The focus of this year’s LIFEnline issues will coincide with our recent sermon series:
Breaking Through the Roadblocks of Life ~
This issue will center on breaking through from disappointment to trust and from pride to dependence.

MONTHLY THEME:

Trusting God in the Midst of Struggles

God is bringing me through something much like a deep valley. I intend to emerge victorious, which is why I volunteered to write this. I just thought I would be farther along by now.

My father has dementia. He was diagnosed shortly before we left for Singapore in June, 2008, and he has gone downhill quickly. My mother has aggressive heart disease. My parents moved in with my sister a few years ago so that my sister would be able to care for them more easily. They are sixty-eight.

In preparing for writing this, I listened to Pastor Jim’s sermon on breaking through the roadblock of disappointment and making the U-turn to trust. I wish I had done that months ago. It will take some time for the truths in the sermon to lodge deeply in my heart and become my new paradigm, but I know they will because I know God can make it happen. He’s in the business of changing peoples’ hearts.

In his sermon, Pastor Jim addressed four questions we ask when we are faced with disappointments.

“Where are you, Lord?” God answers:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” (Psalm 139:7-10)

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5b)

God has never left.

“What are you doing, Lord?” God answers:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:8-11)

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May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

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I was born in western Ethiopia into a Christian family in the Oromo tribe, which lives in much of East Africa. My family had farm land, and I stayed with them until I completed elementary school. During this time, when I was in seventh grade, I was extremely ill with malaria. This was very scary, and nobody expected me to survive. I couldn’t go to church (we met in homes because the government did not allow us to meet in public buildings), but my family and people from church prayed for me a lot.

When I was in high school, I went to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, where my aunt lived. I worked there during the mornings and went to school in the afternoons. After I completed high school, I went back to western Ethiopia, where I worked with my family, raising cows and sheep. I had a coffee plantation, and I also bought coffee from other coffee plantations and sold it to people who exported it all over the world. During this time, every Sunday and sometimes on Saturdays, I went to churches of many different denominations all over western Ethiopia and in Addis Ababa so I could hear the Word of God.

In my sickness, I prayed, “Lord, give me one chance to be in Your house and serve You with all my heart.” By a miracle, I got well, and I went to church and gave testimony of how God healed me. I saw the power of God personally, and my heart was really touched. I knew God really wanted me, and He did this to teach me something.

The Oromo tribe is originally from Ethiopia, where forty-two million of the eighty-seven million people are Oromo. Before 1991, the ruling class of Ethiopia oppressed the Oromo people in many ways. Politically, we did not have the chance to elect someone from our own people to rule us. Socially, we had to use the language of the ruling class everywhere and could not freely speak in Oromo.

Economically, we were not allowed to manage our own property. The land of the Oromo people is the source of important natural resources such as coffee, gold, marble, leather, and mineral water, but the ruling class controlled all these resources. When I was working in business, I saw a lot of harassment, and torture. Oromo people who had strong businesses or were well educated were killed. Thousands were put in prison, and thousands were run into the neighboring countries of Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Djibouti.

We also suffered religious oppression. The Marxist-Leninist government denied the practice of religion and allowed only Orthodox Churches because they supported the government. All other churches were closed, and Christians from these closed churches worshiped under trees and wherever they could. They were sometimes taken to jail, and my parents were in jail three months when I was very young. As I said before, we had to use only the language of the ruling class everywhere, including in our church meetings.

In 1991 a new government took power by guns, fighting, and bloodshed. It said that it wanted to bring democracy and the right to elect government rulers, and many political organizations were created at that time. The Oromo tribe formed its own political organization to fight for democracy, and I started to strongly support it. However, after the new government strengthened itself and gained control in key areas of the country, it started harassing political organizations that were fighting for democracy. It put the leaders of these organizations in jail.

Because I was a strong supporter of the Oromo political organization, the new government put me in jail and tortured me. Finally, I was taken from the jail to the hospital because I got so sick. By the power of money—my family members paid two maintenance workers to help me—I escaped from the prison guard at the hospital one evening through a bathroom window. A waiting car took me to Kenya, and I arrived there three days later.

After I arrived in Kenya, I had plans to work in business again. I was considering if I should buy a convenience store so that I could support my family, but God blocked my plans. My brother, who was then an evangelist in Ethiopia, did not know of my plans, but he wrote me with the story of a dream God had given him. In my brother's dream, I was in a convenience store, considering whether I might buy it. Christ appeared to me in the store and said, “This is not your place. Your place is with Me.” Two other people wrote me and told of dreams that gave me the same message.

A week later, a pastor came and told me about an opportunity to work with a Christian broadcasting service. Through this ministry, I began to provide spiritual encouragement for people who wrote letters from Ethiopia and all of East Africa. Also, I saw a lot of Oromo people who had run from their home county and their property because of the political problems in Ethiopia. They were out of hope, and I strongly started praying. Along with Martha Namarra, an Oromo Christian lady who had come from the United States to Kenya to work with the Christian broadcasting services, I started a prayer group at Daystar University, a Christian university in Nairobi.

We met to pray in the Oromo language, something that was not allowed in Ethiopia, and invited all Oromo people, including politicians and Muslims, to pray with us. A Muslim group in Kenya had welcomed Oromo refugees who were traditional believers and had influenced them to become Muslims. As these Muslim Oromo people prayed with us, they turned to accept Jesus as their Savior.

After about a year, the Oromo prayer group had grown in number and spiritually, and we needed to find a church building where we could meet. We found a church called
the Good Shepherd African Gospel Church, and the pastor gave us a space where we could worship. We started to worship there, and the Oromo congregation elected me as its pastor. God showed me that He had His own purpose in my life before I knew anything about it. I didn't know why I had gone to churches of many different denominations earlier in my life, but now I was a pastor to people who came from all denominations.

