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Editor Janelle Daum

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“When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.”

II Corinthians 2:12-13

What makes the perfect minister? Here are one man’s thoughts on that subject:

“Qualities the world looks for in a preacher. He must have a fine accent. He must be learned. He must be eloquent. He must be a handsome person. He must make no money, but have money to give. He must tell people what they like to hear.

“Qualities and virtues of a good preacher: able to teach in a right and orderly way; a good head; a good voice; a good memory; know when to stop; be sure of his material and be diligent; stake body and life, goods and honor on it; suffer himself to be vexed and flayed by everyone.”

Some of you are thinking, “Yeah, I like that. It sounds like it’s right on the mark.” Those words were penned by Martin Luther several centuries ago, and people in that day were thinking the same thing, “Yeah, I agree with that.” People’s thoughts on this topic have changed very little through the centuries.

That leads to an interesting dilemma for those who want to serve the Lord. Everyone has their own idea of what the perfect minister should be, and the demand is constantly there to live up to those ideals. That makes for a huge stress factor. Consider these statistics from a survey of more than 300 pastors: 66% feel lonely and isolated, 80% experience feelings of futility, and 90% suffer stress and sometimes extreme anxiety because of problems with parishioners. Most are tired after a 55 hour week, but most also say that they are 95% satisfied with their calling.

That is just the facts of life that have to be faced by anyone who chooses to do any kind of ministry for the Lord. Problems and stressors naturally come with the territory.

It’s also true about life outside of ministry in dealing with jobs, relationships and all of the problems that come our way. We all face those stressors in life. How do we overcome them?

As Paul continues on at the end of II Corinthians 2 he talks about the stressors he faced in ministry and how he overcame them. He begins with the stress created by outside distractions.

We need to fill in some historical background here so that we can get the full impact of what Paul is dealing with. Paul was in Ephesus finishing the work that he had started there. Titus had been sent to Corinth with the letter of reprimand that Paul has mentioned several times already in this letter. While Paul was in Ephesus his preaching caused a riot. That forced him to leave Ephesus and to go on to Troas where he was planning to meet up with Titus.

Think about Paul's emotional state during this time. He had just faced a riot in Ephesus with him as the central focus. He was also anxious as he awaited word of the Corinthians' response to the letter of reprimand. So those that hated the Gospel in Ephesus had turned against him, and he feared that those who loved the Lord in Corinth might also turn against him. There were plenty of outside distractions to keep his eyes off of the Lord. It worked.

The situation in Troas was about as good as you can get in ministry. Verse 12 tells us that Paul went there to preach the Gospel of Christ. When he got there the Lord had opened doors wide for ministry. It was an almost perfect situation. The people were prepared to hear the message of the Gospel and their hearts were open to it. We can assume that many people were responding to the message of salvation, and that the believers who were there were being strengthened in their faith. It was the kind of situation that every minister dreams about. Everything was working just like it was meant to because God had opened the people's hearts.

But Paul found himself distracted by circumstances outside of his ministry. He couldn't put his heart into the ministry in Troas because all he could think about was what was going on in Corinth. He tells us in v.13 that, "*(he) had no rest for (his) spirit.*" He couldn't concentrate on the open door the Lord had provided for him because of his preoccupation with Corinth.

The result was that Paul ended up leaving a dream ministry in Troas to go find Titus in Macedonia. He wasn't going to be able to do anything else until he got the situation in Corinth settled.

It's a warning for all of us. Outside distractions can have a deleterious effect on our life and our service for God. We try to make it sound less serious by calling it multitasking, or being plugged in to the digital age. Adam Stadtmiller recently shared this thought:

“Like most church leaders, I try to maintain the crumbling margins in my life against a world of Facebook posts, phone calls, tweets, text messages, 24/7 news coverage, and constant connection.

“Analysis of this colossal shift in culture is not new. Thousands of articles, books, and blogs have been written on how the pace at which we are living is chipping away at our already thin boundaries. A recent New York Times article states that 20 percent of Americans are taking some type of psychological drug to cope with the pressures of our brave new world. Our stress and inability to disconnect for rest and reflection is leading us to early graves.

“How has constant connection and endless distraction changed the church's task? How are we to advance our ministries without compounding the problem?”

Can you see the hand of Satan in that? Paul's warning in v.11 was that we need to be aware of Satan's schemes so that he can't take advantage of us. Outside distractions are one of his most effective tools for creating spiritual crises in our lives. He's overjoyed when we get so involved in good things that we don't have time for everything because he knows that most of the time we're going to pull back from spiritual things and we are going to start to slide backwards spiritually.

