



IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

Spring 2012

RELYING *on* GOD

TAKE HEART

STORIES OF STRUGGLE AND
HOPE FROM BROTHERS AND
SISTERS IN SOUTH ASIA

plus: INVESTIGATING TWO SONGS
ABOUT HUMAN (IN)ABILITY

and FOUR WAYS TO RESPOND TO
(RATHER THAN SHRINK FROM)
SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

We were ushered into the world of disability when our son sustained a spinal cord injury in a car accident. We were not going to a BIC church at the time, but church suddenly became an unfriendly place. The only accessible door was at the back of the church, out of the flow of people, so he ended up without fellowship. Meals and meetings were held in the basement, which was wheelchair inaccessible, so we had to decide: Do we stay with him and miss the meeting, or leave him to attend it?

[The article “No barriers between us” was] a breath of fresh air! I loved the part about finding people’s gifts and including them in ministry.

— **Nancy**, from InPart.org

I loved this issue! I was proud to be associated with the BIC when I read the stories about engaging with our differently-abled friends and helping them to participate fully.

— **Amy Starr**, from Facebook

I appreciated the Winter 2011 edition of *In Part*’s focus on disabilities and how people with disabilities can experience faith and community without barriers.

I pass on the word about a resource that is available for congregations within the Anabaptist tradition: the Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADNet). ADNet’s mission is to support congregations, families, and persons with disabilities by offering resources, encouragement, and other tools for inclusive communities. ADNETONLINE.ORG

— **Milt Stoltzfus**, New Beginnings BIC (Akron, Pa.)

THE VIEW FROM HERE

“**God never gives** you more than you can handle.” I’d heard this scores of times, but because it sounded so virtuous, I’d never really questioned it. That changed six years ago when I was listening to the radio show *This American Life* and heard this father’s account:

On a typical day, our son, Ben, empties the contents of cereal boxes and egg cartons onto the floor. He opens car doors while we’re driving. He walks into traffic. He throws himself up against the sliding glass door in our den. [. . .] By the time Ben was 12, he [. . .] dwarfed everyone in our house but me, which is why my wife’s arms are covered in bruises and scratches and scars.

This man and his wife dearly loved their son, who had severe autism, yet the demands of his condition had driven them to the brink. They felt totally overwhelmed on a daily basis, a burden intensified by those who told them, “God never gives you more than you can handle.”

I’ve looked, but I’ve never found a biblical basis for this assertion. The closest I’ve come is 1 Corinthians 10:13, which seems to indicate that God will spare us from temptations we cannot bear. But I’m not so sure the verse means we’ll never meet with suffering, pain, or grief that are beyond us. Even Jesus, when facing His crucifixion, pleaded, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Honestly, I wish the Bible guaranteed that these cups would be dashed from our hands. Instead, Scripture seems full of stories of people—Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, Job, Mary, Paul—given more than they could handle.

This edition of *In Part* adds to those narratives, sharing about believers around the world who encounter threatening circumstances, yet who turn to God and are being carried through by the Spirit’s strength.

Their responses remind me of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 1: “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. [. . .] But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us again.”

As I’ve interacted with the stories in this issue, they have awakened me anew to the truth that it is only hope in our Savior—not in ourselves or in our coping skills—in which we can rest.

Kristine

Kristine N. Frey, editor

IN PART™

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*Now I know **in part**; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. I Corinthians 13:12*

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COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA



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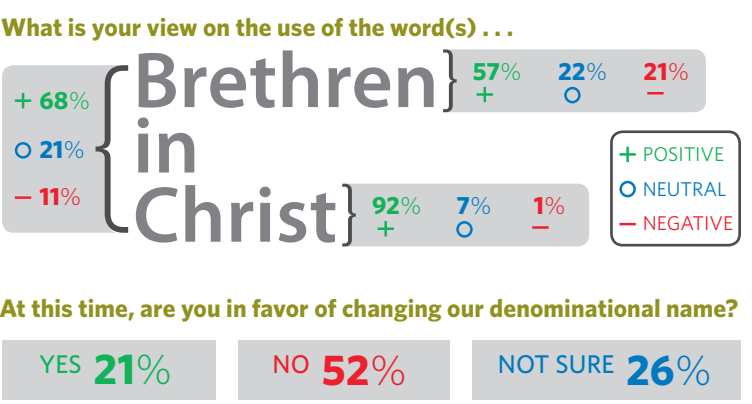
Creative contributor



Natalie Robb graduated from Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.) in 2007 and is currently working as a freelance illustrator and web designer in Brooklyn, N.Y. The freedom of weekends in the city and bike rides in the sun are what thrill her. Natalie’s “To Our Core” illustration appears on page 3.

