



November 2024



*“Since my youth, God,
you have taught me,
and to this day I declare
your marvelous deeds.*

*Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power
to the next generation,
your mighty acts
to all who are to come.”*
Psalm 71:17-18

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel was born in Israel around 623 BCE during the reign of King Josiah. He, along with most of the people of Israel, were taken captive by the Babylonians in 597 BCE. Ezekiel settled with other Jews in a place called Tel Abib on the Chebar River. The book of Ezekiel was written during Ezekiel's captivity. He prophesied from about 592 to 570 B.C. Ezekiel's prophecies included the destruction of Jerusalem and the eventual restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. **God promised to bring the Jews back from exile, destroying their idolatry and replacing their heart of stone with a heart of flesh.**

YEAR	Jews In Israel	Jews Worldwide	MJ Congregations in Israel	MJs in Israel
1939	445,000	16,500,000	--	--
1948	850,000	±10,500,000	--	23
1989	3,688,000		30	1,200??
1999	4,829,000		81	5,000
2020	7,221,000	±13,500,000	300	30,000

ONE ISRAEL

Note: the figures are from 2020; the 2020 count for Jews Worldwide include the 7+ million in Israel and the 5+ million in the US; MJ stands for Messianic Jews (Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah).
One for Israel.org

Ezekiel 37 niv

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” 4 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” 7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath

in them. 9 Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army. 11 Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ 12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”



Pastor David Missel

585-658-1197 Residence
djmguided1947@gmail.com
585-382-3311 Church

It is our desire to assist anyone who is seeking help, if possible, whether it be spiritual or otherwise. Please contact Pastor David or any Session Elder if you would like us to be of help.

When Pastor David is unavailable:

Pastor David is presently scheduling Fridays as his day off so matters of less urgency could be left on the church office answering device, or call one of the Ruling Elders:

- George Briggs 585-382-3038
 - Patty Gregg 585-245-1311
 - Carol Griffen 585-382-3681
 - Shirley Matthews 585-382-3171
 - Cathy Mlyniec 585-322-6669
- Clerk of Session*
- Leo Richardson 585-382-3153

Other Contacts

LEPC website:

www.seekinggodtogether.com

LEPC Email Address:

grichardson001@rochester.rr.com

LEPC Food Pantry:

(by appointment only)
585-245-3448

Sunshine Person:

Cathy Mlyniec
cmlyniec@gmail.com

The next Regular Session Meeting date is scheduled for November 14, 2024.

Courageous In Any Crisis

Both articles written by Dr. David Jeremiah

I will go to the king, which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish! (Esther 4:16)

When your course is righteous, your courage will be reinforced. Esther had the righteous cause. She was to stand before the king and plead for the life of her people.

Was she afraid? Undoubtedly.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is persevering in spite of the fear. Courage doesn't mean being oblivious to danger. People who wait for all the courage they need before they act will never act. But those who take the first little step of the process of courageous activity will be given greater strength by God.

The challenges of life will not get much bigger. But building your faith in God can grow you into a giant able to be courageous in any crisis. We build our faith by doing the things that seem hard to us at the time so that we can gain strength to do the really hard things that come to us in the future.

God Is In Control

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! (Romans 11:33)

The greatest minds of history have wrestled with the issue of the sovereignty of God versus the free will of humankind. Some day in eternity we may discover how the track of God's sovereignty and the track of our responsibility finally come together. But the way we should look at this is so simple we sometimes miss it: let God take care of His sovereignty, and let us take care of our responsibility. God's sovereignty explains things that humans cannot possibly fathom.

The sovereignty of God in our lives, from our perspective, is like looking at a weaving from the wrong side. We see all the various threads and knots and strands sticking out. We see it from the back side because we do not have the perspective that God has. But someday in eternity, God will take that patchwork we have looked at and haven't understood, and He will turn it around. We will see the beautiful tapestry that has been woven out of our lives. We can spend all our lives trying to figure out why God does this and why God does that. Sometimes we just have to fall back on the fact that God is sovereign and in control. We can rest secure in that truth.

