



BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH

March 2024

Editor Janelle Daum

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“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.”

II Corinthians 2:14

Last month we began to talk about the obstacles that Paul faced as he continued his ministry. In vv.12-13 he talks about how his soul was not at rest because of the negative obstacles he faced. One obstacle was that he didn't find people where he expected to find them. He didn't find Titus at Troas so he ended up moving on to Macedonia. Along with that he had also just faced a riot in Ephesus with him as the central focus. He is also anxious as he awaits word

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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. Paul was distracted by circumstances outside his control. As a result his spirit was not at rest and he couldn't put his heart into the ministry in Troas because all he could think about was these obstacles.

In v. 14 he suggests that obstacles are not always negative. Sometimes the obstacles are good things that come across our path. The story is told of a lighthouse keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline and who received his new supply of oil once a month to keep the light burning. One night a woman from the village begged for some oil to keep her family warm. Another time a father asked for some to use in his lamp. Another needed some oil to lubricate a wheel. Since all the requests seem legitimate, the lighthouse keeper tried to please everyone and granted them all.

Toward the end of the month he noticed that the supply of oil was very low. Soon, it was gone, and the beacon light went out. That night several ships were wrecked and lives were lost.

When the authorities investigated, the man was very repentant. To his excuses and pleading their reply was: "You were given the oil for one purpose... to keep that light burning!"

The obstacle is the division caused by the nature of the Gospel we preach. He tells us in v. 16a, "...to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life." The character of the Gospel is a sweet fragrance. That's why Paul states in v. 14, "*But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere.*" That's a glorious statement about the Gospel. Christ leads us in that ministry of spreading the Gospel message. It's a

ministry that is guaranteed success. He calls that parade of believers who are out sharing the Gospel a “triumphal procession.” Through believers, the Gospel should be a sweet aroma. Our knowledge of God, and our relationship with Him, should be visible to everyone we meet, *“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,”* v.15. As we share the Gospel with others, and as we live for the Lord, we introduce the fragrance of Christ into the world. But then there is that division. For those who turn to Christ and accept Him as their Savior, it’s a sweet fragrance of life. It’s a welcome message that transforms them. But for those who reject Christ the fragrance is different. The truth of the Gospel affirms their state of spiritual death. Their unwillingness to accept the message of salvation by faith through grace makes their lost condition stand out boldly. They can’t deny the message despite their outward protests. They have to come face-to-face with the truth of eternity in hell. That isn’t a very welcome message to most who reject Christ.

The temptation is to water down the message to make it more acceptable and less divisive. That’s the struggle that I have with the emerging church movement. Too often, in an effort to be culturally relevant, the message gets changed. For instance, instead of using the word “grace” it is replaced by other terms such as, “To get a second chance; new lease on life; an opportunity to start over.” But those new terms are all centered on us and how grace affects us. It creates a man-centered experiential gospel. That isn’t grace. Grace is a quality of God’s character. It has nothing to do with our perception of our experience. It explains the motivation for how God acts toward us. When we are told, *“by grace you are saved by faith,”* Paul is saying that grace has nothing to do with our works. The verse finishes by saying, *“and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God; not*

of works lest any man should boast.” Salvation means that we have a new transformed life in Christ. Grace means that God extended His unearned favor to us and made that salvation possible. Grace is all about God. Grace is always about God. To use terms that convey something less than that is to completely change the message.

To change the message is to condemn lost people to eternity in hell. The Gospel is, by nature, divisive. We can't change that difficulty. So we need to embrace the difficulty and at the same time accentuate the positive nature of salvation. That's what Paul does in v.14 where he focuses on how Christ leads us in triumph. What Paul has in mind is the Roman” triumphus” where victorious Roman generals, along with their proud soldiers, would march through the streets of the city with all of their prisoners of war in tow. The picture is one of victory and celebration. What Paul is drawing from this is that in battle one side will smell the sweet aroma of victory, and the other will smell the vile aroma of defeat. Those who follow the Gospel are destined to triumph. Rather than letting the ministry of the Gospel be stifled by its divisive nature we need to focus on the triumph and celebration that belongs to those who received the message gladly. It isn't popular to preach the truth of the gospel because it isn't inclusive, but it's right to do it without watering it down, because it is God's way of salvation.

Blessings,

Pastor Randy

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR MARCH 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

March 2, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

March 16, 8 a.m. Men's Bible Study via Zoom

Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 9, Leadership Team meeting

Sunday, March 10, Daylight Saving Time Starts

Tuesday, March 12, Discipleship Team Meeting

Saturday, March 16, 5:30 p.m. All Church Birthday Party & Bingo
(Dinner/Cake provided)

Sunday, March 17, Royal Family Kids Presentation

Sunday, March 24, Palm Sunday
All Youth Special Sunday School Event

Sunday, March 24, Newsletter Articles are Due

Tuesday, March 26, Outreach Team Meeting

Sunday, March 31, Easter Sunday
7:30 a.m. Easter Sunrise Service
8 a.m. Breakfast
9 a.m. Easter Worship Service

MISSIONARY UPDATES

AMANDA BENSON - PHILIPPINES



February 1, 2024

PRAY FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION!

The last month has been a whirlwind of phone calls, creating spread sheets, meetings, and so much more as we've been finishing up the final preparations for Outdoor Ed. And now...we're only one day away from the advanced crew leaving, and only three days away from the students leaving! I thought I would share some specific ways that you can be praying for us over the next week!

Saturday

- Our advanced crew will be traveling to Base Camp to begin setting up! This is a group of 42 people.
- **Prayer points:**
- Safety in travel. We are taking 8 vehicles with all our advanced crew and supplies for the week.
- Pray for our staff as they serve this week. Pray that they would have strength and rely on the Lord for sustenance. Pray that they would

reflect Jesus in their actions, words, and attitudes.

- Pray that we would be able to be a witness to the groups we are in contact with (the places we are visiting, the staff at the Base Camp and Corregidor, the boat drivers, and everyone in between!).

Sunday

- We will be having a worship time in the morning. I am leading the devotional. We also will be taking our crew that are going to Corregidor Island over, as well as a group of kids and staff who will just visit for the day.

- We will be continuing final preparations for the students to arrive.

• Prayer Points:

- Pray that I would have wisdom as I prepare for the Sunday morning devotional and that the Lord would use me to challenge and encourage our staff.

- This will be our first day taking the boats over. We have had a lot of interesting and complicated situations with the boats, but it seems that we have the all-clear. Pray that all the logistics would work out for the boats.

- Pray that the waters would not be too rough for the group going for the day to return in the afternoon.

Monday

- Students will be leaving Faith Academy bright and early (6:30am!) and heading out to Bataan (Bah – tah – AHN). They will be stopping at Mt. Samat National Shrine to learn more about WWII history and then going to our base camp. They will be doing some walking to talk about and reflect on the Bataan Death March.

• **Prayer Points:**

- Pray for the health of the students and staff. A few students have been sick this week. One girl in my squad has Dengue fever, but she might be able to come if her white blood cell counts go up and her fever breaks. Another just stayed home sick today. Pray that we can all be together for OE.
- Pray that students will be able to learn a lot about the history of WWII in the Philippines, and that they would be challenged to think about it in a deep way and from a biblical perspective.
- Pray that we would have nice weather this week! It has been very rainy for our dry season. Monday night in particular we have all 160 students plus the 20 squad leaders sleeping on tarps under the open sky. Pray that it doesn't rain this week and also that the skies are clear at night. Many students have never seen lots stars due to living in the city.

Tuesday

- We will be splitting into three traveling groups. Two groups will go to Corregidor Island. One will stay at Base Camp. The groups on the Island will be doing an Island tour (it used to be an American WWII base, so there are a lot of bombed out buildings as well as many batteries of large guns). Another group will be learning various skills (such as orienteering and using flag codes) and hiking around the island. The group at Base Camp will be going to a local elementary school to play with the children and share the gospel with them.

• **Prayer Points:**

- Pray for safety as we travel across the ocean to the island and our bus travels around Bataan.

- Pray for those who are doing ministry, that they would serve the students and the Lord well. Pray that the kids who are hearing the gospel message would come to know the Lord and that the pastor that has connected us with this school will be able to continue to work there once we leave.
- Pray for the hearts of our students as they hear various messages and have squad discussions. Pray that the Lord would soften their hearts and that they would hear the truth and that it would change their lives.