IN MOTION

Name-change survey results



Top three reasons for retaining the current name:

1. Our current name is part of our history and identity.
2. Our current name implies brotherhood or community.
3. Changing our name could create practical problems.

Top three reasons for changing the current name:

1. Most people don't understand the meaning of our name.
2. The word "brethren" is a problem.
3. A more contemporary name could be used.

Some interesting cross-tabulations:

The strongest support for changing the name came from ...

- Those between 25 and 30 years of age (30%)
- Those who have been part of the BIC for five or fewer years (44%)
- Those who are part of the Canadian Conference (54%), the Atlantic Conference (20%), or the Pacific Conference (19%)

Based upon these results, a recommendation to conclude the name-change study at this time will be brought to General Conference 2012 in July. The recommendation will also advise that a name-change study group be convened at least two more times at four-year intervals to determine whether a name change should be pursued in the future, using the 2011 survey as a baseline for trend comparisons.

More on the name-change survey and the proposal for GC 2012 action: [TINYURL.COM/6T6PT2Y](http://tinyurl.com/6T6PT2Y)

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

A JOURNEY WE WEREN'T "EXPECTING"

For one family, relying on God meant opening its home to two new additions

by ANDREW MEISER

Early on in our marriage, my wife, Mary, and I had talked about adoption, but the fire of our passion to pursue it had been mostly dormant for 20 years. I had recently changed careers to become a pastor, our two children were in high school, and it didn't seem like the time for any other major family life changes. Yet the embers of our vision glowed when I heard about how a church in Colorado had adopted hundreds of children, transforming the state's foster care system.

The coals fanned into flame as Mary and I completed training toward the goal of adopting a 4- to 10-year-old child out of the foster care system. Soon, the paperwork was done, the new room was ready, and our kids were on-board.

We were prepared—but not for the news that we ourselves were expecting. College shopping for our 18-year-old son was about to run concurrent with buying clothes for a baby. And as for adoption, we didn't talk much about it.

Then, about a month after our pregnancy revelation, I received a call from the foster agency.

"We have a 5-month-old hospitalized baby who needs a home by today, or tomorrow at the latest," a caseworker informed me. "Are you interested?"

"Can I have a few hours to talk and pray with my wife?" I heard myself asking.

The caseworker agreed but called back just a few minutes later.

"It'd be *really* good if you could let us know sooner. Would an hour be enough?"

→ RELYING ON GOD: We confess our dependence on God for everything and seek to deepen our intimacy with Him by living prayerfully.



Illustration by Natalie Robb

Waves of misgiving and confusion slammed into my spirit as I hung up and stumbled into my church. We had virtually no baby accessories in our home. We had scarcely even thought of foster care possibilities since the pregnancy announcement, and we had never considered taking in a *baby*. "No" seemed the only reasonable response.

As I prayed, God didn't respond to my objections with answers; He answered with the blunt, searing majesty of His grace. I exited the church with a changed heart. The decision was made soon after: Two babies would be entering our home.

Over the weeks to come, I noticed that no one at our church ever suggested that we reconsider our decision to remain foster parents. I was staggered by the outpouring of support through prayer, encouragement, and mountains

of donated baby items. But more than that, I was humbled, and then convicted, as I heard the stories of those in my congregation who were under circumstances far more challenging than mine yet had opened their homes to hurting people. I was learning reliance on God—not only as a flash of faith or spark of discipline but, as my brothers and sisters already understood, a way of life illuminated by Christ's light.

Update: The Meisers cared for "Jack" for four months before his parents met the requirements to regain custody. Fortunately, the relationship between the two families has continued. Jack's parents have invited the Meisers over for holidays, and they allow Jack to spend the night with them once a week. Allyson, the newest addition to the Meiser family, was born on Jack's first birthday.



Andrew Meiser serves as pastor of Eshcol BIC (Ickesburg, Pa.). He adds that the people in his family "enjoy each other outrageously."

FOCUS

THIS JANUARY, 17 men and women donned caps and gowns to graduate as the first class of Instituto Biblico Zoe, a new 12-course program designed to help Spanish-speaking Brethren in Christ explore BIC beliefs or pursue ordination. The ceremony was the culmination of the innovation and vision of Mirta Colloca, Zoe founder and co-pastor of Vida Abundante BIC (Hialeah, Fla.), and the team of administrators and course instructors she has assembled. Enrollment for Zoe's next semester has already necessitated the rental of a larger space, and in the second phase of the program, video recordings of each class will be available for use around the world.



Administrators and members of the first graduating class from Instituto Biblico Zoe

↑ Front row, from left: Obdulio Acosta, Yadira Altamirano, Carlos Berrios, Manette Castillo, Zenaída Diaz Herrera, Adriana Espin, Byron Espin, Kathy Gomez, and Maria Guntin.

