Could I?’ And when she told me about Travis and Denise and their impact on her life I asked if I could give them a call. They said they would come to the baptism.”

On July 2014, Dramann baptized Donna. Travis and his family were by her side. Travis and his family were open to meaningful ministry with Donna but also understood they were just one part of God’s plan to touch Donna’s life; a part of the mosaic of believers working together to carry out God’s mission in Colorado.

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Adapted from the article *From Flood to Faith*, by Joe Conway, published in *On Mission* magazine, Winter 2015.