We have a choice when distractions come our way. We can either let

them have a negative impact on life or we can use them to strengthen our resolve to be servants. Paul chose to take care of the distraction because he knew that he would never be able to minister effectively until it was gone. That's why he left Troas to search for Titus. It was the only way to settle the distraction. With that done he would be ready to go on for the Lord. We will never in our life and service until we make the same kind of choice to deal with distractions and remove them from our lives. It really boils down to the question of what is the priority in our lives... the world or the Lord?

J. Wilbur Chapman states it pretty clearly: "My life is governed by this rule: anything that dims my vision of Christ or takes away my taste for Bible study or cramps my prayer life or makes Christian work difficult is wrong for me, and I must, as a Christian, turn away from it."

That's the choice. That is how we deal with the stressor of outside distractions in a positive and God-honoring way,

Blessings,

Pastor Randy

COMMITTEE REPORTS

OUTREACH TEAM REPORT



JANUARY 21, 2024

Once again, Brandon Valley Baptist Church had the pleasure of having Jenna, Nurse Manager at the Alpha Center, join us for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. She shared about what the Alpha Center does and how we as a congregation can help. She was extremely informative and passionate about her role as a nurse and what this non-profit company does to help so many women and men from all over our community. We are proud to partner with such an amazing organization.

SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

On January 22, the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in 1973, we recognize Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. From 1973 to 2022, more than 63.6 million unborn children's lives have been lost through abortion. When President Ronald Reagan first proclaimed and recognized Sanctity of Human Life Sunday in 1984, he said, "These children, over tenfold the number of Americans lost in all our Nation's wars, will never laugh, never sing, never experience the joy of human

love; nor will they strive to heal the sick, or feed the poor, or make peace among nations. Abortion has denied them the first and most basic of human rights, and we are infinitely poorer for their loss.” With the reversal of the Roe v. Wade decision on June 24, 2022, it is important now more than ever to promote and get involved in life-affirming organizations. Ask yourself: How does my daily life reflect the belief that defending an unborn human being is a noble cause? Included are ways to help yourself, your church and your community support men and women experiencing unexpected pregnancies.

PRAY

Please remember in your prayers those who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant and in need of support and guidance. It could easily be the person sitting next to you at church, the woman bagging your groceries or your grandchild’s high school friend. Pray that they have the courage to reach out for help.

SPEAK HOPE

There are members of your congregation that have been personally affected by abortion and need to hear messages of grace, forgiveness, and hope. They are most likely struggling with feelings of guilt and shame and need to know the church is a safe place.

SUPPORT & PROMOTE

Tell others about organizations, like Alpha Center, whose primary mission is to reach women and men at risk for abortion. You never know who in your life may be in need of these life-saving services. Invest your time, treasures, or talents in the places that daily champion protecting the unborn.

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR FEBRUARY 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

February 3, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

February 17, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

Upcoming Events

Monday, February 5, Spiritual Vision Team Meeting

Saturday, February 10, Leadership Team meeting

Tuesday, February 13, Discipleship Team Meeting

Wednesday, February 14, Valentine's Day

Sunday, February 18, Newsletter Articles are Due

Monday, February 19, Presidents' Day

Tuesday, February 27, Outreach Team Meeting

MISSIONARY UPDATES

AMANDA BENSON - PHILIPPINES



January 1, 2024

HOPE!

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

Lamentations 3:22-24

There are certain areas of my life in this last year where I felt like things would never change. From my flawed human perspective, it felt like I could never change or others will never change. It felt like situations would just continue being the way they were because that is the way they had always been. But then a friend challenged me: “Do you have hope that this could be different?”

Brené Brown, in her book, *Atlas of the Heart*, says, “We need hope like we need air. To live without hope is to risk suffocating on hopelessness and despair, risk being crushed by the belief that there is no way out of what is holding us back, no way to get to what we desperately need” (97). She later says that “hope is a function of struggle—we develop hope not during the easy of comfortable times, but through adversity and discomfort” (101).

How often do I wish my hard things would go away? How often do I wish all my relationships would be great, smooth, and easy? How often do I wish I could just work through my weaknesses and not have them? Pretty much always. And my guess is, you do, too. But the thing is that those struggles teach us how to hope. They grow us. They teach us how to depend on Christ.

One thing Brown is missing in her book that I have learned is that hope placed in myself or in my circumstances is no hope at all. I am weak and fail. I continue to wrestle with my sin nature and my enemy. I have no hope that I will ever grow. I have no hope that my relationships can improve. I have no hope that even the hard times have a meaning and a purpose.