Second row, from left: Lucille Faust, director of Zoe; Dorothy Gish, dean of Equipping for Ministry; Francia Hoyos; Jose Duvan Hoyos; Lesbi Lanz; Sylvia Lopez Regalado; Ericka Ortega; Evangelina Perez; Ada Rodriguez; Angel Vallejo; Mirta Colloca, founder of Zoe and co-pastor of Vida Abundante BIC; and Roberto Colloca, co-pastor of Vida Abundante BIC.



TAKE HEART

Stories of
struggle & hope

from brothers & sisters
in South Asia

By Susan K. Getty



Select photos by Brandie Stonge

Believers in South Asia* face many challenges. There are socioeconomic obstacles that hinder church development; there are threats and attacks against precious lives; and there are forces of nature that create chaos. What does it mean to rely on God? The answer may be radically different for different people. But just maybe it has to do with where we put our confidence. Where we think the ultimate power is. And what we do with fear.

SHARING IN CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS IN NEPAL



Sanjay was 13 years old when he decided to follow Jesus, after reading a pamphlet that a Brethren in Christ missionary left in his home 16 years earlier. He knew that the decision was not going to assure him of an easier life. Members of his family and community, who practiced a mix of tribal faith and Hinduism, rejected him. He left home to live with an uncle. For the next two years, he suffered alienation and rejection. Then, due to his witness, others in his family began to understand the truth he had responded to and became believers themselves.

Sanjay has served the BIC Church in Nepal as a pastor, teacher, and chairman for much of his adult life. In September 2008, he and a fellow church

leader were kidnapped by the Nepal Defense Army (NDA), a faction looking to re-establish Nepal as a Hindu nation. "We were taken to an unknown place in a jungle," Sanjay recalls. They were held at gunpoint while they were verbally assaulted and interrogated by their captors: "Why do you preach? Why do you convert people to a foreign religion?" Never given a chance to answer any of the charges, Sanjay and his companion were released after a five-hour ordeal, along with a demand for payment and an order to stop preaching and converting Nepalese people.

"Life in Christ is not easy, and we have chosen this life willingly, and no one has forced us to follow the life that is full of challenges," the faithful pastor says. "Opposition and persecution are not the end of our life but it is headed to the glorious life in Christ when we meet Him face to face."

For hundreds of years, Nepal was officially a Hindu country, ruled by a Hindu monarchy. Many Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians who lived there have been imprisoned, driven underground by threats and violence, or

beaten, dragged to the Hindu temple, and forced to bow to idols. Since 2000, prayer and worship outside the Hindu faith have been allowed, but preaching and evangelism still are considered serious crimes. A new constitution declaring Nepal a federal republic nation is scheduled to be approved in May 2012 and may guarantee religious freedom to the people of Nepal.

Yet until that happens, Nepalese Christians remain in danger.

DIFFICULT PATHS IN WEST INDIA



Photo: ©iStockphoto.com/Mopet (left) | Peter Zelei (right)

Since 2000, Dan and Karen D. have lived part time in a thriving tourist beach town in West India. But it has not been a vacation. As North Americans serving as affiliate global workers through BIC World Missions, the D.'s have faced intimidation and a bureaucracy that makes every forward step a major accomplishment. Even securing access into the country is not a given. Due to restrictions on their visas, Dan and Karen must leave the country every six months. And the Indian government once revoked the visa of a friend simply because he listed his employment as "clergy."

One vital dimension of Dan and Karen's work has centered around starting a new congregation, All Nations Center. As a part of their church plant-

* Part of the reality is that the people in this article have to be careful not to attract attention that would increase opposition to their ministry. We will do what we can to ensure their safety by not revealing their full names or precisely where they live and work. And in some cases, we have changed their names. However, these stories and the people sharing them are real.

It is hard to face these situations, but at the same time, it is a precious opportunity to come closer to God.

ing, they have served as visionaries and mentors while identifying and developing a team of national leaders to carry out the work of the church. This model mitigates the potential of dependency upon North American workers and resources, and it equips new ministers. It also sustains the church during the time when Dan and Karen must leave the country, as their visas require.

With all the challenges of financing a ministry in an area with limited financial resources and of raising up new leaders in the church, Karen shares, “Still our greatest concern is local organized groups from the Catholic community coming against us.” In other parts of India, persecution comes from other religious and political groups. But in their area, the predominantly Roman Catholic community teaches that any Jesus-followers who are not part of the Catholic Church are heretics. This plays out in many areas of day-to-day life. For example, landlords may be pressured by priests of the local parish to refuse to rent to those outside of the Catholic faith or even to evict them from the homes they currently rent.

