



BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

January 2024

Editor Janelle Daum

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“For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.”

II Corinthians 2:9

We have been talking about suffering as Paul describes it in II Corinthians. Paul has talked about his suffering for the cause of Christ, and we have talked about how Paul, in his integrity as an apostle, kept the Corinthians from greater suffering. Sin causes suffering in our lives. How do we deal with that? More specifically, what are we called to do to help those who are repentant for their sin but are still

suffering from the results of sin? Do we have any responsibilities to them? Is there anything we should do to help ease their suffering or to keep them from suffering more?

The most important subject in II Corinthians 2 is forgiveness and how it helps to ease suffering. Paul has described to us, in vv.5-8, how forgiveness limits the emotional and physical impacts of sin. Now we see how he completes this discussion by showing us how forgiveness limits the spiritual impact of suffering.

There's a Spanish story of a father and son who had become estranged. The son ran away and the father set out to find him. He searched for months, but to no avail. Finally, in a last desperate attempt to find him, the father put an ad in a Madrid newspaper: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father." On Saturday 800 Paco's showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

Think about the spiritual suffering described in that story. It makes me wonder how many more Paco's are out there yearning for forgiveness. That's the spiritual impact of sin and suffering.

I recently read of how King Louis XII of France treated his enemies after he ascended to the throne. Before coming to power, he had been cast into prison and kept in chains. Later when he did become king, he was urged to seek revenge but he refused. Instead, he prepared a scroll on which he listed all who had perpetrated crimes against him. Behind every man's name he placed a cross in red ink. When the guilty heard about this, they feared for their lives and fled. Then the King explained, "The cross which I drew beside each name was not a sign of punishment, but a pledge of forgiveness extended for the sake of the crucified Savior, who upon the cross forgave His enemies and prayed for them."

King Louis XII was a man who understood the spiritual impact that he could have through forgiveness. Paul wanted the Corinthians to have that same spiritual impact in the life of the sinner. It was a question of obedience: *“For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything,”* v.9. This test was going to show Paul what their hearts were like spiritually. It was a tough test. In v.10 he tells them that everything hinges on what they decided to do: *“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.”* The sense of v.10 is that Paul has already forgiven the man. Will they also forgive? Will they follow Paul’s lead and avoid the spiritual problems that stem from a lack of forgiveness?

The problem is that refusing to forgive a repentant sinner is sinful itself, *“...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs,”* v.11. Satan schemes to get us into that kind of situation so that he can take advantage of us and work all kinds of havoc in the church. The spiritual impact can devastate individuals and the church as a whole. The effect of the sin is bad enough, but when you compound it by refusing to forgive when forgiveness is sought you compound the effect exponentially. The only way to limit that spiritual impact is to forgive. Forgiveness gives us the chance to get back on the road to growing in the Lord again.

The sad truth is that sin hurts everyone. It hurts the sinner and it hurts all those around him who love him and have a relationship with him, whether physical or spiritual or emotional. Sin damages that relationship on every level. The Corinthians were having a hard time forgiving this particular man. They had their role as disciplinarians down real well, they just had not learned the role of forgiveness, and they were crucifying a repentant sinner whom God had already forgiven, and they were destroying themselves.

The simple answer to limit all of that suffering is to learn how to forgive, to learn how to let go of all those wrongs that take place, and to let God take care of it. It's difficult to do but it can happen. Take the Hatfield's and McCoy's for a good example. Their names hit the front pages of newspapers when the Hatfield clan feuded with the McCoy clan from across the border in Kentucky. Historians disagree on the cause of the feud which lasted 10 years. Some cite Civil War tensions: McCoy's sympathized with the Union, Hatfield's with the Confederacy. Others say it began when the McCoy's blamed the Hatfield's for stealing hogs. As many as 100 men, women and children died.