But with Jesus, I have all those things and more. I have complete hope that God will do exactly what He has promised He would do. I have complete hope that He is with me in the struggles. I have complete hope that He will work all things together for good. I have complete hope that what seems irredeemable is redeemable. I have complete hope that victory is possible and assured. I have complete hope that one day I will be rid of this world, it’s trials, and my sin and will be with Him for eternity.

So when I look at my life and feel hopeless in certain areas, I am forced to look at my relationship with God. Am I seeking Him in this

situation? Am I trusting Him in this situation? If there is no hope in my life, then the answer is probably no. But when I focus on Him and rest in Him and seek Him, then my hope returns. My situation doesn't always change, but I can have hope that God is doing what is best for His glory and my good if it does not. I have hope that there is purpose in what is happening.

My hope is not based on me. It is based on the unshakeable, unchangeable, all-powerful God. This hope isn't wishful thinking-it is assurance. So as you and I look to this coming year, may we have hope. May we seek the Lord. May we trust Him in each situation. May we fix our eyes on Him. Whatever may come, He is working and is with us. He is faithful.

Amanda

Praises

- December was a fun but fast month! There was so much that happened. I'm thankful for all the opportunities that I had to spend time with people, both in the Philippines and in the US. God provided what I needed to be able to come here in so many ways. I'm really thankful for a good time together with my family.
- I'm so thankful for the ways God has provided for me this month. There were many things I was praying for, and it was neat to see how He answered them.
- I'm praising God for so many people in my life who care about me, have prayed for me, and continue to encourage me.

Prayer Requests

- I will travel back to the Philippines on Wednesday. Pray for smooth travel and a quick adjustment back to the Philippines. We will restart school on Jan 8.

- Pray that I can get everything organized this month for Outdoor Ed. It feels like there is still a lot of work to do to get everything together.
- Pray that God would continue to grow me this year. Pray for wisdom as I make some decisions about the next school year. Pray that I would grow more like Christ and be able to love others well.

DARWIN & KAREN STOESZ



January 24, 2023

Ministry Update

Happy New Year. We had a good holiday season. We had a special trip to Minnesota to visit Darwin's parents and family. We continue to serve with SEND International in an expanded role since returning from Japan this last year. Our ministry is helping missionaries bring the hope of Jesus Christ to the many countries where SEND International serves.

Darwin is currently serving as the assistant treasurer to the International Office Treasurer. This involves bookkeeping, helping facilitate fund transfers, and helping with getting finances to the fields where SEND serves.

Ministry Update from Darwin

One financial transaction that Darwin assisted with was sending a significant amount of money to Ukraine for coal and firewood. I thought to myself as I was approving this payment how great it is that I am just one cog in the process where a donor like you gave money to SEND Ukraine, a SEND missionary in Ukraine saw the

need to help Ukrainians struggling keeping warm and saw the need to provide heat, the project was created, was approved by all the necessary people along the way, and I get to be the final approval to send this money directly to a bank account in Ukraine to buy coal and firewood.

Ministry Update from Karen

I thoroughly enjoy owning our own home! For the first time in 20 years, I got to pick the colors of paint for the walls and have a yard big enough for a vegetable garden. I am really looking forward to spring to grow some vegetables. God provided a larger house than we had thought possible, so it is a joy to host a ladies Bible study in the living room on Wednesday nights. Our house is also 3 doors away from my parents and about a 3-minute walk to my sisters' house. It's been good to be that close to family.

Clara is thoroughly enjoying Berean Academy and has started working a part-time job at the Whitewater Memorial Library. Recently, the library director asked her to create a new bulletin board theme for the library. She enjoys making all the decorations for this. It's a joy to see her using the artistic gifts God has given her.

Anna continues to enjoy studying and life at John Brown University. She has a desire for higher education after graduating next year and is exploring her options for graduate school. Please pray for God to guide her to the place he has prepared for her to realize this goal. She continues to use her gifts and love of sport to reach out to the Hispanic community through the soccer ministry of her church. She also loves to spend time with her 5th and 6th grade kids on Wednesday nights at her church. She has really enjoyed the opportunities to develop and use her gifts to serve the Lord.

Overall, we are transitioning well to life, ministry, and culture in

America. Please pray for me to have clear direction as to what kind of ministry God would have me to do. I have finished my degree through Moody and am seeking God's guidance in how to use what I have learned to serve him and those around me.