At times, the tension has escalated to include physical threats. One night, the church had rented a hall to present

a drama to communicate the Gospel. A truckload of men arrived and stormed the hall, smashing chairs, throwing things, and breaking every window in the place. The terrified children were forced into a closet, and two adults suffered bodily injury. Before the attackers left, they stole microphones and electrical cords, putting an end to the program. It turns out that a local priest had instigated the attack. The police, whose allegiance was also with the local Catholic parish, came to the scene but stood by without acting.

Yet the Lord has provided help through an unlikely means: The next chief of police to take office was a Hindu man who had read about the account in the newspapers. When he got to town, he followed up on the story and learned about the harassment that these believers were experiencing. He gave church members his private cell phone number and welcomes calls when they hear news of potential threats.

Now, this influential member of the community serves as an advocate for tolerance between faith communities. And so it has been that, as a result of trusting God while facing opposition, the family of believers there has actually gained a measure of security.

BY THE WATERS IN BIHAR, INDIA



Photo: Associated Press/Aftab Alam Siddiqui

Brethren in Christ brothers and sisters in Bihar, India, struggle with hostility and persecution from other religious groups in the region, but they also do battle with natural disasters. Each year brings heavy rains to the villages along the Kosi River at the base of the Himalaya Mountains. For some time, flood control efforts had addressed the problem. But at the end of the rainy season in 2010, the river—which was unintentionally diverted by the engineering—breached its banks and brought disaster to communities in which several Brethren in Christ churches exist.

Homes and businesses were destroyed. Food and clean water were in short supply. Travel was severely inhibited as both roads and railroads were impassable. The flood had affected everyone, causing many deaths and leaving survivors in great need.

In the midst of overwhelming personal and communal loss, a group of young leaders in the BIC Church of Bihar stepped out of their own suffering and offered to serve their neighbors, many of whom had disregarded them previously because of their Christian faith. These young people volunteered as members of a first-response team

with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches that offers disaster relief. In the past, MCC has worked through another local agency to administer aid, but this time they chose to accept the offer of the BIC in Bihar to act as a direct conduit for assistance.

Kenneth Hoke, executive director of the International Brethren in Christ Association, says, “These were people in their 30s and 40s who were able to come with aid and resources that clearly made a difference in the lives of some very hurting people.”

The Brethren in Christ believers saw the need of their neighbors. They took the opportunity to bring their faith into the public and show God’s love in a very tangible form.

Hindus, Muslims, and spirit worshippers who had carried a low opinion of their Christian neighbors began to see them in a different light. They real-

ized that Christians are, in Ken’s words, “people who are responsive to who they are and what’s happening in their lives.” One leader in the Bihar Church even commented to Ken that people in the community were suggesting that some members of the team run for government office!

Relationships have improved because the Church in Bihar took a risk, trusting God to honor their efforts.

In John 16:33, Jesus recognizes the existence of fear and suffering in life, saying, “In this world, you will have trouble.” Right on the heels of this acknowledgment, He offers this hope: “But take heart! I have overcome the world.” In South Asia, challenges and struggles are a reality for Christ-followers. Yet many are using this time to turn from fear and “take heart,” putting their confidence in God’s provision and guidance.

In Sanjay’s words, “God empowers believers to be able to stand for faith and bear the persecution. It is hard to face these situations, but at the same time, it is a precious opportunity to come closer to God. As I come closer to God, it reminds me how much more Jesus had to go through. The life and death of Jesus is more meaningful when I face certain opposition and persecution. It helps me live a daily life worthy of my calling.”



Susan K. Getty is a freelance writer and artist from Dillsburg, Pa. She works part time in the admissions office at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.), where her husband also works and her two sons are students.

A look at the BIC Church in . . .

Bihar, India

Started: 1914 (by North American BIC missionaries)

Became BIC Conference: 1967

Sites: 104

Worshippers: 4,841

Orissa, India

Started: 1982 (by BIC believers in Orissa)

Became BIC Conference: 1985

Sites: 196

Worshippers: 15,239

Nepal

Started: 1950 (by BIC missionaries from Bihar)

