

Let's pray

A group of seven people, including men and women of various ages, are standing in a circle outdoors in a rural setting. They are all looking down with their hands clasped in prayer. The background shows a dirt ground, a small tree, and a building with corrugated metal walls. The entire image has a warm, orange-toned overlay.

A devotional guide for a week
of prayer for Ethiopia.

May 2023

INTRO

Sharing Their Stories

On New Year's Day 2023, my colleague Justine and I traveled to Ethiopia. Although the sights, sounds, and smells were reminders that we were far from Canada, the people made us feel right at home. Throughout our weeklong visit, we sat with pastors, principals, teachers, parents, and students to listen to their stories. We admired their courage and vulnerability as they shared both challenges and celebrations. They trusted us to listen with open hearts and allowed us the privilege of bringing their stories home to share with you.

I hope you'll be inspired by how God is working through the people and places you'll meet here. They include a principal who shows compassion and care for his students and their families by making home visits, the grade 12 graduates who desire to use their education as a means of helping their struggling community instead of leaving it, and the schools that are inspiring neighbouring villages to establish their own Christ-centred schools.



It was made clear through our conversations that they understood the power of prayer. We were asked repeatedly to join them in praying for their schools, communities, and country. To honour their request, I chose to tell some of their stories in a devotional format and invite you to keep them in your prayers as well.

My prayer for you is that these stories serve as an encouragement for what God can do (and is already doing) in your life, too. May you come to know Him more deeply as you read examples of the people He is working through. As C.S. Lewis said, "Every person you meet is showing you an aspect of God."

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie Koning".

Laurie Koning



ETHIOPIA

Setting the Stage

Ethiopia is known as the “land of origins.” A fitting title, since many of the oldest archaeological discoveries were made here, it’s the source of the Blue Nile, and the birthplace of coffee. Its long history has contributed to a rich and diverse culture of which Ethiopians are proud to share with newcomers.

Part of that rich culture includes its history of Christianity. From the Ethiopian eunuch that met with Peter on his journey, to the present-day Ethiopian Coptic tradition and growing Protestant movement, Christ is alive in Ethiopia! Emerging from the Ethiopian Coptic tradition, Ethiopia Emmanuel United Church is a growing family of 680 Protestant churches and over 544,000 members.

As of 2023, EEUC supports 16 schools with over 4,600 students and 230 teachers. Schools operate on funds from school fees and local church donations. Public schools offer free education, but private schools (including church-run schools) do not receive government funding, and therefore charge school fees. EEUC churches must acquire school licenses from the Ministry of Education and are overseen by government supervisors.

The close relationship between EEUC church and the school they establish means the pastor plays a significant role in spiritual leadership within the school. Each school has a principal and is encouraged to develop their own council or board.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Ethiopia is in the early stages of industrialization and the amount of goods produced in the country cannot satisfy the need of its inhabitants. There is a great

dependence on imported goods and raw materials. Approximately 85% of Ethiopia’s population lives in rural, materially poor regions where most families are farmers. Material poverty has allowed for EEUC to be established in regions like this, but also resulted in many challenges for them. For example, rural regions have limited availability of public schools and even fewer private schools, especially at the secondary level. Many children drop out of school after elementary school simply because of a lack of options for higher education. Most students who attend EEUC schools eventually have to transfer to public schools that teach from a purely secular perspective, thus losing the opportunity to learn from a Christ-centred worldview. Only one EEUC elementary school is connected to a high school.

EEUC schools have a high teacher turnover because they often cannot afford to pay properly qualified teachers. The Ethiopian government requires those teaching grade 7 and up to hold a Bachelor’s degree, and those teaching grade 9 and up to have a Master’s. When EEUC is able to invest in teacher training, they often lose teachers to schools that can pay a better salary. Many of these teachers choose to move to urban centres in search of better opportunities. The teachers who remain can have classes of up to 70 students, decreasing the level of attention and care each student can receive.