In May 1976, Jim McCoy and Willis Hatfield -- the last two survivors of the original families -- shook hands at a public ceremony dedicating a monument to six of the victims. McCoy died February 11, 1984, at age 99. He bore no grudges -- and had his burial handled by the Hatfield Funeral Home in Toler, Kentucky.

All of that needless suffering and death took place because they couldn't forgive. Many times the church is not much better. We cause untold sorrow and suffering for ourselves and others. The Christlike answer, and the only answer, is... FORGIVE. Forgiveness unlocks the grace of God in our lives and brings God people together in a united front to achieve His will and His purposes in the world. That is God's call to us today, "Come together, right now, in the love of Christ."

Blessings,

Pastor Randy

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR JANUARY AND BEYOND

EVENTS CALENDAR 2024:

Sunday's

9:30 a.m. Worship Service

10:30 a.m. Fellowship

10:45 a.m. Sunday School for the Whole Family

Wednesday's

6:30 p.m. Awana Ages 3 - 8th Grade

7:30 p.m. Youth Group 9th - 12th grade

Thursday's

1 p.m. Women's Bible Study at Various Homes

4:30 p.m. Women's Bible Study at Various Homes

Saturday's

January 6, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

January 20, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

Upcoming Events

Monday, January 1, New Year's Day

Tuesday, January 9, 2 p.m. Discipleship Team Meeting

Saturday, January 13, 8 a.m. Leadership Team meeting

Sunday, January 21, Newsletter Articles are Due

Tuesday, January 23, 7 p.m. Outreach Team Meeting

MISSIONARY UPDATES

AMANDA BENSON - PHILIPPINES



December 1, 2023

GRATEFUL!

Thanksgiving was a week ago, and as I was reflecting on the past year, I have realized that I am so grateful for so many things. It has been a hard year in many ways, but it has also been good. This year is one I would not choose to repeat (if I had that option), but God has also been showing me that I should not avoid hard things in my life, since it is through the hard things that so much growth happens. Here are some things from the last year that I am grateful for:

Our House!

For Thanksgiving, Marissa and I were able to have 14 people around our dinner table. This was not possible in the house we were living in last year. Every time someone asks me if I like the house, I say “for sure!” It has been such a huge blessing to be where we are and have the space we have to serve new staff. There are things that I wasn’t expecting with the way our house operates, but God has taught me that His vision for my ministry might be different than my vision for

my ministry, but His is infinitely better! This last year, God provided exactly what we needed to fill this house...from beds to furniture to the money to buy what was lacking. When I look at this, I cannot doubt that God's hand is on this ministry.

My Nephew's Healing

Last January, my oldest nephew, Ethan, was diagnosed with aggressive brain cancer. He was treated at St. Jude hospital, and just a couple months ago was declared cancer-free. He just went back for his first follow-up scan this week. His scans were clear and his blood work showed his body is "fully recovered"! I'm thankful for the chance I got to visit him in March and last summer and to journey with him through prayer. God has been so good in healing Ethan and providing the people at the right time to help in this process. It has also been amazing to see how God has used this to impact so many lives!

My Work at Faith Academy

I am in my second year as Vice Principal at Faith Academy, and I am loving it. It seems like a sweet spot for me – I still get to teach, but I also get to help lead the middle school. I am growing in my leadership abilities, as well as my ability to disciple and discipline students. I'm so grateful to be working somewhere that I know God has called me, where I belong, and where the Lord is using me to make an eternal impact.

Growth

The last year has been hard for me in a lot of personal ways as I have learned more about myself, my story, and my relationships. This process has been challenging and not fun, but I have also seen the growth and impact it has had on my life and ministry. God has

brought some people into my life to guide me in this process and speak truth and point me continually to Christ. And because of that, I am becoming a healthier, more Christ-like person. This journey is far from over, but God has been so, so faithful in it. I have known His presence and care in a way I never have before.