Wednesday

- The traveling groups will be rotating to a different site. The same things will happen at each site, but with a new group of people!
- **Prayer Points:**
- Pray for the families of our students. Many of them have never been away from their children for this long. Pray that they would trust the Lord and us and have peace.
- Pray for any students who struggle with homesickness and being away from family. This can be hard for some, especially the younger ones!
- Pray that the students will build strong relationships with each other and with their squad leader. Pray that they will be loving towards one another and support each other, even when things are hard. Pray that all students would be kind and be able to support the others in their squads and traveling groups.

Thursday

- Traveling groups will rotate to their final sites!
- **Prayer Points:**

- Pray for stamina! This is our last full day, and it will have been a full week. Pray especially for the staff, who are older and have less energy than the middle school students.
- Pray that God shows up in unexpected ways. Pray that He would meet the students in special ways.
- Pray for the high school students who are helping us for the week. Pray that they can grow as leaders and interact well with the students. Pray that they would set good examples for our middle schoolers.

Friday

• The groups will be traveling back from Corregidor to Bataan and will be loading the busses to go home. One group is going to be leaving from Base Camp. We will arrive back at Faith Academy sometime in the afternoon!

• Prayer Points:

- Pray for safety as we travel back across the ocean and then on the buses.
- Pray that we will leave our sites with good relationships with all the people, and that those we interacted with will remember us and Jesus in us.
- Pray that the students and staff will remember what they have learned and will grow because of it.
- Pray that everyone can get rest over the weekend! We also have Monday off from school as a recovery day!

Thank you so much for your partnership with us in prayer! I'm excited to share with you in my next newsletter all the things God has done!

Amanda

Praises

- Praise for all the amazing ways God has worked to put together OE. I'm so thankful for the team of people who are working together to make this happen. I could never do it on my own! I'm also thankful that God has given me strength and balance in the last month.
- Praise that God continues to work in me and not keep me as I am. I'm thankful for specific ways He has shown up in my life in the past month and how I've learned more about who He is.

Prayer Requests

- See above!

BRANDON & MARCI JONES - BRAZIL



February 2024

RIDING THE WAVES

Prayer

- For our seminary and Kairos Brasil students to find the funds, energy, and time to have a successful semester.
- For God to provide guidance in how to equip and come alongside ministry to Brazilians in North America.
- For God's continued grace in providing good health to our family.

Praises

- That we spent the holidays together as a family of five.
- That God continues to provide students and graduates to our seminary.
- That God keeps his promise to lead us to still waters.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.

PSALM 131:3 (NIV)

Every season brings its highs and lows, whether that is the weather,

a calendar full of events, or even waves of emotions. Life on the mission field can intensify all of these things, so the highs can seem that much higher while the lows can seem even worse. Over the years, however, we have found ways to ride out these waves, trusting in God's steady grace and goodness.

In Psalm 131, David, who experienced many highs and lows in his life, reflects on what it means to rest in the Lord. He compares it to a satisfied baby resting next to its mother. David closes the psalm encouraging God's people to trust in the Lord both now and forevermore. And so, we too, as part of God's people, are also trusting in him, no matter what the seasons bring to us.

The summers present a change of pace in Brazil. The whole world seemingly plows through December with all of their end-of-the-year work in order to enjoy some respite after Christmas. To end the year, in Sunday School we had a combined Young Adults and Teens class, where we competed in a form of Pictionary to review some of our biblical lessons from the year. Monica and Olivia warned us that their group was competitive, and they were right! It was a fun and fitting way to celebrate another year of Sunday School.

Our seminary's semester ended well in December, with lots of grading for Brandon to complete before the Christmas break. Overall, the students shined in expressing some great thinking on sticky, ethical questions, as well as defending their own doctrines about the church. In March, we will celebrate our graduating students from the seminary's pastoral formation program and from Kairos.

One of our pastoral students, Ricardo, and his family were able to spend an evening having supper with us. We were energized to hear more about their stories, as they both grew up in Catholic homes, met each other in a night club as young adults, and then later in their

adulthood were seized by God's grace in Jesus Christ! Ricardo runs a distribution company, and one of his employees introduced him to Jesus many years ago. And from there Ricardo introduced his wife, Marcia, to Jesus. And now Ricardo is introducing many others to Jesus as a pastor! Brandon has loved having Ricardo as a student, as this has been Ricardo's first experience with theological training, and he has been an eager learner.