Submitted by Pastor David Missel

LEPC Mission Statement:

We at Leicester Evangelical Presbyterian Church, confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We prayerfully seek to do His will through the power of the Holy Spirit in our worship, discipleship, ministry, mission, fellowship and continually strive to make this church one that glorifies God and is pleasing to Him.



Time to Fill an Operation Christmas Child Shoebox!

November is almost here and the inserts for information for the Samaritan Purse boxes will be available on the 3rd. Filled boxes should be returned to the church by November 10.

Postage will be paid by the church.

Any questions see Gene and Patti Gregg.

Monthly Celebrations November Birthdays

20 Leo Richardson

Anniversaries

1 M/M Leo Richardson

Liturgists Signup for November

For those who want to read scripture during Sunday worship, please remember to sign the “Volunteer” list on the Bulletin Board in Fellowship Hall.

Thank you and may God Bless!

Reminders!

November 3

Time Change,
Turn clocks back 1 hour.

November 5

Don't forget to
VOTE!



by Michael J. Svigel, PhD

“Read your Bible. Pray every day. And you’ll grow, grow, grow!” You might recognize those lines from a well-known Sunday School song. Maybe you remember the hand motions reinforcing the benefits of daily Scripture reading. And you might even recall the warning in the second verse of the song: “Neglect your Bible, forget to pray, and you’ll shrink, shrink, shrink.” That song emphasizes important practical truths. The disciplines of reading the Word of God and praying to the God of the Word should never be minimized. The 176 verses of Psalm 119 spotlight the clear teaching of Scripture that great blessing comes from reading God’s Word. And countless Psalms underscore the need to pray to the Lord in all circumstances.

Sometimes, though, our right embrace of personal Bible reading and private prayer can lead us to downplay another clear teaching of Scripture — the need for “one another” in spiritual growth. The meaning of the Greek word ἀλλήλων (allēlōn) itself is straightforward: “one another,” “each other,” referring to relationships of mutuality. In all cases, “one another” requires more than one person; and it often involves a group of people.

To really grow spiritually in the ways God wants us to grow, we need allēlōn — one another. In fact, when the New Testament uses the image of “growing” spiritually, it usually refers to growing with one another

(1 Cor. 3:6–9; 2 Cor. 10:15; Eph. 2:19–22; 4:14–16; Col. 1:3–12; 2:19; 1 Pet 2:1–5). What are these *one anothers* that lead to spiritual growth? Consider just a handful:

- “Be devoted to *one another* in brotherly love; give preference to *one another* in honor.” (Rom. 12:10)
- “Accept *one another*, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:17)
- “Through love serve *one another*.” (Gal. 5:13)
- “Be kind to *one another*, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32)
- “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs... and be subject to *one another* in the fear of Christ.” (Eph. 5:18–19, 21)
- “With humility of mind regard *one another* as more important than yourselves.” (Phil. 2:3)
- “Encourage *one another* and build up one another.” (1 Thess. 5:11)
- “Live in peace with *one another*.... Always seek after that which is good for *one another*.” (1 Thess. 5:13, 15)
- “Let us consider how to stimulate *one another* to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*.” (Heb. 10:24–25)
- “Confess your sins to *one another*, and pray for *one another*.” (Jas. 5:16)
- “Be hospitable to *one another* without complaint.” (1 Pet. 4:9)

Living out the *one anothers* means more than just showing up to church on Sunday morning. It means actually gathering to minister to *one*

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another, not simply to be ministered to (1 Cor. 12:7; Phil. 2:1–4). It means staying committed to *one another* even when you feel inconvenienced or even offended (Col. 3:12–23). God gave our individual spiritual gifts for building up one another (1 Cor. 12:7). Spiritual gifts are not simply what God gives to you; spiritual gifts are what God gives *through you* to all the *one anothers* in your life.

So, as radical as it may sound to those of us raised singing “read your Bible, pray every day, and you’ll grow, grow, grow,” we need to add another verse to that old Sunday School song. We need to add the Bible’s teaching about the *one anothers*. Maybe that missing verse would sound something like this: **“Embrace one another, gather to pray, and you’ll grow, grow, grow.”**

Besides teaching both historical and systematic theology at DTS, Dr. Svigel is actively engaged in teaching and writing for a broader evangelical audience. His passion for a Christ-centered theology and life is coupled with a penchant for humor, music, and writing.