Freedom

I spent the last week in Jakarta, Indonesia, at the International Christian Educator's Conference. What a blessing and encouragement it was to fellowship with other people in similar situations as me from across the world! In our closing session, we heard from a head of school in a country where they have to keep their school underground because of the government. They are frequently moving buildings to avoid being found out and are spread out in small groups all over the city. This head of school's passion for providing a Christian education, even in such conditions, was inspiring. It made me realize what a privilege it is for me to be able to serve freely at a Christian school where I have resources and stability. What an honor it is to be able to openly disciple my students to follow Christ!

You!

I am so thankful for the team of supporters that is around me, encouraging me, praying for me, and giving financially. I could never do this without all of you. Each one of you plays a vital role in the ministry that God has given me. I know I don't connect with all of you often, but know I am so humbled and grateful that you are giving to the Lord to support what He is allowing me to be a part of here in Southeast Asia.

The Lord

As I sit and reflect on my relationship with the Lord over the past

year, I am brought to tears. This year of struggles on many fronts has brought a depth and dependence to my walk with God that I have never known before. I have realized how incredibly dependent I am on Him. I have grown in my understanding of what it means for God to be my counselor. I have seen that Jesus, who suffered willingly, holds me as I suffer and shows care and understanding. I have seen Him provide for me in ways I never would have sought out on my own. He has taught me how to fight spiritual battles and has fought for me. He has gently corrected me and is in the process of making me more and more like Him. I have a greater awareness of the fact that I am nothing without Him. I am ever so grateful for the salvation He has given me to free me from my own self.

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As I move into this last month of the year, I want to continue to reflect on who God is and all that He has done. I know this next month is going to go by so quickly, with the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. May this season for you be filled with gratitude and joy as we focus on the fact that God Himself came down to Earth as a baby to live as one of us so that through His life, we might also have life.

Amanda

### ***Praises***

- I had a great trip to Jakarta, Indonesia for the International Christian Educator's Conference. I'm thankful for the opportunity I had to meet other educators in similar situations as me as well as to learn and grow.
- I'm so thankful for all the ways that God has provided and been faithful, as mentioned above.

## ***Prayer Requests***

- Pray for wisdom and balance of time as we finish this semester. We only have two weeks left, and I have a lot to do, between teaching and planning for Outdoor Ed. Pray I can get a lot done and stay focused.
- I will be going to the US for Christmas, due to my dad's health not being great. He has dementia, on top of other health issues. Pray for safe travels and a good quality time with my family.
- Continue praying for Outdoor Ed. I have a lot of planning to do and have finally started moving forward with some decisions. There is still a lot that needs to be worked out.
- Pray that the Lord would continue to give me opportunities to disciple my students and point them to Christ.

# HARLAN MOSS - PRISON LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY



**December 2023**

“Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” I Peter 3:15

We find ourselves in the last month of the year! Many things have changed in our world in the past year, and will continue to change. A passage that has been on my mind lately, is Hebrews 12:25-29. It says that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. God, the Word of God, and the Kingdom of God will remain unshaken. Thankfully God is dependable, and His promises never fail! This is the hope I can give men in the prison.

I visit with Roger weekly, who has been locked up since he was sixteen (now he is 19). He is a young Christian and wants to meet regularly. Roger told me in one of our visits that someone told him when he first went to juvenile detention at the age of 16, “When you get out of prison in 16 or 20 years you don’t want to have the mindset of a 16-year-old that you came in with! Therefore, keep maturing in your thinking and actions.” I told Roger that was very good advice to remember. He said that is why he wants to meet weekly.