On Christmas Day, we welcomed Daniel to Porto Alegre! Thanks to the kindness of one of our partners who paid for his plane ticket, we were able to spend a couple weeks together as a whole family. One adventure for the five of us was to go white-water rafting in the Paranhana River just a couple hours away from home. During Daniel's visit, we also enjoyed some down time in the apartment before sending him back to college for his spring semester.

Among the waves of missionary life, one vital characteristic is to be flexible and fluid to receive any opportunities God may be providing for us. One exciting development these past few months has been the possibility of partnering with Brazilian churches in North America to help them with their theological training and leadership development. A few weeks ago, Brandon introduced Tony Campos of Hispanics for Christ with Pastor Antônio Marques, who serves as a pastor to a church of Brazilians in the Boston area. We are praying about how our mission, our pastoral formation program, and perhaps even Kairos could help equip Brazilians living in North America to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom right where they are!

As we look ahead to the fall, Monica and Olivia have already returned to school. In March, a new semester at the seminary will begin with Brandon teaching New Testament Theology. Marci is continuing in her Master of Divinity program, taking her first live class online this semester – Church History.

While rafting on the river, there were periods of stillness followed by frantic paddling only to encounter more still waters. The times of stillness allowed time to look all around: at the sky, the trees, the river, and the precious faces of our kids. As January has been a little still for us, we have relished in the time to consider the beauty of God's grace and the privilege to be part of his mission here.

Thanks to you for your prayers and support through all our waves. We could not be serving here without you.

Trusting in the Lord,

Brandon & Marci Jones

SHAN REED - JAPAN



February 2024

BLESS GOD

Praises

- Praise God for safety in the fire, for kind neighbors and friends, for a new place to live until I return to the US next year. (Note my new snail mail address below; only a few numbers have changed!)
- Praise the Lord we could celebrate our Savior's birth together with our friends.
- Praise the Lord for over 20 years of ministry in Japan as an NAB missionary and for His faithfulness.

Prayer

- Pray for God's work in and through Komyo Christian Church, that we will shine the light of Jesus to those around us. On February 26, we will hold our first Live Gospel Café in four years! Pray for those who attend, as well as those who minister through music and fellowship.
- Please pray for Yuri and me as we walk with Jesus through the preparations and transitions of the next year.

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

PSALM 9:10 (NIV)

Fire

Christmas Eve's fire reminded me that I have not been forsaken. Thank you for your kind words and prayers. It is quite a shock to receive a phone call in the middle of the worship service from a neighbor saying there is black smoke coming out of the windows of one's apartment. Every time I retell the story or reflect on the event, I am filled with gratitude. Even today as my neighbor and I recalled the story, she and her daughter talked about how lucky I was. I could only respond with how grateful to God I am!

Over the past month, I have been singing Brooke Ligertwood's song "Bless God," especially the line "Sing if you've known his grace." Lift an offering of praise with me and sing of his grace!

Christmas Events

In December, we were able to hold some Christmas events at Komyo Christian Church. Our theme for the events was "Celebrating Christmas with our friends." (There is a fun word play in Japanese that doesn't translate into English!) We started with an event to reach out to our community, making Christmas gifts for the nursing home across the street from the church. We had two fun mornings gluing and decorating to make colorful, craft-stick Christmas trees for each of the residents.

The next week, the event was to reach out to our friends. We had a time of singing Christmas carols and enjoying Christmas cookies. Several members of the Gospel choir I used to be part of joined us. It was wonderful to see them again!

I was also able to have an English Christmas party again this year. One of my students wrote her second bilingual picture book, so we enjoyed hearing her read the Japanese while I read the English, and then she told us the story of writing a book. We also decorated Christmas cookies and enjoyed lots of sugar and laughter!

Our final Christmas event to reach out to our friends was the Christmas Eve candle service. We enjoyed reading the Christmas story together from the Bible, singing carols, a Christmas message, and, of course, Christmas treats. Thankfully, I had taken my treats to church in the morning, so none were lost to smoke and soot. It was a joy to praise God together as a church family and with our friends.

More lyrics from the song “Bless God” come to mind: “Come on and lift up your holy hands. He’s worthy of all our praise.”