Became BIC Conference: 2005

Sites: 31

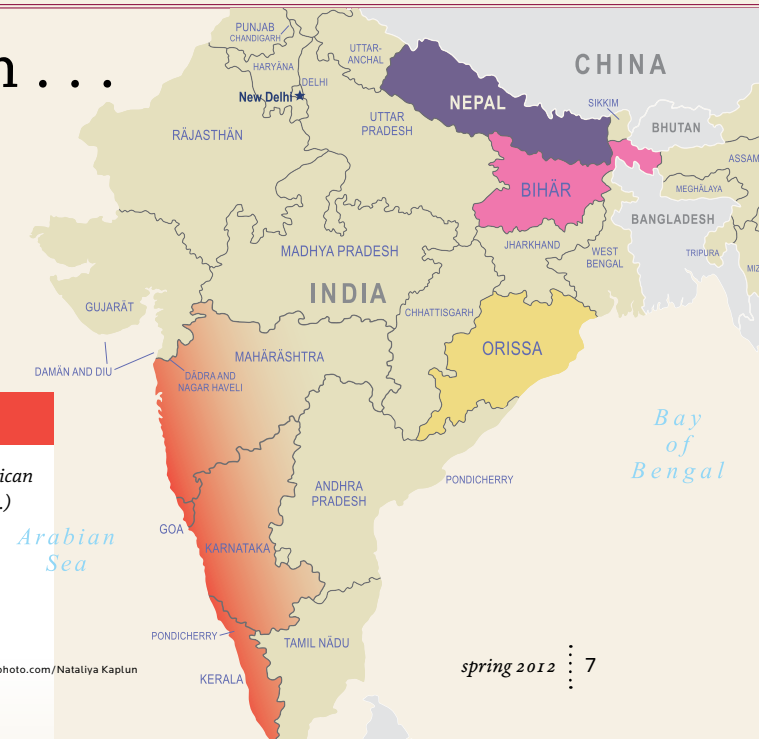
Worshippers: 2,428

West India

Started: 1998 (by North American BIC missionaries Dan and Karen D.)

Sites: 10

Worshippers: 195



In a world of hurt

Four ways to respond to (rather than shrink from) suffering in the world

By Fred Miller



The magazines arrive in my mailbox.

On their covers are pictures of people who look a lot different than I do and who live in a world a lot different from mine. Their eyes are vacant, their bodies shabbily clothed. They often look poor. And needy. I wonder, *Am I supposed to meet such great need?*

Then there are those missions trips I've taken to Chicago, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Zambia. I've seen people suffering—from poverty, injustice, violence, and destruction—firsthand and returned home troubled by the question, *What does God want me to do?*

And added to these experiences, are the articles in this magazine about believers in South Asia facing obstacles and trials that I probably never will. Again, *How does God want me to respond?*

The words of James hauntingly come to mind: “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”

So sometimes I write a check or click the “donate now” button. It's loving; I sense God's pleasure in it, and I view it as one way for me to care for others out of my own abundance. But the reality is that most of the time I do nothing. And I'm acutely aware that these needs are way beyond my limited monetary gifts.

Then how should we respond to world needs that we encounter? How can we avoid apathy (because we tune them out), spiritual dullness (because we don't use them as an opportunity to turn to God), and heavy guilt (because we do nothing or because we don't experience them in the same way as others do)? When we encounter stories of suffering, what might God want us to do?

FEEL. And guard ourselves against feeling nothing. Scripture speaks of having “tenderness and compassion” for one another, even towards those we don't know or will never meet (Philippians 2:1). In Matthew 5:7, Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful,” which implies a heartfelt awareness of the needs of others, and Romans 12:15 instructs us to share in one another's sadness and joys. Just as Christ took on flesh and endured the suffering of humanity, so should we strive to walk in the shoes of others, that we might gain insights into love.

LOVE. Compassionately act in the best interests of others (Romans 12:10–13). This can feel overwhelming, especially when we see news stories of thousands or even millions of people who are suffering. But we should remember that not all expressions of love need to be complicated. A place to start might be the simple gift of feeling their sorrow and not reducing their experiences to a news-bite. They may never know you joined them in this way, but it is one way to honor people's humanity and enter into the story with them. At the same time, true love will be open to other expressions—like giving money, working to correct social injustices, and sometimes offering comfort and support through direct communication, visitation, and service. God knows we can't do every one of these things each time we hear of a need, but we must regularly respond, even if it's in small ways.

PRAY. Through this act, we bring the needs we know of to God, telling Him what's on our hearts. Then, we listen, letting God say what's on His heart. We let Him speak to us about how we feel (or don't feel) and how we love (or don't love). Through heart-to-heart conversation with God, we ask for His kingdom-will; we cry with Him; we confess our apathy; we pursue the heart of Jesus in us (Ephesians 6:18).

A wide path of freedom

I find it helpful to understand God's will as a wide bike path, rather than a narrow, single-file trail. Most of the time, I believe God is not trying to get me to discern one single, God-pleasing response to human suffering. Rather, He's pleased if I stay on the wide path of compassion, moving forward and not going off to the left or the right. The four guidelines above assist me in this process.

For example, my wife and I seek to practice these responses when we encounter hurting people in our church and community. We discuss human needs and pray for them with our children and grandchildren. For a broader perspective, I set my homepage to a site that highlights world events. I subscribe to secular and missions-oriented magazines that inform me of global, regional, and local issues, and I try to periodically visit places where I may encounter these issues. I also do my best to engage and be open to different voices that propose spiritual, social, or political solutions to needs.