Sam told me about the trauma he and his old girlfriend went through

after he had only been out of prison for a month. His girlfriend had been seeing another man who helped her get out of her depression when Sam went to prison the first time. When Sam got out she wanted to be with him instead of the other man. The other man shot himself in front of her. After the police came Sam cleaned up the blood and flesh in her house from the suicide. That trauma brought him back to doing drugs, which brought him back to prison. He is thankful that he came back to prison to stop the drug use. We talked about how to get over this trauma by prayer and saturating his mind by reading and listening to the Psalms. A book I read by Wayne E. Keast (a retired military chaplain), titled, "Biblical Cures for the Wounded Spirit", gave me insight to help counsel people with PTSD. After visiting for more than an hour and praying together Sam was able to smile again, thankful for the opportunity to meet! I will continue to meet with him weekly.

Jack was born in Burma, and at the age of ten, his family was chased off their land. For the next seven years his family lived in the jungle. They got help from some food support agencies. When he was seventeen they moved to America. He started working in one of the factories but started drinking too much. That is how he ended up in prison. Jack grew up in a Christian family, so he knows the Lord. Please pray for healing for him because he is dealing with health issues which make him very tired and it is hard for him to consecrate when he reads the Bible. There are a few more people from Burma in prison, and their language is Karen. If anyone knows how I can get a few Karen language Bibles let me know.

Thank you all for your prayers and financial support! God has led us through another year, and I know He will be faithful to lead and guide us through the coming year!

Have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year! Harlan

## **PAUL & JANET HARKNESS - AWANA**



**December 14, 2023**

Dear Friends,

We are thankful for your prayers over these last 12 months. You all have been very faithful in this. We have been able to carry on in ministry because of your prayers.

We have seen six Awana Clubs begin this fall. We have had numerous conversations with pastors on the subject of child discipleship. We have encouraged many children's workers in their calling.

Again, thank you for praying for us this year. Are you with us in 2024? Well again, thank you!

We will be taking some accumulated vacation days starting December 16, then, Awana will be closed down for the remainder of 2023. We will be back at it again on Tuesday, January 2, 2024.

Praising Him for you. Merry Christmas!

# SEND INTERNATIONAL

**December 14, 2023**

A Year End Story | Engage Newsletter

Dear Friend,

“Do I have to wear a hijab to school?” Inaya\*, a 15-year-old, had just moved to the U.S. from the Middle East. A new culture, new language, and new school. Would wearing a Muslim head scarf make it hard for her to fit in?

Many refugee families like Inaya’s cling tightly to their faith. It’s one of the few parts of their identity left. But for Inaya and her family—two parents and six kids—God was already at work.

When Inaya’s family arrived in the U.S., they were welcomed by Amir, a man who had once emigrated from their area of the world. Amir was a Christian and part of a SEND team seeking to show the tangible, powerful love of God among immigrants and refugees. As Amir talked with Inaya’s dad, Nasir, he saw that God was already preparing him.

Nasir had grown disillusioned with Islam, but in his homeland, questioning was dangerous. “For six years, I have been on a journey,” Nasir said. Now, that journey had brought him into contact with SEND workers who were welcoming, open, and cross-culturally trained to engage Muslims in spiritual conversations.

Amir invited Nasir to a church plant of fellow immigrants that partners with SEND International. There, Nasir and his son heard the gospel in Arabic and met Muslim-background believers from all over the world. He saw two teenagers get baptized and asked about it. Amir explained that they were demonstrating their faith in Jesus. Before

Nasir left that day, he said, “I want to do that.”

Nasir and his family continue attending church services and events. Nasir is reading an Arabic Bible on his phone every day. His son has also expressed interest in the gospel.

**Resettlement isn't easy.** Nasir's family lived in a hotel until an apartment became available. Their current home lacks a fridge. Inaya and her siblings walk two miles to school because there is not enough room on the buses. And they are deeply immersed in learning English.

**The challenge is to help them see God in the midst of it all.**

SEND's team in this city and across the U.S. works tirelessly with newly arrived families, helping set up their homes, enroll their kids in school, transport them to appointments, and fill out paperwork. In the process, the families invite our team into their homes and lives. As they share their struggles, SEND workers offer to pray for them. “Never has a Muslim said ‘no’ to prayer,” says Lydia, who is helping to serve Nasir and his family.