Many families struggle to afford uniforms, school fees, school supplies, or even food. It is not uncommon for students to eat their only meal of the day at school. In 2022, the price of food and agricultural inputs such as fertilizer doubled compared to the price a year

earlier, due to inflation (caused by factors such as the ongoing conflict, drought, and the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Ethiopian government draws a distinct line between church and state by mandating that all schools be secular. This makes incorporating Christ into education particularly difficult. Children cannot pray or hold their own Bible during class.

Yet EEUC schools are finding ways to incorporate the Gospel into all parts of education! Strategies such as focusing on Biblical values, after-school programs, and voluntary clubs are some of the ways EEUC schools are bringing the Gospel into education. Their high standards, focus on values, and supporting their communities attract families from diverse religious backgrounds. EEUC churches are well known and respected and therefore so are their schools.

But the threat of closure is real. Remaining secular is only the beginning of a host of complicated rules that are in place in order for the church to acquire and maintain a license. For example, schools need to build at least 1-2 classrooms each year, on average. (Every region has its own rules and enforces them to varying degrees.) When schools are found to be noncompliant with any ministry regulations they can be (and have been in the past) threatened that their licenses will not be renewed.

Even though schools are required to be secular, conflict between religious groups continues to plague the entire nation, to varying degrees. The majority of children at EEUC schools are not EEUC church members; they are Orthodox/Coptic Christian or Muslim. There are more than 80 different nationalities that have their own language, culture, and sometimes faith in Ethiopia. This amount of diversity causes conflict both inside and outside the school walls.

EEUC sees conflict and violence everywhere in their nation. With an increase in education, more students are graduating with skills to get good jobs, but still see the problems increase. Because education alone isn't enough. Only Christ can transform a heart, and only when education incorporates the Gospel are children equipped to seek justice with discernment, treat their neighbours with compassion, or build up communities with love.

CANADIAN SCHOOLS ARE STEPPING UP

For the 2022-2023 school year, EduDeo invited Canadian Christian schools to join the *Made to Thrive* campaign to support the construction of nine classrooms and one dining hall, as well as tuition bursaries for vulnerable children. And not just that, they were also encouraged to partner with them in mutual prayer, friendship, and learning.

You can learn more about the Made to Thrive campaign by visiting our website: www.edudeo.com/made-to-thrive.



**made to
THRIVE**

DAY 01

Taking Time to be Present

Scripture focus: Romans 12:9-21

Ethiopians take coffee very seriously.

And rightly so! Ethiopia is the originator and largest producer of coffee in Africa, it relies on coffee for around 60% of foreign income, and an estimated 15 million of its people count on some aspect of coffee production to earn a living.

But their coffee culture is about more than just business. How you drink it and who you drink it with are part of Ethiopian coffee culture. There is only one “real” way to drink coffee, according to Ethiopians: black, in small cups (called *sini*), and with other people. Coffee ceremonies are considered to be the most important social occasion in many villages, and it's a major sign of respect and friendship to get an invitation. Drinking coffee is synonymous with building relationships.

Every coffee ceremony involves being present with others. Friends and family meet in a restaurant, in someone's house, or simply on the roadside. Their conversation is unobstructed by screens or microphones. They drink the same coffee, smell the same incense, and feel the same African heat.

Another important ingredient in coffee ceremonies is time. The traditional ceremony involves processing the raw, unwashed coffee beans into finished cups which are served to guests in three rounds. This can last up to three hours! And that's important because time is essential to building relationships.

We are bound to the limitations of time. We don't have a say in how much we get, only in

how we use it. Our culture and context affect these decisions. Africans highly value relationships and don't constrain themselves to strict schedules like North Americans often do. This allows space for relationships to grow. “Africa time” means schedules are flexible. Letting a conversation finish naturally or welcoming unexpected visits from a friend are more important than maintaining a timetable. Mitiku, one of our hosts, put it so well when he said, “Relationships cannot be on a schedule even though they take time.”