Prayer / Schedule Update

Our tentative schedule so far is as follows. Of course, all dates are subject to change. Please pray for us especially for these events:

Jan 27 - Feb 3 Darwin works from his parent's basement - Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Feb 16 - 18 Darwin visit Anna at John Brown University, Siloam Springs Arkansas.

Feb 17 Clara goes to the Berean Academy Winter Banquet.

Apr 4 - 16 Darwin goes to SEND International headquarters for training and collaboration.

Please pray:

1. Pray for Anna and Clara that they would have continued growing relationships with Jesus.
2. Pray for Anna at John Brown University and studies kinesiology.
3. Pray for Clara at Berean Academy that she would seek God and make good friends.
4. Wisdom for Darwin as he serves as the assistant treasurer for the International Office.
5. Wisdom as Karen seeks her next ministry.
6. That our supporters will continue to support our ministry as we still rely 100% on support.

7. Pray that Darwin's Japanese teacher Mr. Tsuneizumi and Karen's friend Yuko-san would put their faith in Christ.

Thank you so much for your prayers, financial support, and encouragement.

Darwin & Karen & Anna (20) & Clara (16) Stoesz

HARLAN MOSS - PRISON LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY



January 2024

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Romans 15:4

It is hard to fathom that it's already January, 2024! The future is uncertain, but we know our lives are in God's hands! His Word brings us hope and comfort throughout our days. It always amazes me how God reveals Himself to bring hope and comfort to the men behind the walls!

Roger was mentioned in my last newsletter. He is young and influenced by other inmates. We talked about how important it is not to let other people control you, because you might leave prison with the same mindset you came in with at a young age. Roger told me how he had to have a personification of being a tough guy and act the way others expect him to act. We talked about how important it was to let the Bible teach us how we are to think and live. He disagreed with me. Then he saw my devotional book lying on the cabinet next to him and he asked me what it was about. I said, “Well I have not yet read today's devotion, you can read it to me.” He read the devotional,

and it was very similar to what we were discussing! Some of the content said, “So don’t be disheartened by how the world may see you. Look to God for the true measure of your worth, and trust that He will favor you in His time.” Roger could hardly believe that it supported everything I tried to tell him! God’s timing is always right!

I have had a weekly one-on-one Bible study for several years with a man in mental health. He came to know the Lord in 2017. He grew up in the gang life and some other inmates still try to get him to come back to the gang life. He has been verbally and physically assaulted for not wanting to go back to the gang or the “jungle”, as they call it. He told them, “I am not going back to your jungle, because I am part of the Jesus Jungle and I rap for Him. I have lived life under the devil’s control most of my life. Why would I want to go back to the darkness, I am free in Christ!” He shared some of his Christian rap with them and they were surprised by how good his Christian rap sounded, so they started with Christian rap as well! He shares a Christian rap song with me weekly that he has composed. I told him that he was a witness to these lost men and encouraged him to continue sharing his testimony.

I visited with Fred about the importance of knowing the Word and living by faith and not by sight. Fred said to me twice as we were talking, “Everything you are saying is what my mother tells me all the time!” I reminded him that evidently the Lord is trying to get his attention concerning these truths! God, His Word, and His truth will never change!

It was a blessing to be able to distribute the Christmas sacks to the inmates on December 19. They were very thankful as we gave them their sacks. Pastor Greg, other chaplains, and I loaded up the boxes of candy onto a U-Haul truck early that morning from Eastside Lutheran Church where the candy was stored. After getting boxes through the

checkpoint into Jameson Annex, eight inmates helped fill 520 sacks in an assembly line for Jameson. Thanks to those who contributed financially to make it possible!

I thank you for your support throughout 2023, by your prayers and financially! You are all a blessing!

In Christ, Harlan

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS



The Voice of the Martyrs

January 18, 2024 - PERSECUTION & PRAYER ALERT

BRUNEI: Compulsory Islamic Teaching in Schools

Sources: VOM USA, Borneo Bulletin, The Star

Photo: Wikipedia / Pangalau (cc)

On November 1st, Islamic religious teaching was officially integrated into the educational system of schools in Brunei. This requirement was issued due to a decree from the country's sultan. The newly mandated curriculum applies to all students from the second to fifth grades – whether they attend public or private school. It involves an hour of instruction each day, including the practise of Islamic prayers and study of the Quran.

Christians in the country have requested prayer that their children will be effectively disciplined at home and in the church, so their faith will continually strengthen and sustain them.