In all of these things, our main call is to follow Christ. In the words of the worship song “Hosanna,” we must ask Jesus to:

Heal my heart and make it clean
Open up my eyes to the things unseen
Show me how to love like You have loved me
Break my heart for what breaks Yours
Everything I am for Your Kingdom's cause
As I walk from earth into eternity.*

*Lyrics by Brooke Fraser



Fred Miller is the senior pastor of Cumberland Valley Church (Dillsburg, Pa.). Fred loves to read theology, to coach youth lacrosse, and to watch and evaluate movies with his wife, Cathy.

In a world of hope

Feeling, loving, praying, and growing are lifelong endeavors. But here are a couple practical ways to pursue them.

FEEL.

- **Find out** all you can about the context.
- **Listen** to people in the situation talk about what they are experiencing.
- **Ask yourself** some questions. (You may even want to write down your responses.)
Have I ever been in this situation or a similar one? What was that like?
What might I be feeling if this happened to me?
What things might be keeping me from feeling (fear, busyness, pain, etc.)?

LOVE.

- **Ask** others to tell you what they need and seek to provide them with it.
- **Take the time** to “mourn with those who mourn.”
- **Give** to the BIC World Hunger Fund in cases of global emergency relief assistance.
BIC-CHURCH.ORG/MINISTRIES/COMPASSION/WHF.ASP
- **Go** with BIC World Missions if visitation is the best approach. BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WM/SERVE

PRAY.

- **Use** the Prayer Focus, a weekly list of prayer requests from the worldwide BIC community.
BIC-CHURCH.ORG/CONNECT/PRAYER/PRAYER_FOCUS.ASP
- **Sign up** to receive *The Challenge*, a monthly newsletter of prayer requests from BIC global workers. BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WM/PRAY/CHALLENGE

GROW.

- **Subscribe** to *Shalom!*, a quarterly journal that shares stories of peace and reconciliation from around the world.
BIC-CHURCH.ORG/CONNECT/PUBLICATIONS/SHALOM
- **Engage** in conversation with others at INPART.ORG.
- **Challenge yourself** with new ideas using the resources available at BIC-CHURCH.ORG/RESOURCES.

Sufficient sounds

One song is
about ability.

The other is
about inability.

BUT I SEE TRUTH IN BOTH.

By Scott Elkins

Raised in a working-class home in Appalachia, I saw both of my parents laboring long and hard to put food on the table. We were not poor, but only because we stayed busy. It never crossed our minds to have someone mow our grass, fix our car or our house. Charity was something we gave; it was never to be received. We stood our ground, paid our debts, and didn't ask anyone for anything.

As an adult, I still do most things myself. Isn't that the American way? This idea is at the heart of who we are as people. We prefer to stand on our own two feet, to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Does anyone really like to admit that they need help? I doubt it. Yet as a Christian, I wonder if "self-reliance" is a healthy attitude.

At the same time, the alternative—doing nothing or failing to use our gifts and skills—seems equally unhealthy. Humankind has accomplished amazing things. These wouldn't have happened if people had just sat around moaning about their limitations.

But when do our actions come from our being made in the image of God, and when do they come from our broken, sinful nature? Two recent popular

songs highlight this tension between our inevitable weakness and our incredible capacity as people.

WITH MY OWN TWO HANDS

Ben Harper's 2003 hit "With My Own Two Hands" is an upbeat reggae romp full of Les Paul guitars and B3 organs. As a listener, it makes me want to open my sunroof, crank up the stereo, and take on the world. Here is a sample of the lyrics:

I can change the world with my own two hands
Make a better place with my own two hands
Make a kinder place with my own two hands
I can make peace on earth with my own two hands
And I can clean up the earth with my own two hands
And I can reach out to you with my own two hands

Who hasn't felt like this on a spring day? This song makes me feel strong. It causes me to dream big dreams. Listening to this song inspires me get out there and fix this world—and it makes me believe that I can. I love this song because it moves me out of my comfort zone and encourages me to get my hands dirty.

However, I have a confession to make. Most of the times that I have risked, I have failed. More often than not, when I have stuck out my neck and tried to change even a small situation, I find that I am not capable of much at all. I turned 47 this year, and I did not celebrate. Each birthday is a bitter pill to me: a reminder that my time is running short and that, despite my best intentions, I am not accomplishing what I thought I would have accomplished by this age. When I was a

young man, I felt I could do anything. But the unbridled optimism of my 20s is now tempered with frustration and brokenness.

While I am quite happily married, have four great kids, and pastor a wonderful church, I used to dream bigger dreams, like those in Ben Harper's song. I still haven't contributed much to world peace, cleaning up the earth, or changing the world. Most days I don't feel very self-reliant. As I try to tackle a problem, I feel as if I am trying to bale water out of a sinking ship using a bucket with no bottom. It doesn't matter how hard I try, it just doesn't seem to work.