Jesus speaks about moments like these in John 4:35b when he says, “Lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.” **God is preparing people like Nasir to hear his truth and respond-and He is doing this around the world, even amid crisis, war, and disaster.**

For over 75 years, SEND International has responded to the doors God is opening in strategic places and people groups worldwide. Together, we can launch qualified, passionate missionaries from all over the world to live among the least reached and work to see a local church planted. We can prepare and train resilient workers to learn languages and cultures, and to go to the hard places of the



world where nearly 3.4 billion unreached people live.

We can do this vital work because you are part of the harvest of workers God uses to fuel our efforts. SEND International is a faith-based ministry that depends on the generosity of Jesus' followers with a heart for the Great Commission. During a time when it seems the world is desperate for hope and peace, **now is the time to give and pray** so that we can meet more people like Nasir.

In Nasir's home country, he couldn't ask questions about Jesus. But God has brought him to a place where he is free to ask and has surrounded him with people who can point him to Jesus. SEND's team hopes to communicate that, yes, there is freedom in America. But true freedom is in Christ. **Will you help us send this message by giving today?**

Sincerely,

Michelle Atwell

C.E.O., SEND U.S

## THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS



The **Voice**  
of the **Martyrs**

**December 14, 2023 - PERSECUTION & PRAYER ALERT**

**INDIA: 42 Christians Questioned, Resulting in Several Being Charged**

Sources: Release International, OpIndia, Indian Express, Outlook India

Police in the Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh detained 42 Christians and formally charged nine of them after receiving a complaint about an alleged “Christian conversion racket.” The accusations outlined tactics purported to be used by the believers in leading members of the state’s impoverished and tribal communities to convert to Christianity.

Based on the complaint, police brought the detained Christians in for questioning. Of these 42 believers, 27 of them were reported to be pastors. Officials also confiscated large quantities of religious literature - along with laptops, cell phones, audio recordings and more. Following the interrogations, nine of the detained believers have been charged under the state’s anti-conversion law. While this legislation is intended to prevent conversion by force or deception, in

reality, it outlaws Christians from sharing the hope of the Gospel to spiritually seeking community members.

Since the anti-conversion legislation was passed three years ago, nearly 400 followers of Jesus have been arrested in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Most of the arrested believers are Protestant pastors and church members. Currently, India's anti-conversion laws have been enacted in 12 of the country's 28 states, and there is pressure to introduce a similar law on a national level.

**Prayerfully uphold our Christian brothers and sisters in India who have been arrested for sharing their faith. Pray that the governing laws of Uttar Pradesh and other Indian states would be used in ways that also recognize and support the constitutional rights of the country's minority groups, so freedom of expression and religion may be experienced by all citizens. In the interim, pray that despite the threat of opposition and false charges, Christians throughout the nation will continue reaching out to those around them with the compassion of Christ, in keeping with the centrality of the Gospel message.**

### **SUDAN: Humanitarian Aid Denied to Muslim-Background Believers**

Source: Mission Network News

Now in its eighth month, Sudan's civil war has displaced over six million people, many of whom were forced to take refuge in camps where food and other basic resources are scarce. Some humanitarian assistance has been provided to the country, which is then distributed through smaller local aid groups. According to a Christian ministry worker in the region, this aid has been denied to some displaced followers of Jesus.

The ministry worker reports that when local aid distributors - who are typically Islamic - realize someone has come to faith in Christ after leaving Islam, they refuse to give them food, even though the rations have been supplied by the United Nations and other international organizations to help all who are being severely affected by the war. Some of the Muslim distributors believe it is their duty to withhold any means of compassion towards those who have left Islam.

To overcome this problem, Christian ministries are endeavouring to provide practical relief to believers in areas where the humanitarian aid is being denied. However, the need is enormous and the resources extremely limited.

