

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/10/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

A man was hiking up in the mountains. As he looked at the beautiful scenery around him, he forgot to pay attention and stepped off the edge of a thousand-foot cliff. Halfway down, he managed to catch hold of a small tree growing out the side of the mountain. As he hung there, he looked down the sheer cliff at the jagged rocks five hundred feet below. He looked up at the unclimbable wall of rock stretching up above him. In desperation, the man called out, “Help! Is anybody up there?”

A voice from above answer, “Yes. I am here. I am the Lord. I will help you, but you must do exactly as I tell you. Let go of the branch.”

“What?” the man asked incredulously.

“Let go of the branch,” the voice repeated.

The man thought for a moment. He looked at the tiny tree barely clinging to the cliff itself. He looked down again at the sharp rocks far below him. He looked back up to the wall above him. Finally, the man took a deep breath and yelled, “Is anybody else up there?”

One of the greatest challenges before us as Christians is to grow in our trust of God. In II Corinthians 4:18, Paul says this: *So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* It seems much safer to stick with what we know, what we can see and touch, and that over which we have control. Though we think we want to grow in faith, our reality is that we stick to what is familiar—that is until something forces us to go beyond what we have previously relied on. We can see who we are now and who we have been in the past, but we may not be able to see who we might become in the future without God’s help. That help is grace. Paul continues this discussion in II Corinthians 5:7: *We live by faith, not by sight.* God’s grace is received by living in faith.

Growing in faith, fixing our eyes on what is unseen, is a life-long process. Too often, it takes finding ourselves in a circumstance that seem hopeless or unbelievable before we are faced with putting our trust more fully in God. Yet, instead of waiting until one of those “falling off a cliff” situations comes along, we would do well to challenge ourselves to expand our faith regularly. We can do this by looking for occasions that push us beyond our comfort zone and force us to rely on God’s help. I’m certainly not talking about stepping out in front of a bus. Rather I’m suggesting that we take occasional steps in sharing our faith, or offering Christian assistance that normally we would avoid: telling someone about how we sense God in our life; offering to pray out loud in that moment for one in need; sharing a promise from scripture that

can uplift or sustain one through trying circumstances; providing assistance to one with whom we have no relationship.

It is when we go beyond what is familiar or comfortable for us and share the promises of God with others that we can find our faith expanding. It is when we have to trust that God will give us the needed words that our faith increases. God promises to be with us and to give us what is needed to witness to our faith. Even when it feels like we're failing, God's Spirit will be there to provide what makes our message effective. Don't wait to walk off the edge of a cliff. Trust God and go where you might normally not go. Fix your eyes, not on what is seen or familiar. Look to what is unseen and, by doing so, your faith will grow.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey