



In an effort to combat the COVID-19 blues, Agnes and I have taken up a new pastime – hiking. We discovered that the trails near our home lead to breathtaking landscapes.

Our eldest daughter and son-in-law, who are adventurers at heart, often serve as the spark that inspires Agnes and me to set out on a wilderness trek. It also doesn't hurt that hiking is an opportunity for us to spend time with our grandkids while staying within current COVID-related restrictions.

Many of the trails are quite challenging with steep inclines and rocky crevices and, in the winter, they are even more daring as ice forms over the trails and rocks. I must admit, this has created high levels of anxiety for Agnes and me as we try not to slip and fall.

One of the concerns I have for our Alliance family of churches is the increased potential for spiritual slippage during the months of isolation and restrictions that COVID-19 imposes. The spiritual journey is a challenging one at the best of times, but during an

extended season of crisis, it is like walking on ice on a pathway in the wilderness. Increased levels of anxiety, depression, and relational tensions can lead to the temptation to give up or become careless, which can result in a serious fall. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, the Apostle Paul warns, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

In Psalm 73, the Psalmist confessed, "my feet had almost slipped, I had nearly lost my foothold" (v2). Why? Because he had lost his focus on God and began to look at how the wicked prospered (vv3-12). He began to reason that it was pointless for him to keep himself separated and holy before God (vv13-16). In a moment of raw honesty, the Psalmist states, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence" (v13). As despair sets in, the Psalmist finds himself on the verge of giving up his pursuit of purity and holiness. The title of Eugene Peterson's classic book, *A Long Obedience in The Same Direction*, states it well—it is difficult to stay focused when times are tough and it appears like there is no relief in sight.

Currently, the challenge we face is a virus that does not respect boundaries and operates in stealth mode, and the serious impact it is having on nearly every facet of our lives. Add to this ever-changing restrictions that limit our ability to attend in-person gatherings, that are intended to strengthen our faith and keep us from falling. Our thinking can become warped and we can become short-sighted and fail to see the fruit of our walk with God. Discouragement and frustration can cause us to begin to doubt the goodness and justice of God. The potential for slippage is formidable!

How did the Psalmist keep from slipping? As he drew near to God and allowed the Holy Spirit to challenge his thought processes (vv17-22), his attitude began to change, and he began powerfully declaring his dependance and trust in the Lord. He professed, “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you take me into glory...I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds” (vv23,24, and 28b).

Recently, Agnes and I made a very helpful purchase for our hiking adventures—winter ice grips. These rubber devices with spikes clamp onto your hiking shoes and provide solid grip and stability on icy surfaces. Our hiking trips have been transformed as we walk with confidence, focusing on the incredible beauty of God’s creation around us instead of worrying that we might fall. Professing God’s unfailing kindness, His goodness, the depth of His love, and declaring His unending care for us holds us firm on the slippery trails of life and provides us with joy amid the uncertainties we face. These declarations serve as spiritual “ice grips.”

The Psalmist cried out, "When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy” (Psalm 94:18-19). Do you find yourself just hanging on? Have you slipped into despair and are tempted to give up? Have the challenges of this season caused you to slip into a state of carelessness? I encourage you to stop, draw near to God, and begin declaring His praises. He will hold you up! Like the Psalmist, let us powerfully declare, “I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds” (Psalm 73:28).



Global Advance Fund Update

The Global Advance Fund (GAF) covers the costs of sending and supporting international workers. Through the GAF, our workers take the Gospel to places where few or none have heard the name of Jesus.

Year to date (as of February 26, 2021)

Total 2021 Faith Goal	\$14,322,910
YTD Income	\$2,219,166*
Excess/Shortfall	(11,803,744)

**17.59% of total 2021 Faith Goal*