<https://www.dts.edu/employee/michael-svigel/>

Submitted by Carole Missel



Photo by Carole Missel

***O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend!***

A Prayer to Remain Faithful to the End

Today’s inspiration comes from:
Pilgrim Prayers by Tim Challies

**O Jesus, I Have Promised:
John Ernest Bode**

It has long been the conviction of Christians that once we have truly come to Christ in repentance and faith, we can never fall away from that faith. Those who have been justified can never be unjustified; those who have been indwelt by the Spirit will never be abandoned by Him. Yet Christians have also agreed that it is possible for us to deceive ourselves and to deceive other people into thinking we have trusted in Christ when we have not. Hence we are told to be diligent in confirming our “calling and election” (2 Peter 1:10).

Knowing that we can be self-deceived, we must examine our lives to ensure we are living as Christians are called to live — that we are putting sin to death, coming alive to righteousness, and finding ever-greater joy in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And always we must pray that God would graciously preserve us by His Spirit so we can live in a way that is pleasing to Him, then finish our race well and go to be with Him forever.

Observe

The poet begins by affirming that he has promised to serve Jesus to the end of his life. But he knows this will not be easy, for in the second stanza he provides a long list of the enemies and temptations that will challenge him for mastery of his life. This is why, in the third stanza, he

pleads with God to give him what he needs to overcome those challenges. By the end he turns his heart away from what he has promised and toward what Jesus has promised — the ultimate affirmation that He will, indeed, remain faithful.

Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend!

Pray

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

O let me feel Thee near me,
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear Thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control!
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou Guardian of my soul!

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
To all who follow Thee
That where Thou art in glory
There shall Thy servant be;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my Friend!

~ John Ernest Bode,
“O Jesus, I Have Promised”

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Reflect

John 12:26 *26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

2 Peter 1:5–11 *For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Apply

Do you ever struggle with doubts about your salvation? Where do you turn for comfort when this happens? Instead of taking it for granted, it is good to take time today to pray to the Lord that, by His grace, you will persevere to the end. In addition to the encouragement of Scripture, it can be helpful to hear from others who might note evidence of grace in your life. Are there people who can speak into your life to tell you whether you are showing the marks of the Christian? If so, consider inviting their feedback today.

Excerpted with permission from *Pilgrim Prayers: Devotional Poems That Awaken Your Heart to the Goodness, Greatness, and Glory of God* by Tim Challies, copyright Tim Challies.

Submitted by Carole Missel



Fatu Thoronka

Fatu is 18 years old and is in the class of JSS1 at Mapainda Junior Secondary School in the Mayatta area, Sierra Leone. Her hobby is volleyball. Please pray for Fatu, her educational future and the other students and teachers at the school.

LEPC supports EduNations through our Missions Funds.

Continued Prayers for:

*Pray for peace in Jerusalem.
May all who love this city prosper.
O Jerusalem, may there be peace within
your walls and prosperity in your palaces.
For the sake of my family and friends,
I will say, "May you have peace."
For the sake of the house
of the Lord our God,
I will seek what is best for you,
O Jerusalem.*

Psalm 122:6-9 niv

- Pray for Israel and the Middle East.
- Pray for all hostages and refugees throughout the world.
- Pray for all the "innocent" civilians caught in the middle of war.
- Pray against hatred throughout the world.
- Pray for the U.S. upcoming elections.
- Pray for our soldiers that are in harms way.
- Pray for the persecuted Christians around the world.
- Pray for our church and it's members and friends.

God's will be done!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Psalm 100 niv

*Shout for joy to the Lord,
all the earth.*

*Worship the Lord with
gladness;*

*come before him with
joyful songs.*

Know that the Lord is God.