Step by Step

Last quarter, I shared about the “little by little” life as a missionary in Japan. Although the fire in my condo set me on a quick path to packing and moving, I can see how it is part of the little-by-little, step-by-step plan God has for me.

In January of 2023, God began moving in my heart. I noticed the Holy Spirit at work but wasn’t quite sure to what the stirring was leading. After several months of prayer, I shared with Yuri that God was leading me to return to the US at the end of this term in 2025: to visit my supporting churches on home assignment and then to stay in the US.

I do not know yet what God has planned for my future; however, I am grateful He has not forsaken me as I have sought Him.

Thank you for the ways you have been walking with me for over twenty years as I have had the privilege of serving Jesus here in

Japan.

Sing the chorus of “Bless God” with me:

Come on and praise the Lord with me

Sing if you love His name

Come on and lift your voice with me

He’s worthy of all our praise.

Shan Reed

HARLAN MOSS - PRISON LIGHTHOUSE MINISTRY



February 2024

“ Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 18:3

God is always speaking, but many times we are too busy to listen. Everyday there are many things trying to get our attention. When the men come to prison they have time to think about their lives and look back over their past. Some of them start to recognize how God had been trying to get their attention, but they were too preoccupied with the stresses of life. James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” Prison is a place where they can reflect on their lives and draw near to God!

Gib went through a divorce a few years ago which was very difficult for him. He said, “I didn’t take time to listen to God before I came to prison. When I look back over my life, I can remember those who witnessed to me. I had to be broken by coming to prison to realize that all the good advice and instructions my father gave me now makes sense. The Lord has changed my life!”

At the church service I noticed Jack wiping his eyes when we were

singing praises to the Lord. While Pastor Greg was preaching, he continued to wipe his eyes. When I talked with him the next day Jack said, "I felt like the Lord was speaking directly to me! I was leaning ahead looking at the floor and every time I looked up Pastor Greg was looking at me. I felt he was speaking directly to me. I was raised attending church, but I didn't pay attention. At eleven years old my grandma was brutally killed, and I saw her body. I never could deal with it. Now I realize God is calling me to follow Him. When I think about following Jesus there is peace and joy in my heart." Jack was ready to trust Jesus Christ and ask the Lord to forgive him for his sins. Praise God for the loving kindness, patience, and healing that He brings!

When Jake got arrested, he asked God to change his life! He prayed, "God, I don't know Who You are, but please change me and go with me to prison." Jake went on to say, "I didn't know who I was praying to, I didn't even know for sure if He was real. I noticed things starting to change for me, Today I was so full of anxiety, so I said, "God if You are real, please calm my nerves! Then I saw a Christian book on my table, and I read about 100 pages without stopping. Before I knew it, my door opened, and it was time to eat. Then you called for me to come to your office." I explained the gospel to Jake, and he said he believed everything and trusted Christ as his Savior! Jake went on to say that he was hungry to learn as much as he could.

While Wade works in the dining area, he visits with some of the men during meals. He has given me over a dozen names of men who want Bibles. I am thankful for Wade and his zeal for getting God's Word distributed!

Please pray for the staff because some of them are required to work long hours. Thank you for your prayers, financial gifts, and encouraging notes! You all are a blessing! In Christ, Harlan

RICK & DEBBI BARDIN - CAMEROON



February 2024

LIGHT STILL SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Praises

- For health and strength.
- Open roads most of the time, and the patients still being able to get to our hospital.
- For the completion of the water plant project.
- For Rick's slide scanner being repaired and delivered safely.

Prayer

- For the end of the conflict.
- That our hospital will be able to have the resources and freedom to provide excellent care to all who need it, as an expression of Christ's love.
- For our hospital administrator – God knows the details.
- For the remainder of our time in the States with family and friends to be meaningful.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never

extinguish it.

JOHN 1:5 (NLT)

We have had some lowlight times these last few months, which are always more difficult to express in words than highlight times. But we can testify that in the down times we have seen God at work mightily, drawing us closer to Him and to the community we have here. We have experienced disappointments in the progress of the radiation center project; it has met several challenges and is progressing slower than anticipated. Also, as we mentioned in the last newsletter, Rick's slide scanner was down for five months. It had to be sent to South Africa for repair, which took a long time to arrange and get done. After a few months of peace, we have experienced more uprisings in the continued conflict zone we live in, and loss of friends in death due to sickness.