I'M NOT ABLE

That same sentiment reverberates through NeedToBreathe's 2011 song "Able," a soulful, piano-laced introspection featuring a sweet dobro solo. These lyrics speak well to how I feel most days:

Carry round the secrets
Only heaven knows
Crawl into our darkened rooms
Where only victims go
Though I feel I'm strong enough to carry all this load
I'm not able on my own

This song understands that North Americans are enmeshed in a culture that tells us to "just try harder." But I have yet to find anyone who is this utterly self-reliant and capable of standing solely on their own two feet. Perhaps the most offensive part of the Gospel is the revelation that "I'm not able on my own."

But equally scandalous are the words in John 14:12, where Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these [. . .]." Jesus Himself believes that we will do bigger and better things than He did. So far, I haven't turned any water into wine, restored sight, or healed a lame man. Am I doing something wrong? Or did He mean that the things I would be able to do are greater than miracles? In Acts 1:8, we read, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses." Could it be that the witness of my simple life of obedience—a preview of the coming Kingdom—is greater than feeding 5,000 people?

About halfway through "Able," the lead male voice is joined by a whole choir, which belts, "Find your patience, find your truth / Love is all we have to lose." The sudden flood of voices

reminds me that we're all in the same boat, and no one's bail bucket is of any use. Maybe I'm reading too much into it, but perhaps it is in our daily rubbing of shoulders with other broken people that we find our patience and our truth—the truth that we are desperately needy.

TOGETHER

So who is right, Ben Harper or NeedToBreathe? I think both are on the right path, depending on where you are in life. Without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, "Able" is correct in saying that "Though I feel I'm just as strong as any man I know / I'm not able on my own." But once we have surrendered to Christ and are filled with the Holy Spirit, then maybe we can sing with Harper, "I *can* change the world with my own two hands."

Where does that leave me? I need to remember that when I act upon my own plans and desires, I find myself in the same predicament as Adam and Eve: afraid, standing naked in front of God, ashamed of eating my own apples and searching for fig leaves of self-importance, self-reliance, and self-indulgence. I must learn to wait on God in prayer for the right plan to change the world and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to make that plan reality.



Scott Elkins is pastor of Canoe Creek BIC (Hollidaysburg, Pa.). When he's not spending time with his wife and four children, Scott can be found racing kayaks or playing guitar, dobro, and bass guitar.

TO THE POINT

How are you connecting to, learning from, and serving with the worldwide family of faith?

THIS SPRING, I'M TAKING a six-week sabbatical trip to India, Tanzania, Kenya, and Britain. I want to learn from these brothers and sisters—what keeps them strong and what challenges they face, even as they faithfully minister. At the same time, I'm eager to accept their invitation for me to teach and share out of the training I've received. It's exciting to be a part of this type of exchange where all parties are learning and growing together, based upon the unique resources and experiences we have been given!

—**KEITH TYSON**
Ashland (Ohio) BIC

WE HAVE A VISION FOR PATHWAY to become a congregation that is *for* the nations. As we look into what this means for our church, we want to commit by praying, giving, and going.

For the past several years, we have given to support the work of God around the world through BIC Cooperative Ministries. We have also partnered with other organizations in our giving efforts. And for the last couple of years, we have taken teams to support the work of BIC workers serving at the Navajo BIC Mission (Bloomfield, N.M.).

—**JEREMY BLOUNT**
Pathway Community Church (York, Pa.)

WALKERSVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH has partnered with a missions organization, Ekta Indian Missions, by providing an office in the church free of charge. The church has also partnered with Ekta by providing local volunteer staff and clothing and materials for a Vacation Bible School in India.

In addition, our church has recently welcomed a Spanish-speaking congregation to use our facilities for its services.

—**TIMOTHY FISHER**
Walkersville (Md.) Community Church

FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS, groups of believers have prayed for the BIC Church by using the Prayer Focus, a list of prayer requests and praises from around the world that I compile each week. It is posted online at BIC-CHURCH.ORG/CONNECT/PRAYER/PRAYER_FOCUS.ASP. I hear from people who appreciate being connected and use the Prayer Focus for personal prayer times, as well as for group prayer meetings.

Praying is a powerful ministry that anyone can do. It connects us with all of our brothers and sisters around the world. We can learn of God's work in battles and victories everywhere. It's been amazing to see how, with almost every request in the Prayer Focus, there is a praise for some other need that was met—and often, that need was prayed for in a previous week.

