

An Update from the Nelsons & the Church of the Cross

September 2011



The Sentence of Death.

The Apostle Paul nearly died many times. He was stoned, shipwrecked, bea occasion when Paul thought his life was truly coming to an end. He writes about it in you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of A far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.” Sometimes when Paul faced threats, God gave a reassuring word or vision, such as, “Do not be afraid...I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you” (Acts 18:9,10). On this occasion, however, there was apparently no such word. Instead, Paul felt the sentence of death in his heart. He knew it was coming.

A couple months ago I was not feeling the sentence of death for my life, but I was feeling the sentence of death for my ministry. So many setbacks, pressures, and challenges had added up that the death of the ministry seemed imminent. Our Spanish ministry leader was deported in November, a couple on my leadership team were facing a severe crisis in their marriage, the mental illness of a person in the church flared up and caused havoc, our new Spanish service that had started strong dwindled to the point of having to quit, our worship leaders announced that they are no longer able to help us, my young adult Bible study was withering on the vine, our thrift store and community garden projects have faced frustrating setbacks and challenges, and attendance at worship has been really low. My leaders felt like packing up and leaving town, literally. It felt like going back to the very beginning of my time in Delhi; or rather, it felt like the end.

God Who Raises The Dead

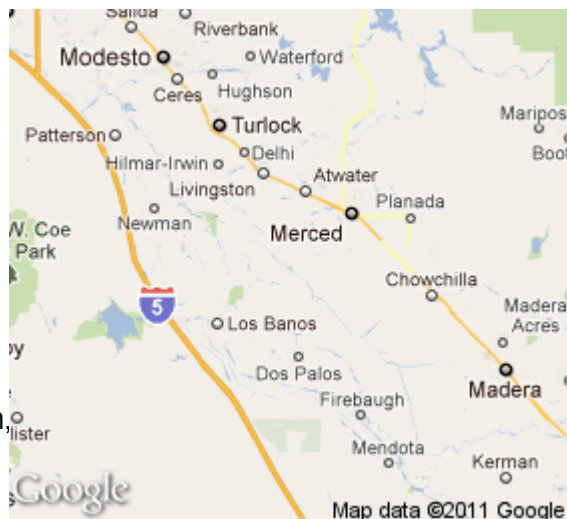
Paul felt the sentence of death, but his life didn't actually end. God rescued him. Paul writes that being brought to such a point of despair happened “that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead.” Paul was at this point a mature Christian, a leader. He was an apostle! And yet he writes about learning a deeper dependence and reliance on God. Of course I have always known that this ministry is in God's hands, but I learn things in a deeper way through experience. What I have been learning is to rely upon God, to depend upon God. That sounds basic, but it is a good lesson for a confident, let's-make-things-happen kind of person like me. So feeling a death sentence is not bad, as it teaches us to rely on God, “who raises the dead.” I have been doing a lot of handing things over to God, including things that seem dead. “If you don't make this fruitful, it will fail. I cannot do it on my own power.” I'm not doing much different than before, but things are different internally, in my attitude, in my faith.

I wish I could say that as I am learning this lesson things suddenly turned around. Not quite. But there are some encouraging signs: things are in process for Isabel's return to the United States, the marriage in crisis is being restored (he confessed to the church and asked for forgiveness!), the Muslim husband of one of our members attended a worship service for the first time, in the last week three people shared with me that it is time for them to come home to God and connect with a church, and our leaders are feeling more encouraged. Coming up we will have a wedding, a baptism service, and a quinceañera. Other difficulties are, well, still difficult.

Livingston.

What was especially hard about all these setbacks was that it all came to a head right at the time I was planning to begin work in earnest in Livingston. Despite the doubts and difficulties, I felt I had to stand firm in Delhi and continue forward with the plans for Livingston. I had told some people that one way I was going to gather people in Livingston was by going house to house. Now I don't like pushy people coming by my door, and knocking on doors isn't my favorite things to do myself. So I kind of chickened out the first time. I did something much more comfortable - I visited my friends' ESL ministry to Indians in Livingston. A good connection, but not what I came for.

Then finally I did a gut check and went out to the neighborhoods. I prayed for an encouraging first house. I introduced myself to the woman who answered the door and said I was planning to start a church and was looking for people who would be interested.



"Yeah, sure," she said enthusiastically. It was as if they were just waiting for a church. After talking with her at her door for a half hour, he husband came home and they invited me in. We sat at their kitchen table and he told me that he reads his Bible and listens to Christian radio regularly, but their family has never been part of a church. We talked so long I never made it to another house that day.

The next time I found several more interested people. The next time one more. This was a more encouraging start than I was expecting. Other people are talking to and inviting their family and friends. Alfonso and Connie, the pastors of a Hispanic congregation that meets at Gateway, our mother church, called to tell me they would like to work with us in Livingston. At this point we have had two informational meetings at Gene-o's Pizza, an old hangout for Livingstonians. It is not surprising, but still disappointing, that only one of those enthusiastic responders made it to a meeting. However, the dozen or so adults include some very capable people. One anglo pastor (me), one Hispanic pastor (Alfonso), and one Indian pastor (Kenny) make for a team ideally suited to Livingston.

Adding risk

I can make no guarantees about the fruitfulness of this second church plant in Livingston. It may fail dramatically. The nature of faith and obedience is that it includes risk. The time and money that have been poured into Delhi were a risk. Now we're adding more risk.

The positive side of having such challenges in Delhi is that I actually have more time available than usual. A number of things have wound down or simply failed, which has freed up my time. I was hoping to have time available because things were thriving and leaders were in place to continue ministries. But however it happened I have time to spend in Livingston, where it seems so far that ministry might be more fruitful.

Immediate Need for Partners!

I just found out recently that a grant from the denomination will be much less than anticipated. Instead of \$25,000 we will receive more like \$6000. I was counting on that money for start up costs and salary. So we're a little bit in the hole. I would like to develop a network of supporting churches in our area, and we already have some wonderfully encouraging partners. The other main network of prayer and financial support is individuals like you.

Would you like to partner with us by giving a one-time or monthly gift towards the new ministry in Livingston? Use the enclosed paper to make a donation or to be added to the prayer team.

Family (& Poultry)

Isaac, Peter, and I bought two turkeys a little while ago. Their unofficial names are "Thanks" and "Giving". This is what happens when you live in a small town long enough. When I was younger I thought people with chickens were such hicks. Peter suggested that we adjust their rotation of chores so that one day one of them takes care of the chickens, one moves the mobile turkey coop, and one sets the table. Sounds good to me. In November a friend from the church will butcher both turkeys and keep one as payment.

Our youngest, Nathan, has begun to crawl, eat solid foods, and pull himself to standing position. He goes crazy with delight when brought to wherever his older siblings are playing.

Thanks

Paul concludes the section on the sentence of death with this hopeful comment, "On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2 Cor 1:11). I don't know how many people give thanks for us. I do know that I give thanks for all of you.

Grace and Peace to You,

Zeke & Rebecca Nelson

(with Isaac, Peter, Katherine, and Nathanael)

Prayer Support

- Praise God who raises the dead!
- For the new work in Livingston! People, gifts, resources, location, timing, and most of all the power of God.
- That God uses us to make many disciples and leaders.
- Worship leaders.
- Pray for God's provision and guidance for our hopped-for thrift store.
- Pray that God does a mighty work in Delhi, Livingston, and the other cities and towns in our area.

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