One of the friends we lost was little Sam, the boy we wrote about a couple newsletters back who we had arranged to get an oxygen concentrator for so he could be discharged home. He did very well for about a year then had repeated lung infections and got to the point where his lung tissue was so scarred that even the oxygen concentrator machine that was donated for him was not enough on 100%. The Lord took him after being in the hospital for about two weeks this last admission. He is truly at peace and rests now we believe, in the arms of Jesus.

On a brighter note, we have been in the US since mid-January, visiting family. We started out in Nashville with our son Jess and his wife Faryn and our four grandboys: Caleb (15), Josiah (12), Daniel (10), and David (9). We had two weeks with our daughter Jeanna and her husband Ryan and our two grandkids, Mia (6) and Trace (3), near Orlando. Now we are back in Nashville for time with Jess' family.

We thank the Lord for this opportunity to be with family and for the volunteer pathologists who are providing services on Mbingo cases via telepathology. We are very thankful the scanner was repaired just in time for us to take this trip. That was made possible by the Southwestern Medical Clinic Foundation.

We did have some happy times of victory and celebration in these last three months.

We are so thankful to our Lord and to all of you who pray for us and support our ministry financially.

In His Matchless Name,

Rick & Debbie Bardin

PAUL & JANET HARKNESS - AWANA



February 16, 2024

In my last Memo two weeks ago, I mentioned the Central Iowa Awana Bible Quiz that I assisted with. That event went very well. There were seven participating churches, with 76 T&T Clubbers participating. Two boys had perfect scores in both the written and multiple-choice quizzes.

Lucretia kidney tumor update: The last doctor our daughter saw for this has determined that the tumor is too small to do anything about right now. They will be keeping watch on it. Still do not know if it is benign at this point.

Thank you for praying for me for strength and stamina during the Bible Quiz event. The Lord answered your prayers. I mentioned some health issues at that point which I had for two weeks. The issues continue. I have developed some neurological problems that are affecting my vision, speech, and balance. I have been seeing a neurologist since it started. Please continue to pray.

Paul Harkness

THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS



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

February 1, 2024 - PERSECUTION & PRAYER ALERT

INDIA: Christian Couple Beaten and Threatened

Sources: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, The Wire

A Christian couple in Uppaladinni, Karnataka, was recently beaten for their faith and threatened with death if they continued to practise Christianity. The attack on Vijayalakshmi Chavhan and her husband Ashok happened on January 10th, the day after Vijayalakshmi was accused by several media organizations of conducting forced religious conversions.

Vijayalakshmi is a registered healthcare worker who goes door to door raising awareness of basic medical needs. Some villagers, however, objected to a Christian being allowed to enter their homes. Her opponents threatened to get her fired and conveyed warnings of violence.

After the conversion allegations circulated, Christians in the area intervened on Vijayalakshmi's behalf, filing a complaint with the police. However, when the Christian woman, her husband and some of the villagers met with police to resolve the situation, a mob of around 300

people arrived and attacked the married couple. While police officers attempted to intervene, sources report that they did not do enough to prevent the attack.

A police investigation has since been launched, with six men named as perpetrators of the incident. However, harassment continues for this couple, as well as the members of their church. For instance, three Christian families recently had their utilities disconnected for four days on the instruction of the community chief. These believers have also received threats and warnings to stop following Jesus.

Pray for the protection of Vijayalakshmi, Ashok and other believers living in this community who are presently facing intimidation and threats because of their faith in Christ. May those responsible for this attack not only be held accountable for their violent actions, but may they also come to realize the error of their ways. Ultimately, pray that God would radically transform the hearts of those throughout India who are opposing the Gospel message, leading multitudes more to faith in the Lord for their eternal salvation and the provision of their numerous other needs.

CHINA: Patriotic Education Law Takes Effect

Sources: International Christian Concern, Bitter Winter, Reuters, Voice of America

In recent years, efforts by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to control all areas of society has increased exponentially. On October 24th, the national legislature passed a “Patriotic Education Law” which took effect on January 1st. The purpose of this law is clear: to ensure that the philosophies and principles of the CCP permeate every facet of society.