There's no doubt about it: God created us to live in relationship with one another.

Being present and taking time for others is perhaps most important during periods of difficulty. Consider Job in the Bible. His life was difficult, to put it lightly. When he lost his family, his livestock, his crops, and his health, his friends spent seven days sitting with him - in *silence*.



Simply spending time with him was important. They couldn't take the pain away, but they could mourn alongside him. That was the best they could offer.

But of course it's not just in grief that we need each other. In Romans 12:15, we are called to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn". Celebration and grief are two opposite ends of the spectrum of human experience, and we are called to be there for each other for everything in between. **This is the ministry of presence. Taking time to be with people allows us the opportunity to be used as a tool in the hand of God.**



Let's pray

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow your love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal
life.*

(Prayer Attributed to St. Francis)

DAY 02

Excellence for God's Glory

Scripture focus: Daniel 6:1-5

Ethiopia Emmanuel United Church (EEUC) serves 16 schools throughout Ethiopia. Let's go on a tour of three of them.

If you start in Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa and drive southeast for two hours, you'll reach a town called Wonji Shewa.

Most families in this community are materially poor (which is true for all of the towns where EEUC schools are located). Although Wonji Shewa is historically known for its sugar cane plantations, the vast majority of adults today are elderly and retired and unable to contribute to the local economy.

EEUC has established two schools here: an elementary school for kindergarten to grade 8 and a secondary school for grades 9-12. The total student population is 900.

In 2022, secondary students in Wonji Shewa successfully completed national examinations for the first time and moved on to post-secondary education. This was such an accomplishment that when a neighbouring village heard about it, they reached out to EEUC to see if they would consider establishing a school in their region as well! Conversations are ongoing about how opportunities for a quality Christ-centred education can be expanded.

If you continue your journey south for another three hours, you'll reach the town of Arsi Negele.

Original inhabitants of Arsi Negele were claymakers, and people of low social status. Now, most rely on agriculture. Although there



is a small population of Christians, the majority are Muslim. EEUC has a school here that serves 534 students from kindergarten to grade 6.

When the school was first started by EEUC, community members did not want to send their children because they assumed Christianity was going to be forced on them. However, when they realized this wasn't happening and saw the success of the students, enrolment increased. Not only that, but many Muslim parents who originally sent their children because of the quality of education are now coming to Christ.

Both Wonji Shewa and Arsi Negele schools have gained the respect and admiration of their communities because of their high quality of education, their care for their students, and their focus on values instead of just academics. God is using this to bring people to Christ.

The way in which a quality, Christ-centred education is impacting these communities reminds me of Daniel. Daniel lived during

the time of the Israelite exile in Babylon. The Babylonians were hostile to the Jewish religion, and yet Daniel repeatedly stood firm as a follower of God in both words and actions. He recognized that a commitment to excellence can serve as a witness of his faith.

In Daniel 6:3 we read, “Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” Because of his excellence and faithfulness, he was well respected and blessed with influence even over people who hated his God.

God is using these schools to transform communities. He is opening doors for students and their families to receive the transforming power of the Gospel through a quality education.



And God can use you! May you be encouraged by how the faithful witness of these schools is influencing their communities and ask Him to reveal opportunities for you to impact others, too.

Let's pray

Dear Lord, how we praise and thank You, and worship You for Your greatest of all gifts, in sending the Lord Jesus to be our Saviour and Friend and for dying in our place on the cross, to pay the price for our sins.

Thank You that when two or three are gathered together in Your name You are there in our midst. And thank You Father, for the many blessings that You shower over each one of us day by day. Give us grateful hearts and a willingness and desire to share with others the grace and mercy that You have showered on us day by day, without measure.

Help us Lord, to demonstrate Your great love and grace to all those that cross our paths today. May we be ready and willing to be faithful witnesses of You and to give an answer for what we believe, so that many may also come to know You and to accept Jesus as their own personal Saviour and friend, because they saw Him in us.

Help us to uplift other members of Your body and in all things to be Your hands and feet, Your eyes and ears, and Your heart of love in all we say and do today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 03

Suffering Together

Scripture focus: Galatians 6:1-10

The word “compassion” comes from the Latin root “passio”, which means to suffer, and “com”, meaning together – to suffer together.

Leul Abate lives and works in Ethiopia, and is an inspiring example of compassion. He has spent the last seven years as principal at Arsi Negele School. He has a calm disposition and a warm personality. When we asked him what he loves about teaching, he broke into a bright smile and simply said, “I just love kids.”

Leul is passionate about giving students their best chance at success and sharing the good news of Jesus with them. Each student is important to him, and so are their families. When he hears about stories of struggling families, his heart breaks for them. In a way, he suffers with them. He doesn’t just bring Jesus to them in words, but in action. He even makes house calls.

Teachers make daily personal sacrifices for their students. In regions where EEUC schools are, there are few resources available, so teacher turnover is high. Those who stay endure long hours, poor pay, and large class sizes – sometimes over 70 students. They would be paid more elsewhere, but they choose to stay because they believe in what God is doing in EEUC schools. They know it’s worth it when they see the transformation that happens through a Christ-centred education.

Galatians 6:2 calls God’s people to carry each other burdens. Literally? Well, maybe! But in this particular passage, Paul is referring to temptation, hurt, or heartache.

When we choose to help someone by entering the messiness and heartache of someone else’s life, we choose to shoulder the burden alongside of them. This can be painful and difficult, but when we work together, we can accomplish much more than we could alone.

From weeping alongside of those who were grieving (John 11:33-35) to touching those who were outcasts (Mark 1:41) to healing the sick (Matthew 14:14), **Jesus is our best example of what compassion looks like.** He carried the ultimate burden by shouldering our sins and dying on the cross.

Praise God for educators like Leul who are being used by God to bring this life-changing truth to children through Christ-centred education.



Let's pray

There are seasons when the needs around us seem to far exceed the resources within us. Where else can we go but to you?

Lord Jesus, it's only because you bore the burden of the law's demands and judgment for us; only because you say to us, "Cast all your care upon me, for I care for you"; only because you call to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" that we can continue to show up and shoulder the many burdens of others.

Grant us grace not to be afraid of the emotional messiness that certain burdens bring. Help us know how to rely on your presence more than we rely on mere words. Help us to understand our limits, but even more so, help us be very aware of your limitless mercy, grace, power, and peace.

Amen.

Adapted from "A Prayer for Grace to Bear One Another's Burdens" by Scotty Smith



DAY 04

Stewarding God's Gifts

Scripture focus: 1 Peter 4:7-11

Today's story is from a conversation I had long before I set foot on Ethiopian soil. As part of my preparation for the *Made to Thrive* campaign, I spoke with recent graduates (and best friends) Samrawit & Semira in August of 2022. They traveled 90 minutes from their homes in Wonji Shewa to Adama to meet me over Zoom.

They are confident. They are intelligent. They are Spirit-filled. And they want to change their world.

They are members of the first class from Wonji Shewa Secondary School to sit for government exams. This was an opportunity they don't take for granted.

Samrawit moved to Wonji Shewa after her dad died when she was almost 2 years old. Her mom struggled to pay school fees, so she moved in with her aunt. She often didn't have much time to study because she was responsible for helping with her aunt's business.

Although her situation was challenging, Samrawit appreciates the opportunity she had to go to school. **"I love my education. It is the only thing that can help me achieve my goals."** Her goals include studying foreign politics because so she can help Ethiopia develop by building stronger international relationships. She has seen firsthand the struggles of the people in her own village (like unemployment, lack of education, material poverty) and believes she can help make change.