In 1999, after living seven years in Kenya, I came to the U.S. with my wife Ebise and two nephews and a niece. I went to the leaders of the Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church, and they invited me to tell them about the Nairobi churches. I couldn't control my tears because I thought about the Oromo refugees in Nairobi, people who had nothing to eat and no hospital. The church leaders started to help the Nairobi churches. I helped a group of Oromo Adventists start a church, and it is now a big congregation of three to five hundred people.

In 2006 I started the Oromo Christian Fellowship (now a congregation of thirty-five to forty people). Since that time, I have been looking for a church I could work with. I talked to twenty-two churches, and all of them were positive. However, they had a long process before we could meet. Finally, God did a definite miracle for me. I met Andrew Gross (an elder at Bethel Christian Fellowship) when he was taking his kids to swimming lessons and I was also taking my daughter, Nahimi (now six years old), to swimming lessons. He told me about BCF and gave my phone number to Pastor Jim Olson.

When Pastor Jim and I met to talk, I learned that the vision of BCF is the same as the vision of my church: we bring people from the east, west, south, and north. I got peace of mind and understood that it was the plan of God for us to come and worship with BCF. God brought us together with the same vision. Last November 13, we started worshipping here.

I see how the Oromo community is affected by the ruling class in Ethiopia. They left everything and fled to Kenya, and they are wounded. I extremely give myself to help the Oromo community receive peace in Christ. I am encouraged by Nehemiah 2:20, where Nehemiah said, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding [the wall of Jerusalem].” I believe the heavenly God will see our problem and rebuild us as a strong community. This is why I give myself to serve as the pastor of the Oromo Christian Fellowship.

God saved me by His miracle, and He has done a lot of miracles in my life. He made me to pass through difficulties and, after the difficulties, clearly revealed His purpose to me. Philippians 1:6 encourages me: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

--Pastor Daniel Gudu
Oromo Christian Fellowship

Over the last several years, I have been representing our upper Midwest region on the National Board of the Fellowship of Christian Assemblies (FCA). This is the Fellowship that our church is a part of, a group of pastors and churches that has been doing ministry together in our area and around the world for many years.

In the midst of our long-standing history, we have often been asked, “What is the FCA?” or “What does the FCA do?” Our answers have always been a little bit different, depending on who was asked, because the FCA was expressed slightly differently in different settings. So a few years ago, our National Board set out to clarify who the FCA has been, was, and was called to be. That discovery process took a major step this last April at our National Convention, when we introduced what we feel God is calling the FCA to BE and DO, and it was unanimously embraced.

We believe that the Fellowship of Christian Assemblies is a family of ministers & ministries connected to advance the Kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit through the local church.

How are we connected to advance the Kingdom of God?

Relational Connections: Regular Regional & National opportuni-
ties for ministers and ministries to stay relationally connected.

FCA LIFE

Missional Connections: Cooperative Missions & Church Planting efforts.

Ministry Connections: Regional and National Resources &
Connections for Youth, Worship, Men, Women, and Couples.

Leadership Connections: Fellowship Elders & National
Coordinator working together to encourage, equip, & empower
ministries & ministers to advance the Kingdom of God by the
power of the Holy Spirit.

This is the international family of churches that we at Bethel Christian Fellowship are part of, and we are so thankful that God has given us these different ways of connecting with others in God's family who want to see the Kingdom of God come by the power of the Holy Spirit through local churches. We recognize that we cannot simply be independent local churches, but that God is calling us to relationships of trust and interdependence as we, like a family, work together for mutual edification.

The theme of the conference was “Greater Things,” and we feel that by focusing on the things God has called us to do, we will in fact see God do Greater Things through our fellowship of churches.

--Pastor Sam Snyder
historical LIFE

A Woman with Lasting Peace

(Editors note: This is the third in a series of BCF Hall of Faith articles intended to help up recall godly characteristics of those who have walked before us at BCF and also to challenge us to walk in surrender to Christ as they did.)

Our first two articles in this BCF Hall of Faith series have introduced us to our first two pastors, Almeda M. Engquist and Helen Jepsen. In this LIFELine issue, we will learn about Helen Jepsen’s older sister, Ruth Donaldson, who loved and served Jesus alongside Helen in her ministry at BCF. Our source for Ruth’s story is a typewritten copy of her personal description of what God had done in her life fifty years before. It is simply entitled “Peace That Lasts.”

Ruth wrote that she and her sister, Helen, grew up in a wealthy home in Boston, Massachusetts, where they had many “fine possessions” and parents who loved them. She added, “We were always into mischief. What one didn’t think of, the other one did.” As young adults, they moved to Denver, Colorado, with their parents, and both married.

“Being headstrong girls, both of us separated from our husbands,” she said, and this was when they began their entertainment career. They “put together a little song-and-dance routine” and became “a hit” throughout the East and the upper Midwest. “In the Twin Cities we were the only two-sister act and were therefore in popular demand. Helen [with the stage name Billie] played the Hawaiian guitar, and I [with the stage name Bobbie] played the tiple [a musical instrument in the guitar family].”