**Please uphold the war-torn nation of Sudan in your prayers, and its many displaced people, asking the Lord to minister His peace and provision in this deeply divided part of the world. Pray for the ongoing efforts of humanitarian organizations to help all citizens in need, and that these necessary provisions will also be fairly distributed to our suffering family in Christ. May those opposing the displaced Christians - and trying to prevent them from receiving greatly needed humanitarian aid - come to personally experience God's transforming love and forgiveness, which are available to all through Christ's redemptive work on the cross.**

## **REPORT UPDATE**

### **CHINA: Further Repercussions Follow Church Raid**

Sources: ChinaAid, Early Rain Covenant Church

Over five years ago, the Early Rain Covenant Church in China was raided, leading to multiple arrests. In the years that have followed, the Chinese Communist Party has made a concerted effort to harass

the members of this Christian community in an attempt to completely shut down the church.

More recently, on October 28th, the church held a graduation ceremony in a hotel conference room for the students of a small Bible college it operates. However, upon being declared an “illegal” gathering, the event was also raided by the authorities.

During the raid, a church deacon named Jia Xuewei suffered a broken rib from being beaten by a national security agent. Even though the Christian leader has filed a complaint against his assailant, the intimidation and persecution committed by Communist officials have continued. Due to the pressure officials have placed on his landlord, Jia was forced to move out of his home. At least two other church leaders have faced similar circumstances, for their lease agreements were likewise terminated. In a separate incident, Preacher Ding Shuqi’s family had their water supply cut off in the officials’ attempt to force them to leave their home.

On December 9th, which is the anniversary date of the initial raid that took place five years ago, Chengdu authorities deployed numerous tactics to keep church members from participating in online activities, including warnings by telephone or in person, stalking, power outages and forcible detentions. Several of the church’s leaders were also detained for interrogation. While some were released later that night, Jia Xuewei has been forced to remain in “administrative detention” until December 22nd. Additionally, Preacher Dai Zhichao, who was arrested on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” is currently being held in the Chengdu Detention Centre.

**Please prayerfully remember each of these detained church leaders, asking the Lord to sustain them in the midst of this trying situation by increasing their strength, love and patient**

**endurance. Continue to pray for the other members of the Early Rain Covenant Church, including those who have been displaced from their homes, as they face repeated intimidation and harassment from the authorities. May these believers receive greatly needed wisdom, guidance and peace as they faithfully endeavour to continue their ministry activities despite the government's unrelenting opposition.**

## CRISIS IN UKRAINE



**December 12, 2023**

From one of our non-profit partners in Ukraine, Heart for Orphans:

“We are the Bondarts family, and we have been serving orphans for 19 years. Currently, 16 children live with us, including 10 minors. twenty-one children have lived in our family over the years. We live in the Volyn region near the city of Lutsk in the village of Garazdzha.

We sincerely thank you for the financial support of our family. This is a great blessing for us, at a time when there is a war in our country, prices for all products have risen and services have also become more expensive. Thanks to this money, we can provide our children with everything they need.

For example, our 5-year-old, Karina, got sick unexpectedly. She has a brain tumor, which is a big challenge for us. She is currently undergoing treatment in Kyiv, and we need financial support there as well. We sincerely thank everyone who donates. May God bless you all!”

## **Missionary Contact Info.**

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Go to [https://www.awana.org/  
missionary/harkness/](https://www.awana.org/missionary/harkness/)

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### **How To Give To North American Baptist**

#### **Missionaries:**

**Step 1:** Go to the NAB's  
new missions webpage  
**nabonmission.org.**

**Step 2:** Click on the  
“missionaries” label.

**Step 3:** Click on the national  
missionary to whom you would  
like to designate your support.

**Step 4:** Click on the “give to..”  
button on the national workers  
page.

**Step 5: Fill out the form.** All  
gifts given through the NAB are  
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**BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH  
PRESENTING A CHANGELESS CHRIST FOR A CHANGING WORLD**