*It is he who made us,
and we are his;*

*we are his people,
the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with
thanksgiving*

*and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and
praise his name.*

*For the Lord is good and his
love endures forever;*

*his faithfulness continues
through all generations.*



Photo by Carole Missel

When Joy Feels Like Coming Home

Inspiration comes from:

Come Home for Christmas

by Matthew West

We throw the word joy around all the time, but I think we need to take a moment to think about what it means when we sing about it in Christmas carols or even when we read about it in Scripture. We use joy for so many different things — “Opening that present brought me joy,” “The Cubs winning the World Series brought me joy,” or “Getting that raise brought me joy.” But the “joy” of getting a new iPhone can’t be the same joy we find in the Bible. That kind of joy is just a shallow emotion attached to a conditional situation that passes quickly, right? That’s not the “joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart” that kids sing about at Vacation Bible School.

So, when we talk about joy during the Christmas season, when we light the candle of joy during Advent services, when we sing about it, what exactly are we talking about?

One of my favorite Christian authors, C. S. Lewis, wrote a famous book called *Surprised by Joy*, where he described a little about joy, saying that it “must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure... I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world.”¹

Wow. That’s exactly why he is one of my favorite writers! So, **• joy is something more substantial than happiness. And when you have it, you wouldn’t trade it for anything.**

I read recently that the word joy is referenced more than four hundred times in the Bible.² I also did a little Bible study and looked up how the word is used when we find it in the New Testament. The Greek word for joy is chara, and it’s defined as gladness, cheerfulness,

or, my favorite, calm delight. Bible scholars agree with C. S. Lewis that joy reflects a steadiness and depth not associated with a passing event.

• True joy isn’t dependent on our circumstances, which also means this joy the Bible speaks of isn’t something that can be taken away.

We may not always feel it in the moment or recognize it, but it is still there.

Joy takes center stage as we celebrate Advent in our faith communities. A lot of churches these days use Advent candles to mark the weeks leading up to Christmas. In the third week of the Advent celebration, there is a pink candle known as the “shepherd candle.” This candle is meant to represent the joy that comes through Jesus’ birth and the salvation He offers us. This third week of celebration focuses on Philippians 4:4–5, where the apostle Paul told his readers, *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.*

Paul said joy is found in the truth that God is near us! Christmas is the story of God coming near us. So, it is Jesus’ birth that brings deep and lasting joy to the world. And when we focus our hearts on Him, that joy tends to spread like the flames of a candlelight Christmas service.

Just like with most of the spiritual truths of Christmas, we have to trade in all the trivial, the consumerist, and the worldly ideas about joy to embrace its eternal truth. We have to let go of pop-culture ideas about joy to get to that inner, immovable definition of the joy that only God can bring us.

Another thing we can probably all agree on about joy is that it seems to be kind of a rare commodity in today’s world. Think about how often you really find people who seem to be burning with joy. How many

times do you miss it in church service — a place where joy should be breaking out everywhere? When was the last time you could say that you really were aware of joy in your own life? Or when was the last time you brought joy to someone else? The angel brought “good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10 ESV), but when was the last time you really experienced that for yourself?

The reality for so many people is that Christmas is anything but a time of joy. So many things compete for our attention during this season — office parties, church functions, neighborhood parties, or even the stress of Christmas shopping can fill our calendars to the point of exhaustion. For some people, Christmas is just a season of too many conflicts and uncomfortable family get-togethers with weird uncles and strange family dynamics. There are so many obligations that can make us feel stretched thin emotionally, relationally, and even financially. It’s not like we need any more added noise out there in the world, but the hustle and bustle and material focus of the season can definitely work to darken our joy light if we have any burning at all. Remember, there is an enemy who is intentionally working to steal our joy. He thieves by using discouragement, grief, and the temptation to believe that all hope is lost. But God has given us a story of joy unlike anything the world has ever seen — if we will just turn the attention of our hearts toward the first Christmas.

¹C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1955), 18.

²Bible Apps, s.v. “joy (n.),” accessed April 8, 2024, <https://bibleapps.com/j/joy.htm>.

Excerpted with permission from *Come Home for Christmas* by Matthew West, copyright Matthew West.

Submitted by Carole Missel



Our Mission

The EPC exists to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus as a denomination of Presbyterian, Reformed, Evangelical, and Missional congregations.

Our Vision

To the glory of God, the EPC family aspires to embody and proclaim Jesus' love as a global movement of congregations engaged together in God's mission through transformation, multiplication, and effective biblical leadership.