Four years later—1920—their lives suddenly changed. One “beautiful Saturday in June” Ruth was waiting for a streetcar in Minneapolis when she met two women she didn’t pay much attention to. Shortly after Ruth returned home that night, she began suffering intense pain and severe hemorrhaging. She believed that she was dying and asked to have Helen called to her bedside. When Helen arrived, Ruth said, “Helen, won’t you give your heart to Jesus?” Helen immediately fell to her knees and asked Christ to come into her life. As Ruth saw her sister cry out to God and experience the miracle of new birth in Christ, she also experienced a second miracle. “I suddenly felt better,” she wrote fifty years later. “It seemed as though a hand touched me. I felt as strong as a horse. ...God had actually healed me that very moment.”

God called Ruth and Helen to give a bold witness for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and this is what they did, serving Him as traveling evangelists until 1933. After this, God directed Helen into pastoral ministry, and she pastored a church in Clarkfield, Minnesota, and then Bethel Christian Fellowship. During all of Helen's years in ministry for Christ, Ruth served alongside her. Ruth had a desire to minister to missionaries who were home on furlough, and she obtained a home in the Randolph and Snelling area of St. Paul so that they would have a place to stay while they were here.

The January 1975 Bethel Temple Times newsletter (BCF was formerly called Bethel Temple) ran a story that said Ruth experienced “an excitement [that] surpassed anything the nightclub circuit had to offer her—the irrepressible joy of being a born-again Christian.” In that article, she said, “I wouldn’t trade what I have for anything. Christ satisfies.” Ruth enjoyed life, and those who knew her remember that she was a prankster, always ready to play a trick on someone.

In the final paragraph of her life story, “Peace That Lasts,” Ruth wrote the following:

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For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:28-29)

God is never lost!

“When are you coming, Lord?” God answers:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. . . Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 10:35-11:1)

God is never late!

“Why have you allowed this to happen?” God answers:

But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:18-22)

God will never lose!

Speaking of the peace God gave to her and Helen, Ruth testified, “The peace that God put within our hearts has grown more precious than we could have imagined.” We honor Ruth Donaldson, a woman whose faith brought her lasting peace.

--Ken Holmgren

These questions Pastor Jim brought to the fore are still very much in my mind. I intellectually know that He is with me. Sometimes I wish I did have His thoughts, or at least the ability to step back and see the bigger picture, to understand where He is in this. I get impatient and ask Him to come and fix things on my terms – now! I have a hard time seeing His “Yes” and “Amen” in what is happening with my father.

If you are in the midst of a struggle to turn from disappointment to trust, I pray that you will be comforted. So many times, that's exactly what we need when we're hurting. More than answers, we need comfort. I also pray that the power of these truths will roll away whatever stone is in the way, keeping you from trusting Him, so that you will emerge with Him, victorious!

--Amy Watson
Trust + Obey = Something New

(Edited's note: Dave Ogren has served as a worship leader at BCF for many years. We are grateful for his faithful ministry, and we wish him and his family God's best as they step out in trust and obedience to Him in their upcoming move to Scotland, where Dave will be doing graduate studies on the development of Christianity in the non-Western world.)

Remember the old hymn “Trust and Obey”? The familiar lyrics go on to read, “...for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” While these words may at first seem trite (Is “happy” the most robust description?), they really point to a fundamental truth regarding the relationship we who are a new creation have with Christ.

You have probably heard the saying that the most unhappy people are those who have fallen away from God. This immense sadness comes from once knowing the truth and the power of God in one’s life before turning back to selfish ways. One of the ways we can remain both grounded and growing in Christ is to trust and obey Him. This heart attitude and lifestyle sounds quite simple, yet often challenges us in ways we would never dream!

Second Corinthians 5:17-18 reminds us that if we are in Christ, “the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” As we trust Christ’s work on our behalf, He also designates us as reconcilers to the world. It’s a call to both internalize (trust) and externalize (obey) our new selves in Christ’s power. We are made new so we can create new things with Him! Let’s quickly review a couple biblical examples of those who put trust and obedience together and saw God create something new.

After the creation passages in Genesis, things got off to a bad start in a hurry. We had the Fall, the first murder, overwhelming wickedness, the flood, and the tower of Babel. And that was all in just the first eleven chapters of Genesis! It was time for a serious intervention by God after quite a stretch of events.

Just when you think it was time for God to throw in the towel on these humans, He promised to do a new thing. In Genesis 12:1, God told Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” This sounds like a good opportunity to trust. Not only was God calling Abram away from everything familiar; Abram didn’t know what his destination was! He was simply instructed to head out with his family and whatever possessions he could bring.

God did not promise an easy journey, but He did promise that all people would be blessed through Abram’s obedience. It was not enough for Abram to only trust that God’s words were true; he needed to act. Abram needed to trust and obey. God said to Abram, “Trust now, and I’ll show you the new thing later.”

Later, in Exodus 3, we see Moses isolated in the desert, removed from his previously royal influence, and low on public relations skills. Through a fiery shrub, Moses was called to believe God is real and also present with him. At first, Moses resisted trusting. “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh...?” (Exodus 3:11). We have probably all asked questions like this before. Isn’t there someone more qualified? If not, can someone else still get the job done?

The answer is intriguing. God did not say that Moses had what it took, that he would find his way again in the Egyptian political scheme or immediately win over the Israelites. Rather, God promised to be with Moses. When Moses asked, “Who am I?” God showed him that his capabilities (or lack thereof) were not the issue. Rather, the focus was on God’s sufficiency and His promise to commune with Moses and the Jewish people. The one true God was not the “great and powerful Oz” behind the curtain, but was directly in fellowship with Moses. This was in direct contrast to the gods of the nations around Israel.

This revelation was the basis for Moses’s trust in God. Since God revealed His identity, His name, His intentions, Moses could know God and not simply know about Him. God said to Moses, “I am with you, so you can do what I am asking of you.” It was the promise of God’s presence to do a new thing and transform us.

Lastly, the prophet Ezekiel was set in the middle of extremely traumatic events. The Jewish people had been swept away to an unfamiliar land at the mercy of a powerful empire and separated from the temple. Since the temple was the resting place of God’s presence, there was great consternation that the Jewish people were themselves separated from God. Was God still with them? Were they still God’s people?

Through incredible—and at times incomprehensible—visions, an awestruck Ezekiel realized that God’s presence was indeed with them in this foreign land, away from the temple. This was a completely new concept for the Jewish people. No boundaries could separate them from communing with God. However, this also meant something personally for Ezekiel. For a number of years, he had been trained to work in the temple. It was all he had known, his identity and purpose. But in the first few chapters, we see God calling Ezekiel to a new position, to be a prophet rather than a priest. He was to be a “watchman,” speaking God’s words of warning and comfort.

Ezekiel was completely unprepared for this new assignment. He did not have much time to think it over, or years to develop his craft. Rather, Ezekiel was put in a position where trust was his only viable option. As he stepped out

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Introducing Karen Christian Fellowship

We are the Karen people from Burma. In 1949 the Karen revolution started because we were seeking freedom and democratic, human, and equal rights. In 1984 the ‘Burmese government regime persecuted, killed, raped, and tortured the Karen people and other ethnic groups. By December 1994, most Karen had to flee to Thailand to rescue our lives and became refugees. In 2000 the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) opened the immigration case status for Karen refugees, so the Karen people received permission and opportunity to go the USA to live in safe places. Praise the Lord Almighty! We thank God for bringing us here. Six thousand Karen people, maybe more, live in the Twin Cities.

Last December, our Karen Christian Fellowship church started with three families, praying together and having fellowship together in Jesus’ name. We have moved from place to place. Our families grew spiritually, and other families joined us more and more. We decided to find a better place to meet, the best place for us, and we prayed hard for this. Finally, God provided us with the perfect place, the perfect pastor for us to connect with. We set up an appointment to meet with Pastor Jim Olson and his church leaders about giving the Karen people space to have services in his church. God touched Pastor Jim and his church leaders to agree to have us in the Bethel Christian Fellowship building.

We Karen people thank God for this. We thank God for Pastor Jim and the church leaders, the staff, and all members who welcome us at Bethel Christian Fellowship.

--Thomas and Kathy Ritnorakan
Chairman of Karen Christian Fellowship.
Singleness: Infirmity, Identity, or Opportunity?

(Editor's note: Stephanie Fisk, a part of the BCF community since 2005, is serving God in ministry with the G42 Leadership Academy in Mijas, Spain, and also with MATTOO (Men Against the Trafficking of Others), which works with victimized women in the underground sex trade. She introduces her thoughts in the following article this way: As I prayed about what I should write for this LIFeline, I could not deny that this is the message I am to share. I believe that I am writing it as much for me as for you! I am writing it in the spirit of gratefulness that God has protected my heart until such a time as this.)

I’m not a girly girl, nor do I write about relationships with men. I recognize that I am a woman who has not only lived, but thrived as a rather content, single missionary during my twenties. My focus has remained strong as I devoted all my time, energy, money, and resources to serving Jesus around the world. Were there times when I desired a companion of the opposite sex? Of course, but I saw those as very vulnerable and weak times when I would quickly shut off the raw emotions and replace them with yet another wall of protection around my heart.

In my mid twenties, I began to notice this callus that “protected” my heart from distractions such as a relationship with a man. I recognize that it is good for a woman to be guarded and not sell herself short to every man who shows interest in her. But when does this singleness become part of a woman’s identity that prevents her from opening her heart when the time is right? I was beginning to sense a false sense of pride in my singleness and a mentality that I was a better servant of the Lord because I was single. I found myself almost despising women who only attended to their kids and husband. I didn’t want to be one of those women who no longer had time to “serve the Lord.”

Don’t get me wrong. I know that raising a family is one of the greatest ministries on earth, and I want a family of my own! But my view was a bit warped due to pride that prevented me from acknowledging what was truly in my heart. While this attitude helped to keep me very focused and available for where God was leading me, my spirit was not open to the possibility of a relationship.

For many years, I wore singleness with pride. But with each passing year, pride dissolved into a deep sense of disappointment. I began to struggle with even imagining that I could be in a relationship, let alone desired by someone of the opposite sex. I begrudgingly resigned myself to live a life of singleness. Rather than see it as a gift, I began to view it as a disease. This is when God brought Ruth into my life and turned my perspective and attitude around.

Last year, I read the Book of Ruth over and over again. God spoke to me loud and clear about two things: Ruth’s attitude towards serving her family in her singleness (as a widow) and the fact that while she devoted her life to serving her mother-in-law, her path crossed with that of her future husband. Her singleness was not her identity nor an infirmity, but a blessing that enabled her to be in a position to serve God and her family. She embraced it. I found extreme comfort in Ruth’s story, as I could relate to parts of her life. Here I am in Spain, single and serving the vision of a spiritual father. I found rest and a renewed sense of trust in God in this area of my life. As my trust grew, walls that I had built around my heart began to crumble. Instead of me protecting my own heart, I began to depend upon God and His good and perfect will for my life in regard to a future husband. In Him, my heart began to soften to the idea of meeting the love of my life.

As I focused on serving God and the individuals He had placed in my life in Spain, I began to notice a special someone who appeared to be running along a path parallel to mine. He began to pursue me. What was his initial attraction to me? The way I faithfully and courageously served the Lord and His vision in my life. I immediately thought of Ruth. Long story short, after five months of talking and dating, we are enjoying this process of discovering God’s love for one another and how beautiful it looks to serve Jesus alongside a lifelong companion.

I pray that God’s faithfulness shines brilliantly and that He is constantly glorified as His sons and daughters learn to trust Him in all areas of their lives, not just those areas where it is easy. Personally, as I surrendered this area of my life to God, He responded with love, joy, freedom, and blessings.

--Stephanie Fisk
Trust is central to the Christian faith. Other related words would be hope, faith, and belief. If we think of moving toward dependence—on God, our husband or wife, our co-worker, or our friend—it is probably not going to happen without trust. Trust and dependence exist in the fabric of our lives. They can be blocked by pride and disappointments, but they grow as we exercise them. God gives each of us different experiences or opportunities to trust Him. As we trust Him in one situation, it becomes easier to trust Him in the next similar situation. He prepares us for what He is calling us to do, or, you might say, it’s all part of God’s plan (PGP).

Marla and I have moved around a lot, so it has probably been easier for us to trust God and depend on Him when we move to different locations in Southeast Asia. We react differently at the time of these transitions, but we have both seen over time how God has provided and blessed us in each place. Having said this, I hasten to add that the upcoming transition in our lives will not be an easy one for me. It’s not so much because of the move, but because the job to which I am being called is in an area where pride and disappointment have taken their toll in my life.

In Hebrews 11:1 and 6 (New Living Translation) we read:

> Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen, it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. ...And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

When we have faith in God, when we believe that He exists and rewards those who sincerely seek Him, we are able to trust Him and depend on Him. Faith enables us to take steps of obedience when we can’t see the outcome. But it is different from expectations, which look at what we want and what we think we deserve, things that relate to pride. While both faith and expectations relate to the future—what we hope for and cannot see—faith looks to God, and expectations look at circumstances.

Expectations can be devastating. People have expectations when they go into work for God or when they get married. Many times the expectations lead to disappointment, and then one must decide how to respond. One can remain in disappointment and be paralyzed, unable to move ahead with God, unwilling to accept guidance from God or others. Or one can respond with faith, looking to God, trusting that while things may not be as expected, God has in mind what is best for us. He cares about us and about our future, and we can take small steps forward as He shines His light on our path and guides us.

I have walked in disappointment, and I am thankful that God has always been there for me. But I haven’t always seen that, and I haven’t always had the faith to move ahead in God’s call for me to teach and work in the best way, His way. I believe that has resulted in lost opportunities. To be sure, all has not been lost or wasted. God has a way of salvaging things, even when we drag our feet.

Now I have an opportunity to move in the dream I once had, but have doubted. I have a chance to teach God’s wisdom. It’s a dream I once prayed for but have not always accepted or shared. Some things seem natural and easy for us, but some things, perhaps some of the best things we do, are difficult. They require great faith for us to take little steps. We move in these areas because we trust that God is leading, and we know that His presence and His blessing on the little steps we are taking will make all the difference.

I’m sure many of you have experienced some disappointment; some things didn’t turn out the way you expected. I encourage you to ask the Lord what steps you can take to move out of that disappointment. Take those steps, just one at a time. Trust in the Lord, and follow His path for you. Grow in your trust and dependence on Him with each step. His presence will make all the difference for you and those around you.

--Moe Hirschy

ANASTASIA & MICAH, MARLA, MOE, AND MARLYSE
IN THE SMOKEY MOUNTAINS WHILE ON HOME LEAVE
Increasing Influence in Evangelism

When God Directs the Show

This LIFELINE’s theme of trust and dependence perfectly spotlights the Fisherman’s Life focus on spreading God’s kingdom. You see, we cannot share our faith without trusting God and depending on His Spirit.

On Pentecost Sunday Pastor Jim gave a powerful sermon on the Holy Spirit. I felt the message applied directly to a fund-raising dinner I was to attend that week. God totally scripted and directed that evening far above anything I could ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

So let the show begin!

Cast

Holy Spirit: playwright, director
*Jim: organizer of fund-raising dinner
*Paul: gay bar owner; Jim’s cousin; main sponsor of fund-raising dinner
Jean (myself): Jeff’s friend
Harmony: Jean’s personal care attendant
*Sam and *Matt: worship/outreach event organizers
*Don: local sportscaster; emcee of fund-raising dinner
*Denotes a pseudonym

Prologue

Several Twin Cities ministries have wanted to rent out a popular gay bar in downtown Minneapolis for an evening of worship and outreach. Although they have tried, organizers had not been able to contact Paul, the bar owner. Providentially, Paul was the main sponsor of a fund-raising dinner Jean was planning to attend, so Sam and Matt, two of the worship/outreach organizers, attended the dinner with Jean, in hopes of connecting with Paul there.

Exposition

We were totally dependent on God to connect us with Paul. We trusted God to direct and empower us; we knew we could do nothing apart from Him.

...Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit...
(Zechariah 4:6)

...apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

In preparation, many people prayed that we would be able to meet Paul at the dinner, begin building a relationship, and be a blessing to him. We prayed that he would be open to renting out his bar for God’s purposes. We asked that Paul would experience God’s love for him and that God’s kingdom would eventually break into the lives of Paul, his family, his employees, and his clientele.

Denouement/outcome

The drama unfolded when Matt arrived at the dinner and realized that it was actually one of his own cousins (Jim) who had organized the fundraiser! (Matt and Jim’s grandmothers were sisters.) To Matt’s amazement, that made Matt a shirt-tail relative of Paul. Matt spent the evening reconnecting with cousins and getting to know Paul and his extended family. They made plans to get together in the future.