After implementing the law, CCP officials met with leaders of the

country's five authorized state religions to explain how to adhere to the new policies. The guidelines given to these religious leaders state that China's "religious circles must learn, think and practise 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.'" Of critical importance is the statement that "the state is greater than religion, and the state law is greater than religious rules." The intention is for education on all levels to be affected, including that of schools, religious centres, company training programs, and every other area of society. The policies further emphasize that the law applies to all Chinese people, whether they are living in mainland China, Taiwan, or anywhere else in the world.

The effect that this law will have on churches in China is not yet fully known, but increased persecution is anticipated. Within the state church, pressure to promote socialist ideologies over Biblical principles will undoubtedly increase. The law may also be used as a tool to further persecute unregistered churches throughout the country.

Please remember all Chinese Christians in your prayers, even those residing in other countries, as they face increasing pressures to centre their lives around the beliefs of President Xi Jinping. Pray that these believers will receive wisdom as they determine the best way to stand firm in their faith while dealing with governmental indoctrination, which so strongly opposes the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Pray that President Xi, and other leaders within the Chinese Communist Party, would come to terms with the truth of God's Word so they too will reach the point of humble repentance and salvation.

SRI LANKA: Church Ordered to Find New Location

Source: NCEASL

On the morning of December 3rd, police entered the Assembly of

God church in the town of Makola, which is located near the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo. The officer in charge questioned whether the service was being conducted legally. Since the believers were in the middle of a worship service, the pastor agreed to report to the police station the next morning.

The next day, police questioned the pastor and his landlord. Although the church leader was told to stop holding church services in his rental home, he refused to comply. One of the officers then stated that the place of worship needed to be registered with the government in order to continue operating. The police also ordered the landlord to no longer allow the pastor to use the house for hosting Christian gatherings.

The pastor has been given six months to vacate the premises. He also signed a police statement asserting that he will continue hosting worship services during that time. The church is having difficulties finding another location for a couple reasons: 1) since there are more than 100 people regularly attending the services, they will need a sizeable space, and 2) some landlords in the area are not willing to let the believers use their facilities as a meeting place for the church.

Pray that the members of this church will be able to find a suitable meeting facility where they can worship together peacefully without any further opposition. In the meantime, may their Godly lives and daily interactions with those around them serve as testimonies of God's love, grace and peace. As the Holy Spirit works in and through the situation – and within the hearts of the opposing authorities – may all the barriers that have been raised in this South Asian nation be removed, so these Christians and many others can faithfully and freely spread the hope of the Gospel.

February 17, 2024 - PERSECUTION & PRAYER ALERT

The Need for Prayer

Christian persecution is on the rise in India.

Radical Hindus intent on making India a purely Hindu nation have been emboldened since the election of Narendra Modi as prime minister in 2014. Modi is a member of the Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has seen a 20 percent increase in membership since his election.

Here is what it is like to follow Christ in India:

- Hindu–nationalist informants live in nearly every village and report on the activities of Christians, resulting in attacks and arrests.
- Churches have been demolished and burned, worship gatherings have been disrupted, and crosses in graveyards cemeteries have been vandalized.
- Bibles and other Christian literature have been confiscated and burned.
- Pastors and evangelists have been beaten and jailed, and several are martyred each year.
- Christians are often arrested and detained after being falsely accused of “forcing” Hindus to convert to Christianity.

When our brothers and sisters in Christ in India face persecution, we can stand with them in prayer!

CRISIS IN UKRAINE



February 13, 2024

“To our friends at SEND International,

We had a very blessed trip. God blessed our travel and ministry on the front line. I was not able to give an update right away because my friend, a soldier who served in the army from the second day of the war, was blown up by a mine and had to amputate his leg. It made me very sad. I couldn't recover mentally for a long time.

We continue to serve people and God. We have everything to ensure that service in the House of Prayer continues even if there are problems with electricity. I am again at a seasonal job at school, although the salary is minimal, but it is enough for utilities and basic necessities.

God blesses us and we now serve in another church in the village. There are currently eight members of the church and there is no minister. We have done humanitarian aid mission in the village of Oleksandrivka in Donetsk region and in the stabilization station in the village of Rai Oleksandrivntsi.

Your church partner in Ukraine, Pastor Dima”

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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 tax deductible.

BRANDON VALLEY BAPTIST CHURCH
PRESENTING A CHANGELESS CHRIST FOR A CHANGING WORLD