Our Motto

*In Essentials: Unity.
In Non-Essentials: Liberty.
In All Things: Charity.*

The Steeple Newsletter

is published monthly by the Leicester Evangelical Presbyterian Church, for the purpose of proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and that He is moving among his people here. Our intent is to keep the readers informed of local events, provide information to stimulate and edify it's readers, mixed with a touch of humor to lighten the day.

For those who would like a printed version of the church newsletters, we keep the last 2 months' issues in the brochure rack, on the wall to your right, as you exit the sanctuary to Fellowship Hall.

Submission Deadline:
The 3rd Sunday of the month.

Contact:

Sharon Richardson
srichardson002@rochester.rr.com
Leo Richardson
grichardson001@rochester.rr.com

Staying Connected: If anyone does not receive the Steeple Newsletter, participate in Prayer Chain Activations, receive church updates by e-mail, or has a change for the "Birthdays and Anniversaries" and wants to be included, please contact Leo Richardson.

Highlights

Regular Session Meeting of 10/10/2024 at 3:02 p.m

Sharing Life, Spiritual Focus and Prayers for the Church and Others we meet: Many individuals and situations were cited. The Session prayed for those mentioned, and also for our nation, hurricane victims, peace in Israel, and with gratitude for all that God has done.

Treasurer's Report: Standard business matters discussed. Appreciation was extended to the Treasurer for all the work she puts in keeping accurate financial records.

Clerk's Report: Average Worship Attendance: Sept. (16), Average Berean Attendance: Sept. (6), Holy Communion: Sept. 1, (17).

Pastor's Report: Pastor expects to provide shut-in Communion soon. Other routine issues discussed. Pastor scheduled the following: Study Leave: October 14 -20, Vacation: October 21-27 and November 4-10. Communications: Pastor talked with a member of "Final Harvest", a Christian singing group, about experiences that they had while on tour in New Mexico, which included miraculous healings. Available dates, if one were to invite "Final Harvest" to perform a concert, were mainly in June of 2025. No action was taken. Postal Communications: Solicited Support: Faith Comes by Hearing, Family Life Ministries, and the Jewish Voice. A thank you note was received from Solid Rock Riders (Christian Motorcyclist Association) for a donation by LEPC. Pastor entertained questions or concerns: Session talked about worship attendance when pastor was away. Overall, things seem to be maintaining in our attendance numbers.

Worship: Update: Joint worship service with York UP was discussed but nothing planned for now. Mr. Greg Burns will fill the pulpit on Oct. 20 and 27. Session approved to purchase dinner gift certificates for Mr. Greg Burns in gratitude for filling the pulpit. Innovations discussed, and agreed upon, when Pastor David is away on vacation etc., such as using pre-recorded audio or video sermons or inviting special musicians in for portions of the service.

Witness Report: 25 Our Daily Bread Christmas Devotionals were requested.

Missions: Session approved a donation to the EPC Disaster Relief Fund. Session approved a donation to "Faith Comes by Hearing". Session approved to support Operation Christmas Child - Christmas Shoe Box program for 2024, and to pay for shipping of those shoe boxes. LEPC's supported Missionaries in the Mideast are expected to return to the USA soon.

Stewardship: Session approved the updated LEPC Financial Policies.

Christian Ed: The Berean's Class is continuing the study entitled, "What Even Is Grace" by the Paul Tripp Ministries.

Property: Session approved the contract submitted by Davis Concrete LLC to repair the front steps in the spring of 2025. Sanctuary sound system has intermittent humming in the speakers. More adjustments to be made and tested. The mower shed was painted. LEPC is still seeking quotes for snow removal for 2024-2025. LEPC is waiting for a written estimate for new railings to be installed once the steps are repaired.

Miscellaneous: The next Regular Session Meeting date was scheduled for November 14, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. Pastor David Missel closed with prayer at 4:50 p.m.