Sam enjoyed sitting with several of Paul’s employees. He was able to lead his table of bar staffers in saying grace. Sam’s role included developing a good ongoing connection with one of Paul’s right-hand men.

Meanwhile, Jean and Harmony sat with the dinner emcee, Don, a local sportscaster. When he learned of Harmony’s musical ability, he invited her to sing the national anthem at some of his local sporting events. The Holy Spirit prompted Jean to give Don a CD containing her testimony and the gospel message, which he gratefully accepted.

In the final scene after dinner, Sam, Matt, Harmony, and Jean were blessed to dialogue about spiritual things with other guests and give out books and CDs to those who wanted them.

Epilogue

Those who prayed for us played a major role in how the plot developed. In addition, Matt told how his godly great-aunt (Jim’s grandmother) had prayed for her family and descendants three hours a day for years; her prayers are still being answered. He said that she and her husband helped found the Orthodox Church that Jim’s and Paul’s families attend. Jean recently received an invitation from Jim to attend an event at this church.

We did not approach Paul at the dinner to ask about renting his facility because God is directing Matt to get to know Paul and his family on a more personal level. An interesting twist is that Matt was supposed to be in California with his wife the day of the dinner, but they had to return early to Minnesota because of a medical problem.

God totally wrote and directed this incredible evening for His purposes. We are excited to see what He has in store for the next act of this ongoing Kingdom production.

--Jean Swenson
Learning to Trust God

I was asked to write about trust and dependence for this issue. I find this a delightful God-thing because I am and have been intentionally working on these two things since Saturate started [in January 2011].

From what I have heard from my elders, trust is something we learn throughout our lives. This helps me feel better because I am not very good at it. What I want is to trust God right from the onset of the problem, to have trust in Him so ingrained that it is like breathing. God is giving me this because I have asked Him for it. Trusting God doesn’t happen all the time, but His little reminders can’t always go unnoticed.

In Genesis 22:11 the Lord called Abraham, and he replied, "Here I am." That is how I want to answer God. The beginning of Isaiah 58:9 reads, "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I." This is a promise that I hold onto. He will answer!

Trust and dependence are interrelated in my life. The Lord is teaching me to trust Him in situations where I am fully dependent on Him. I have been on my own for almost six years now. During that time, I have been homeless twice—not movie-type homeless, just couch hopping. I have been both hungry and tired. I have wanted a place to rest, but not without losing the freedom to do what I wanted.

Then the Lord put His rather large foot in my path, and my life changed, drastically and very quickly. He showed up physically when I was in a dangerous situation and then spiritually when it was time for me to heal. His foot has stayed there, but I realize that He was not blocking me from myself, He was walking with me.

I have fallen short. I am a sinner saved by grace, completely unworthy of the love the Lord shows me. But that does not matter because His love and His purpose for my life have taught me to depend on Him. I cannot depend on myself.

Where am I now? I am completely jobless, in school full-time, loving my three-and-a-half-year-old. I am in my own apartment (with walk-in closets), have my own car (I say "my own," but it is the Lord who provided it out of His abundance), never without food, never without love, and never alone.

Trust and depend on our Father. It may not look like He is giving you what you want, but He will always give you what you need. Psalm 37 says that we are to follow God in all our ways, even though we will have trouble. The closer we are to Him, the more like Him we become and the more we want what He wants. We will want to please God out of love for Him.

May God abundantly bless you and your family.

--Cay Yingling

Elevator Apologetics

Rick Mattson, a friend of Bethel Christian Fellowship and an InterVarsity leader for Macalester College, has been in the process of writing a book on apologetics. To make his writings known, he has been posting snippets from his book. Each segment is called “Elevator Apologetics” and presents an image that can be used to answer hard-to-answer questions.

For example, Rick answers questions about the Bible’s authorship and reliability, questions like, “Why does the Bible contradict itself?” He explains that our context of understanding now is not the same as it was during the times that each book of the Bible was written. To give a simple and concrete illustration, he asks us to imagine people two thousand years in the future observing the game of basketball through our ancient newspaper clippings. It would seem alien and strange, as we sometimes feel the contexts of the Bible are.

All of Rick’s illustrations help us to better approach theological questions with concrete pictures that can be brought up in short conversations. They are, as Rick says, “images for apologetic conversations that you can put into play quickly -- even on a short elevator ride.” Hence, he has entitled them “Elevator Apologetics.” For more illustrations, get connected to his blog: http://rickmattson.blogspot.com.

--Elisabeth Wolfgram
During the 2011-12 school year, our Kingdom Kids were on a journey of learning to **love God and love others** as we studied the Ten Commandments, a road map for God’s perfect will. A few of the kids had the opportunity to say what each commandment means to them personally and how they can live and walk them out in daily life. Here are some of the lessons we learned along the way. Yes, these kids have much to teach us! *(Note: grade designations are from the 2011-12 school year).*

**Commandment # 1: Have no other gods before Me.**

“Have no other gods before Me” means not to believe in false gods that are not real or not to bow in front of statues. The Creator of the universe is the only God to worship. In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar punished Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for not bowing and worshiping the image of gold and man-made gods. God saved them from a blazing furnace because they refused to worship him and other gods and gold. They believed only in God, our Creator.

--Mark S., Grade 3

**Commandment #2: Do not worship any idols.**

I think “Don’t bow down to idols” means that nothing is more important than God. If you worship money, TV, or anything else, you are saying it’s more important than God. You can’t worship both at the same time. You can pick some idol or God. If you follow God, you get eternal happiness, but if you worship idols, you will only get immediate, non-lasting happiness. God is trying to say, “Pick eternal happiness or immediate pleasure that will probably end in devastation.” Thus, “Don’t bow down to idols” means you can follow God or an idol, and there is only one God. God will give you happiness on earth as well as heaven.