—**GRACE HOLLAND**
Dittsburg (Pa.) BIC

PARTING WORDS

GOD IS NOT A SPARE TIRE

So don't keep Him in the trunk

by PERRY ENGLE

I've never been much for overly simplistic sayings (sorry, Twitter), so I always approach catch phrases with a questioning eye. One I've been processing recently is the admonition to “pray like it all depends on God and work like it all depends on you.”

It took me awhile to find the originator of the quote. One source cited reformer Martin Luther; another, revival preacher Charles Finney. Eventually, my research led me to a fellow bishop, Saint Augustine of Hippo, having made the statement sometime in the fourth or fifth century.

The adage has a lot of close relatives. The most familiar is, “God helps those who help themselves,” which, disappointingly to many, comes from Benjamin Franklin and not from Jesus. Another says, “Don't wait until your ship comes in. Swim out to meet it.” There's also an Indian proverb that encourages those in trouble to “call upon God, but row away from the rocks.”

I've been trying to figure out if “praying like it all depends on God and working like it all depends on you” has any parallels in Scripture. Certainly, we are called to “pray without ceasing” and to “work as unto the Lord.” God says, “Those who seek me find me,” and also declares, “I will bless the work of their hands.” It seems that Scripture affirms, in most contexts, an active human participation in bringing about the blessings of God.

The problem is that my default setting most always is to depend on myself prior to depending on God. More often than not, I use God like a spare tire. He only comes out in emergencies when one of the others goes flat. My tendency is to rely on God only when I run out of other options.

I'm thinking that there is nothing wrong with working like everything depends on us, as long as we recognize that everything doesn't depend on us. As Paul told the God-seekers at the Areopagus in Athens, “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). In other words, this God, who for Athenians was “unknown,” is the source of everything for those of us who believe. We're fooling ourselves if we think we can do anything apart from Him.

The clearest view of Scripture seems to be that God helps those who cannot help themselves—whether it be Moses and his band of panicking Israelites trapped by the Red Sea, or a woman with a decades-old hemorrhage straining to touch the edge of Jesus' robe, or a desperate Roman centurion seeking healing for his paralyzed servant. Yet, remarkably, in helping the helpless, God often involves them in the saving process. Moses raises his staff and the waters part; the woman touches the



hem of Jesus' garment and her bleeding stops; and the centurion simply believes Jesus, and his servant is healed.

As we rely on God for everything, we are expected to respond to this dependence with words, prayers, and actions of faith. Even though we work as if everything depends on us, still we know in our hearts that everything really depends on God.

Saint Augustine was also quoted as saying, “He who created us without our help will not save us without our consent.” I think that's another way of saying that God doesn't need to—but finds great pleasure in—including us in the process of redemption. It's a profound truth and a beautiful partnership that we can work for God like it all depends on us, while knowing with absolute certainty that we can do nothing apart from His help.



Perry Engle can't help himself and knows it. He is bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church and lives with his wife, Marta, and their family, in Ontario, Calif.

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STEP

BRETHREN IN CHRIST
WORLD MISSIONS

Name: Jacob Spidel **Age:** 25
Church: Fairview BIC (Englewood, Ohio)

Fun fact: To save money for STEP India, I sold my car and started bicycling everywhere!

How did you hear about STEP?

Back in 2005, I was a senior in high school, and I knew going to college was going to be a stretch for me. A youth leader at my church had gone through STEP the year before and thought it would suit me rather well.

What did you learn as part of STEP Honduras?

God began to reveal to me just how He sees me—chosen, wanted, accepted. I had never viewed myself this way in the past, and it was a great time of growth for me.

So now, seven years later, why are you doing STEP again?

After a while, my faith seemed to stall. I started praying for God to guide me. It was during this time of searching that I heard STEP was expanding to a new site in India, and I was invited to serve as a team leader. I was jumping through the roof!

What are some differences you've found between STEP India and STEP Honduras?

With STEP Honduras, much of our ministry centered around working alongside various Christian organizations to serve the community—by helping with construction projects and leading VBS programs.

STEP India has fewer opportunities to serve in that traditional sense, mostly because missionaries are not accepted kindly and persecution is everywhere. Our ministry has primarily been relational—taking the time to let relationships flourish and see what comes of it. I will go a couple times a week to play snooker with all the college boys. It's all about building these relationships and witnessing through your everyday actions.

Who would you encourage to consider STEP?

STEP is a great program for those interested in stepping out of their comfort zone, experiencing faith in other cultures, deepening their understanding of God, and making a difference in this broken world of ours.

ABOUT STEP

- 10 weeks of training
- Six months of ministry in Honduras or India
- Young adults (ages 18–30)



REGISTER NOW! Applications for STEP 2012–2013 teams are now being accepted. (Deadline is July 15, 2012.)

FOR MORE INFO:

BIC-CHURCH.ORG/WM/SERVE/SHORT-TERM/STEP