Voice of the Martyr's: icommittoprayer.com

Sept. 12, 2024 | Arabian Peninsula

Christian Attacked on Street

Bassam has been attacked by people angered that he left Islam, but their outrage doesn't deter him from sharing his faith. "He is not afraid to tell people that his life has been changed by Christ, and that has put a target on his back," said a front-line worker. Bassam was walking through a dim alley when he felt compelled to move toward a main street with more light. Just as he reached the main road, two men wearing black masks attacked him with a wooden rod, swinging it at his head. Bassam blocked the strike, but the rod broke his arm. "He believes the attack was a part of the cost of being a Christ follower," said the front-line worker. "He is thankful that the Lord spoke to him. If he had stayed in the alley, he might have been seriously hurt or even killed." The worker added that Bassam requests prayer for his protection and that he will be an effective witness for Christ.

Sept. 19, 2024 | Tajikistan

Christian Woman Beaten, Barely Escapes Forced Marriage

When Dinara came to faith in Christ, her Muslim family members beat her severely. Dinara fled from the abuse, but her family tricked her into returning by telling her that her grandfather was ill and urgently needed her attention. When she returned, she arrived to a room full of people waiting for her, including a Muslim man who was going to take her as his second wife. Dinara escaped and eventually fled to another nation, where she is working to start a new life. Nearly all Tajiks are Sunni Muslims, and fewer than one-half of 1 percent are Christians.

Tajik women who convert to Christianity, like Dinara, can face severe pressure from their families.

Oct. 3, 2024 | Nepal

Threatened Pastor Continues Ministry

After a Christmas worship service in December 2023, Pastor Raj Kumar Yadav received a phone call from an unknown person. At first, the caller asked seemingly innocent questions about the celebratory service, and the pastor answered in general

terms. Then the person asked how many people were fed cow meat during the meal. The question raised concerns in the pastor's mind, since Hindus consider cows sacred and have sometimes made trouble by claiming that Christians have slaughtered and eaten cows. The caller then identified himself as the leader of a Hindu extremist group and told the pastor he would kill him within a week. Pastor Raj said that he is not fearful but is taking precautions.

God in the Trenches

Inspiration comes from: *Face Forward* by Bethny Ricks
Devotionals Daily from Faithgateway

We don't need to wait for mountaintop moments to find God; he stands with us in the chaos, in the trenches, in the valleys. He walks alongside us as we walk on isolated dirt roads, as we sit in cob-webbed corners, and as we reflect on the memories of conquered or avoided mountains. He is present on both the well-trodden and the less-traveled paths, waiting for us in the in-between spaces. Success does not always resemble the envisioned finish line. Sometimes, winning means finding the courage to reach toward hope in simple ways. We do this by finding solace and strength in the small everyday moments that remind us of God's presence and love. These simple acts, even when everything appears to be crumbling around us, offer profound reassurance and peace, propelling us forward, even when we may need to pivot or start over entirely.

- Amid all the advice, what often gets lost is the wisdom that points us back to center, back to faith, back to the assurance that God is in the fight with us, not a mere bystander.

Some trenches are unavoidable consequences of decisions made, but the comfort lies in the knowledge that God will never forsake us. Facing challenges head-on is difficult, but remember this:

Avoidance is your kryptonite.

Indecision is a costly decision.

Time is the greatest snitch.

These aren't just catchy phrases. The collision of these statements forced me to accelerate certain learnings, practice what was both within easy reach and challenging, and steadfastly fix my gaze on God, refusing ever to turn away again.

Avoidance can make us believe that turning away from a problem will make it disappear with time. But when avoidance becomes ingrained in our thinking, it can suffocate our desire to move forward or even work toward healing. We often dodge things we'd rather not face—conflict, health issues, heartache, financial troubles, embarrassment. In those situations, God's peace becomes the

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counterweight, a peace that transcends understanding. Facing what you've been avoiding allows you to hold courage in one hand and God's peace in the other. Confronting your struggles and burdens doesn't mean you're stagnant; it means you're ready to make decisions, run the play, or set a new vision.

Indecision is a decision, and a costly one.

- Each moment of indecision can fill your core with the regret of missed opportunities and the return of self-doubt.

Embrace failure, make it part of your personal equation, and be firm on this: never let others force choices on you. Have the courage to make your own decisions.

Time, our relentless friend, tells the truth sooner or later. It brings light to the shadows, revealing our denials and humanity. Failures are meant to be learned from, not outrun.

We see God not only in blessings but also in the gaps.

With God, we can outpace what would have once destroyed us in a foot race.

Lying in a hospital bed, I realized I had conquered mountains but felt the weight of climbing without peace and clarity. God had shielded and guided me, but I wanted to do things my way. Refusing to step off the mental, emotional, and physical treadmill had led to a health crisis before my thirty-seventh birthday.

The ripples had turned into a wave.

**God is in the fight with us,
not a mere bystander.**

When the Mess Catches Up

I remain immensely grateful that God is not confined to mountain-

tops, the place it seems only great men and women stand and teach. He is present in the mess that we make and that this broken world creates.

In the hospital, the consequences of my choices — my avoidance and indecision and the ticking clock of time — caught up with me.

What will it look like when the mess catches up with you?

This question isn't intended to instill fear. Rather, to reclaim control means acknowledging that you might not have all the answers right now but that you know where you will lean amid the chaos. Allow me to say this:

- We cannot jeopardize our mental health and expect continual victories.
- We cannot neglect our physical health without consequences.
- We cannot sidestep a relationship with Jesus and expect to feel whole.
- We cannot take shortcuts and expect endurance on the long road.

- God is the ultimate counterweight to our troubles.

His whispers and Word are designed to help us proactively react when we feel paralyzed. He has the power to reroute what threatens to overtake us; He's committed to being our refuge. Psalm 23:4 NLT resonates: *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me.*

The shepherd is vigilant in protecting His flock.

I found myself in the hospital because of years of choices, not because of God. Yet what was meant to break me only provided

more strength and grit because, by then, I knew exactly where to lean. God will continually pave pathways toward victory in your life. Keep taking those steps forward; it's the third and fourth steps that weigh us down most. Discipline is the tool to propel us toward victory.

When I was on the brink of a stroke, my mind raced. I grasped for hope, just as I had in moments of reflection during lonely flights, chaotic meetings, court hearings, and long car rides. In every instance, hope was present. God was there throughout. His assurance, "I go before you," empowered me to make decisions unforeseen around the corner and granted me the strength to cease striving and rest.

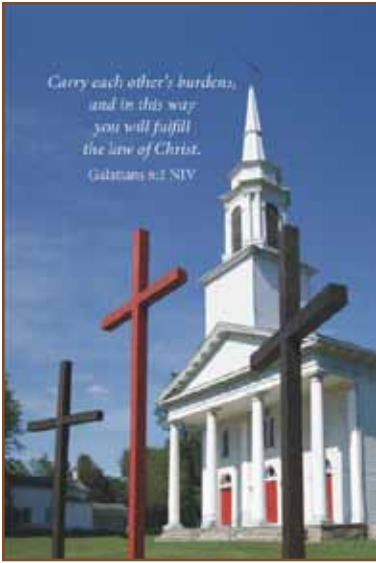
We must actively participate in our personal growth with God. When we're no longer victims to the waves crashing around us, we won't bend toward laziness, dissatisfaction, or a disengaged life, even in the face of loss or disappointment. Our hope, grit, and freedom are found in acknowledging His presence amid storms, trenches, or valleys. Or even in unfulfillment we feel after climbing mountains you thought would bring happiness.

No more avoidance. No more indecisiveness. Create space to think, and then take action. When the lies of yesterday hunt you down in the form of regret and loneliness, when thoughts attempt to put your mind in disarray, and when you realize you're following the wrong leaders, mentors, or friends, snatch the reins back.

Lean directly on God as you cross over troubled waters.

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Submitted by Carole Missel



EPCConnection

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Dish-to-Pass Luncheon 2nd Sunday of the month after church



Leicester EPC
161 Main Street
P.O. Box 202
Leicester, NY 14481



Artwork by Carole Missel for The Nature Conservancy Art Show. One of this year's requirements - you could NOT use paint. You could create in ink, pencil, chalk, etc.

The show begins November 17, 2024, noon til 2 p.m. and runs until December 31 at the Silver Lake Brewing Project, 14 Borden Ave., Perry, NY.

*Wishing you
a Blessed
and Happy
Thanksgiving!*