--Mario H., Grade 5

**Commandment # 3: Don’t use God’s name in vain.**

Do not swear because He said so and because His name is good.

--Chris B., Grade 2

**Commandment # 4: Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.**

Do not go to the store on Sunday. I like the verse Job 37:14, “Stand and consider the wonders of God.” I love the Sabbath!

--Toby G., Grade 1

**Commandment # 5: Honor your father and mother.**

Do not argue, and listen to your mom and dad. Your mom and dad are important, and it helps me to listen and obey God. Help your mom and dad—like cleaning your room.

--Keira W., Grade 1

**Commandment # 6: Do not murder.**

Do not kill others. This is a commandment from God. Your life and everyone’s life means a lot to God.

--Elijah H., Grade 2

**Commandment # 7: Do not commit adultery.**

Well, “Don’t commit adultery” means you shall not cheat on your spouse. If you do, you’re disobeying your spouse and God. If you hurt anyone, you hurt God. God is trying to teach us to be trustworthy. Stick with your spouse, just like in Jeremiah 3. We can live this out by waiting to find a person you really love and make sure the person really loves you back.

--Benny P., Grade 5

**Commandment # 8: Do not steal.**

You shouldn’t take what other people have without permission. We should be thankful for what we have. We can live this out by being thankful and being happy with what we have.

--Ian M., Grade 4

**Commandment #9: Do not lie.**

Do not lie to God and your family. Don’t lie to your friends. Don’t lie to your teachers.

--Elise G., Grade 1

**Commandment #10: Do not covet or want what others have.**

You should not want something so bad you take if from others or that it drives you crazy, like that guy [Esau] who sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, making a bad decision. We can live this by talking to yourself and seeking God when you want something so bad.

--Simon M., Grade 2

And from Mark 12:30-31, the first and second greatest commandments that Jesus taught:

“**Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.**”

God is trying to tell us that we need to set aside all of our possessions and serve Him with our whole soul. We can do this every day by setting aside time to worship and by praying throughout the day. Therefore, we need to honor God every day with our love, our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength.

--Joe G., Grade 5

“**Love your neighbor as yourself.**”

Love the Lord as yourself. Love your family. Love your neighbor. Love someone who loves you so much. Love your friends. Love everyone. Love God and love others. Love the one who gives you joy. Love the one who loves you as His own.

--Xia Xee L., Grade 2

Did you know that up to 50 (!) Kingdom Kids (grades K-5) gather each week during the school year to engage in

Growing LIFE continued on page 13
Growing LIFE continued from page 12

Of Trust and Praise

Lord, when I study Your Word, when I meditate upon Your Name, I learn to trust You.

You are the Eternal God, You've been in existence forever-- You will not crumble.

You are the LORD Almighty: great and awesome, holy and righteous.

Not only are You God in heaven, but You are Emmanuel, God with us.

You are my peace and my strong salvation. I praise You, my God and King!

--Amy Watson

Festive Seasons

Longing for songs of festivity, Seeking their secret vitality. Clues of things as they ought to be, Seized as the Maker grants jubilee. Acquire these things by simply asking And by inwardly receiving His dispatches sent posthaste. Sent for mortals to pursue, To sing and dance this Festive View:

Come to me, Oh, Come to me Joyous dance and liberty. Leaping spiral spins of joy, Exaltation to deploy. Reservation set aside, Yeshua's lively life applied The standard for us all. Release, embrace, expand your reach: Communal praise to Heaven breach.

--Bruce Beyer

In God We Trust

When we're encircled all around By frightening, evil forces, It's natural to put our trust In chariots and horses. Psalm 20:7

But when it seems that life presents A war on several fronts, God would rather that we trust In His deliverance. 1 Samuel 2:1

When opposition rises And defeat is close at hand It's tempting to rely on weapons As we take our stand. Psalm 44:6

But sword and bow will not suffice And sin must be deterred By absolute reliance Upon God's Holy Word. Psalm 119:42

When difficulties spring to life No matter where we turn We often place our confidence In riches that we've earned. Psalm 49:6

Instead, we need to place our hope In treasure from above – The confidence that we can have In His unfailing love. Psalm 13:5

When we're uncertain what to do, Unsure of what we've heard, We sometimes choose to listen To false, deceiving words. Jeremiah 7:4

But Jesus has provided The path that's true and bright We fix our hearts with faith and trust On Him, who is the Light. John 12:36

--Liz Kimmel

July: 16-20: SHLBC Jr. High Camp  
22-27: SHLBC Sr. High Camp  
29-8/2: Day Camp: Catch the Dream! 

Register online.

Aug: 12: Graduation Open House for Justin Rasmussen at Cherokee Park (3-5 PM)  
25: Doorway to Ministry Course 9 AM-4:30 PM  
30-9/2: Radiate Youth Fall Kick-Off 
Camp Arrowhead near Lake Mille Lacs

Sept: 9: All Church Fall Kick-Off  
Fall programming begins  
15: All Church Picnic/Newell Park 10 AM-2 PM

God's Word through Bible stories, prayer and worship, crafts, games, and purposeful activities? There is energy, enthusiasm, and eagerness to learn from our creative, relational, and invitational God each week. The kids are so receptive to His Word and are genuinely eager to share what they learn. Their ability to learn, receive, and memorize Scripture is amazing, and their drive and desire to share His love is contagious! Often, the teachers and helpers are the ones who learn from the children, who truly spur on the body of Christ.