Pray for guidance on behalf of Christian parents in this Southeast Asian country as they deal with the newly implemented educational system. May these believers continue raising their children in the ways of the Lord, teaching them to love and serve Him despite any opposition they may encounter. While navigating the growing governmental restrictions, may our Bruneian family in Christ receive

divine wisdom, strength and boldness as they seek to faithfully share the Gospel message with those around them.

PAKISTAN: Blasphemy Charges Dropped

Sources: Pak Christian News, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Morning Star News

In April 2023, two school workers in Pakistan were given the tasks of cleaning a storeroom and burning any garbage they found. However, as both of these workers are illiterate, they did not realize that some of the papers they had burned contained verses from the Quran. When this was discovered, they were reported to the police and charged with blasphemy for allegedly desecrating the Quran.

The two accused workers have been identified as Musarrat Bibi, a Christian widow, and Muhammad Sarmad, a young Muslim man. Although the workers were released on bail as of May 12th, they finally had their day in court on December 8th. After hearing the evidence, Judge Tariz Mahmood dismissed all the charges against them.

Following the announcement of the verdict, Musarrat expressed her relief, saying, "I feel like I have got my life back again." Unfortunately, despite being released, the Christian widow has experienced further challenges. After being granted bail in May, the school administration refused to restore her job. Also, due to receiving subsequent death threats, she was forced to flee the village with her daughter. They have since had to move frequently to avoid being found by Islamic militants who want to cause them harm. Musarrat hopes to eventually find a similar position in another area where she is unknown.

Such dilemmas are frequently experienced by Christians in Pakistan who have been falsely accused of blasphemy. Even when these believers are acquitted by the courts, they often find themselves convicted by public opinion.

Please pray that Musarrat and her daughter will find a home in a safe location where they will be protected from mob violence and other forms of persecution. May this Christian woman also be granted a new job that will provide for their practical needs. Additionally, pray that Muhammad will not suffer any further consequences because of these false accusations. In fact, as a result of this ordeal, may his heart be stirred towards Christ and receptive to His loving kindness – to the point of acknowledging Him as Saviour and Lord. Finally, may God work by His Holy Spirit in and through the legal and political systems of Pakistan so that the frequently abused blasphemy laws would no longer be used to persecute the country's Christians and so many other innocent victims.

EGYPT: Temporary Church Building Burned

Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Photo: Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Local Christians in the village of Misha'at Zaafaranah, located within Egypt's Minya Province, are working to get approval to build a place of worship. The required documents have been submitted to the authorities and, for the meantime, the group of believers were meeting in a temporary structure on the land belonging to the church.

Although local officials have no objection to these gatherings, in the early morning of January 6th, an opposing mob converged at the location to protest the construction of the church building. During the protest, the temporary structure being used by the church members was set on fire. Thankfully, no one was injured in the incident.

This destructive act of persecution follows a similar attack that happened on December 18th against a church building being built in Al-Azeeb. Weeks prior to that incident, another had taken place in Minya Province during the month of November, when a mob attacked a Christian man and burned down his house which had been under construction.

Prayerfully uphold our suffering Egyptian brothers and sisters in Christ who have been terribly affected by these recent acts of violence. In each case, may the Lord minister healing from the trauma they have experienced and provide them the financial resources they need to replace all that has been destroyed. Pray that He will also work by His Spirit to soften the hearts of those in opposition to the Gospel, including the perpetrators who were directly responsible for the attacks, leading them to realize the error of their ways and come to a point of sincere repentance and salvation.

January 21, 2024 - Take time now to pray for persecuted Christians in Sudan

Urgent Need for Prayer

As two Islamist generals and their opposing armies wage a battle for control of Sudan, millions of people in and around the capital, Khartoum, are paying the price. Thousands of civilians have been killed and wounded in the crossfire. And Christians have been specifically targeted.

Both generals - Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - are ardent Islamists notorious for their crimes against humanity. Soldiers under their command have terrorized, bombed and killed civilians in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and other regions of Sudan. As members of former President Omar al-Bashir's inner circle, the generals participated in the 2019 coup that expelled the president from power.

After al-Bashir's expulsion from office, many Sudanese had hoped for political reform and greater tolerance, particularly toward the Christian community. But the opposite has occurred. Christians have been targeted and killed, with some reportedly shot by snipers in the recent fighting. Nearly 4 million Sudanese have been forced to flee their homes, taking refuge in neighboring countries or in other parts of Sudan.

Amid the ongoing fighting, we invite you to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ in Sudan.

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PRESENTING A CHANGELESS CHRIST FOR A CHANGING WORLD**