Semira grew up in Wonji Shewa where she lives with her family. She started her schooling at a government (public) school but then switched to Wonji Shewa Secondary School where they had better teachers who could pay more attention to students and better prepare them for university entrance exams. Semira wants to be a psychologist with a focus on youth counselling. She knows the challenges teens face – whether social, spiritual or financial – and wants to walk alongside them in those difficult years.

For both Samrawit and Semira, success means using what you've been given to serve other people. They told me it was their teachers who taught them not to be selfish with what they accomplish. This echoes what we read in 1 Peter 4:10: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." **Both girls see the change needed around them and have been empowered to use their gifts to take an active role in that change.**



Samrawit and Semira wouldn't have been able to continue their education if it wasn't for bursaries provided through EEUC and partners like EduDeo. These bursaries help vulnerable students to pay for expenses like school fees, uniforms, and other schools supplies.

Pray that God will work mightily to keep more students like Samrawit and Samira in school so they can be equipped and empowered to be agents of change. For it's children – the next generation of leaders – who will carry the Gospel into their communities, transforming hearts and lives.



Let's
pray

God of love and of life, let us take time to look deep within ourselves and discover the gifts you have blessed us with. May our education help us discover where our strengths and interests lie. May we take the time to consider how we can best use these gifts and may we always be open to the direction of the Spirit. Give us the courage to show others the talents they have as well. Help us find ways to serve others in the community and in so doing build up your kingdom. Help us to never forget the love you have for each of us. We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Adapted from: https://www.archwinnipeg.ca/media/youth/docs/youth_resource-1274191221.pdf

DAY 05

Making Room for a Bright Future

Scripture focus: Jeremiah 29:1-19

A common struggle amongst Ethiopian schools is a lack of classrooms. In order to comply with government regulations, schools need to build at least 1-2 classrooms each year, on average. Schools are required to have separate classrooms for both the official language and the local regional one. In older grades, they must also provide specialized facilities like a library, dining hall, and computer lab.

Government supervisors often turn a blind eye if public schools don't meet requirements, but aren't as lenient with private, church-run schools.

But since these schools don't receive funds from the government, they are at a disadvantage. It is not financially viable for churches to build new classrooms each year. They try to keep tuition costs low for vulnerable families, but this means there's less available funds to pay teachers, and even less to build new classrooms.

If a school does not follow regulations, they could lose their license and be shut down. This means students have to transfer to a government school that is secular and provides a lower quality education.

Remaining open means keeping students in Christ-centred school as long as possible.

Some schools have found creative short-term solutions for maintaining relationships with their students after they age out. For example, Teji School currently only serves students from kindergarten through grade 6.



In grade 7, students have to attend local government schools, but they are still welcome to use Teji's library to study and attend after-school programs. In this way, Teji staff can maintain connections and provide students with support they may not receive in government schools.

Why make the extra effort? The Teji staff see the impact Christ-centred education is having on their students. Not only that, but they also know that keeping students in EEUC schools can impact the rest of their life.

School leaders have big dreams, hopes, and prayers for their schools and students. And God has plans for them. We don't always know exactly when their prayers will be answered, but the hope God provides keeps them going every day. They trust that God will provide for the students even when they leave, and that God hears their cries to provide for their schools.

Because above all, Christ-centred education instills hope. Although we can't see the road ahead, we can be confident that God has plans for his people – plans to give them hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).



Let's pray

Today we encourage you to review the week and write your own prayer together.

Suggested prayer requests include:

- That EEUC schools' efforts to be more Christ-centered would be fruitful
- That EEUC schools would have the resources to continue adding classrooms and facilities like libraries, IT rooms, and dining halls
- That the government would ease restrictions on talking about faith in the classroom
- That EEUC teachers would find creative ways to bring Jesus to their students
- That EEUC schools would trust in the Lord to provide resources for food programs

We would love to share your prayers with our partners in Ethiopia, EEUC. Send them (written or recorded) to schools@edudeo.com.