Would you like to be a part of this journey in the next school year? Do you have a creative gift to share? Do you enjoy praying with and alongside others? Do you have a servant heart and helping hands? Do you desire to sow seeds with the confidence that God will reap an eternal harvest not only in the children who enter our doors, but far beyond as these Kingdom Kids become Christ's ambassadors in to the world? If so, we need you! Contact Amy Hernandez to see how you can get involved.

--Carole Pankow
Psalm 27 tells what King David did in a very tricky situation . . .

Connect the dots and read the words along the way.

From each of the capitalized words below subtract the letters that spell out the clue in parenthesis. Then write the remaining letters in order on the lines above.

BUNT - (What you put around your hotdog)
RAGE - (How many years old you are)
POUND - (A small body of water)
POST - (A container for cooking)
GUESTS - (What you do when you aren’t sure of the answer)
FORGE - (The opposite of "aft")
HOOT - (The opposite of cold)
BAND - (To prohibit)

**THIS IS WHAT WE ARE TO DO IN EVERY SITUATION WE FIND OURSELVES!**

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This psalm ends with a message. What is it?

Use this chart to fill in the blanks.

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Page 14
What about the person who trusts the Lord?

Use these words to fill in the blanks below.

bear  tree  roots  person  drought
fear  year  sends  stream  planted
heat  falls  water  trusts  worries
like  fruit  leaves  blessed  confidence
Lord  green

13  is the 12

4 in the 17D, whose

is in Him. That person will be

10 a 21 14

that 15 out its 20

by the 9. It does not 1 when

2 comes; its 18 are always

7. It has no 5 in a

8 of 11 and never

to 3.
The Antidote for Pride

Pride presents a very imposing roadblock to God’s good plan for us to live in dependence on Him. As I have been considering this, my mind has traveled back to my first distinct memory of pride’s evil work in my life. It happened in my kindergarten year, when my teacher often sent my classmates and me to our respective homes with worksheets we had completed at school. Almost every day she did this, she had awarded my work with a large, affirming “S” to show that I had done satisfactory work. I proudly showed these worksheets to my mother and soaked in her words of commendation for my accomplishments.

One day, however, the arithmetic worksheet my teacher returned to me did not display the “S” I had become accustomed to receiving. Rather, it bore an ugly red “U” to signify that I had done unsatisfactory work. Now I realize that I had apparently failed to understand the math concept my teacher had been explaining, but then my only thought was that I did not want my mother to see the poor mark I had received.

Before I left school that afternoon, I folded my arithmetic worksheet small enough to fit into my back pocket, stuffed it there, and walked the four blocks to my home. I still remember my feelings of shame and emptiness when I greeted my mother and did not show my school paper to her. Because I could not proudly show Mom the inadequate work I had done, I felt shame and chose to hide my failure from her. And because I hid my failure from her, I suffered the emptiness of not relating to Mom about all my school experiences, both positive and negative.

I no longer struggle with pride about my ability to make good grades in arithmetic, but I find that pride does pop up in my life far more often than I want. At times, it manifests itself in critical thoughts about people I believe should be doing some of the good things I try to practice. It may also appear in the form of unwillingness to admit my vulnerabilities to trusted relatives and Christian friends. And sometimes, when I begin serving God with a genuine heart motivation of love for Him, pride ambushes me with a false sense that I really deserve to be honored for all my hard work for Jesus.

Just as pride kept me from relating to my mother about my learning challenges more than five decades ago, it has sometimes kept me from relating to others in the deeper relationships God desires that I have with significant relatives and Christian friends. And the greatest consequence of pride is that it separates me from my loving heavenly Father. If I let it go unchecked, it will lead to my destruction (Proverbs 16:18), possibly physically and certainly emotionally and spiritually.

However, God has provided a solution for the evil specter of pride. His antidote can be summed up in the twin choices of humility before Him and others and dependence on Him alone. Proverbs 28:13 says it this way: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

Perhaps you can identify with the roadblock of pride. It’s a problem that none of us can successfully remove from our lives in our own puny strength. However, Philippians 2:5-11 tells how Jesus, the only Person who could claim perfection during His earthly sojourn, modeled humility and total dependence on His Father’s eternal plan. If we would follow Him, we, too, must humble ourselves before our loving heavenly Father and place our total dependence on Him.

What kind of relationship do you have with God? What kind of relationships do you have with others? Is pride bringing separation between you and God, between you and the people He has placed in your life? You can begin to address this roadblock in your life by acknowledging your need of God to Him. Turn from the sins that separate you from God, and place your dependence on Him and His provision of forgiveness. God will keep His promise in Proverbs 28:13 and give you mercy. He is calling you unto Himself, to love and follow Him today.

--Ken Holmgren

There is an easy way to raise money for BCF Missions just by searching the Internet with GoodSearch.com. It's simple. You use GoodSearch.com like any other search engine — the site is powered by Yahoo! — but each time you do, money is generated for BCF. The more people who use this, the more money will go to the missions program here at Bethel.

It's easy to get started. Just go to www.goodsearch.com and enter Bethel Christian Fellowship Missions as your non-profit of choice. Make goodsearch.com your home page or add it to your toolbar...then search away! (Please note that image searches do not count toward fundraising AND, your search must be legitimate. You may not search for google.com on goodsearch. That is considered a fraudulent search and will not be counted toward our goal.)

You can also see how much has been raised by clicking the “amount raised” button on the main page. An average of 1 penny is donated for every search we do. Every bit helps!

You can also do a good portion of your shopping online and earn varying percentages of your purchase price for missions. Check it out at the following address: http://www.goodsearch.com/goodshop.aspx