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You are not in control

I wasn't nearly as thrilled as my 22-year-old daughter when she informed me she would be bungee jumping off a bridge. But since she is an adult and can make her own decisions, I only asked that she call me as soon as she was done to spare me unnecessarily prolonged worry. She promised she would, just as she had when she and her best friend celebrated their high school graduation by jumping out of an airplane.

The bungee jump was set for 3:30 P.M. on a Sunday when I was scheduled to speak at a church at 9 A.M., 11 A.M., 5 P.M. and 8 P.M.. I thought about my daughter's escapade on and off throughout the day, but especially when 4 P.M. rolled around with no phone call . . . then 4:30 and 5 P.M and still my frantic calls and texts were unanswered. Perhaps you can relate to my angst. At 5:15 P.M. it was time to speak again and I have to tell you, it was God's grace that I was able to focus on that message. Imagine my

relief when I received the text at 7:07 P.M.: "I'm alive." She had been out of cell coverage until then.

I don't consider myself a control freak, but like most people I don't enjoy the uncertainty and fear that can grip us when we "feel" we have no control. Yet over the years I have discovered that, for the most part, the feeling that we do have control is simply an illusion. My passion for backpacking has really driven this lesson home.

When I go into the mountains I am completely out of reach of everyone but God and my hiking buddies. There's always that nagging feeling, "What if something happens while I am gone?" And you know what? Sometimes things do. I was in the mountains when one of my dearest friends, Jhan Moskowitz, had a fatal fall in a New York subway. Just like that, he was gone and I never had a moment to hope or pray . . . I received the shocking news of his sudden death after it was all over. So what should I do? Stop going into the mountains? Believe me, I thought about it. But my ability to receive a phone call has zero effect on my ability to control events. Proximity does not equal control.

Wherever we or our loved ones may be, we have to exercise faith in God, knowing that He is control and we

are not. It's such a simple truth and yet we all struggle with it. A host of situations test our resolve to trust God.

One of our missionary couples was preparing to transfer to a different country. Obstacles cropped up, postponing their move until a yet-to-be determined time. The couple had done all they could do, but so many things were beyond their control. This uncertainty was breeding fear and frustration. I had no more control over the unfolding circumstances than did they. But God did.

I reminded the couple of Abraham and Sarah's story. They went out, not knowing where they were going or when they would arrive; no Google maps available. They were not in control but they believed and trusted God, who was. The Scriptures say they "judged Him faithful who had promised" (Hebrews 11:11). We can tell one another this until we are blue in the face, but unless or until we each exercise our own faith in God regarding these matters, we will continue to fear and fret. It's crucial to remind ourselves of God's care for us and His promises to us. Then, by faith, we can cede our own desire for control over to Him. So what are some of His promises to us?



David Brickner
Executive Director,
San Francisco USA



We don't usually choose the circumstances of our lack of control. But we can choose to share that sense of joyful abandon and trust in God despite our lack of control. The choice is so much easier if we can just remember how much better it is for us that He is in control rather than us.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5b)

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,

Nor shall the flame scorch you.” (Isaiah 43:2)

“Fear not, for I am with you;

Be not dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you,

Yes, I will help you,

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:9-11)

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)

And on and on the promises go. What will it take for us to gladly give over our desire (which we sometimes mistake for need) to feel we are in control? What will it take for us to trust in the control of the One who made these precious promises?

Our faith in God is not merely a tool to help us cope with our circumstances.

Trust in the sovereignty (rule or control) of our caring, omnipotent God liberates us! Suddenly we find we're free to be courageous and take risks for Him. It's not that faith makes us reckless, or leads us to test God. It's what happens when we unclench our fists to let go of illusions of control. It's so great to be free from those illusions, illusions that so often whisper false warnings, drowning out the true promises of God. Hearing and trusting His promises gives us the courage to live and serve with boldness and joy.

One of our Jews for Jesus core values is “stepping out in courageous faith and taking risks for God.” We can't do it if we are grasping for control over our lives and circumstances. I want to trust God, not just when things are going well, but when I can't see where I am going. I want to believe and trust God and take risks for His glory.

The risk my daughter took when she went bungee jumping is not exactly the kind of risk-taking I'm referring to. Still, the photo of her on my cell phone illustrates what I mean: her back arched, arms in the air, free falling from a bridge some 150 feet

above a beautiful river gorge—it's a picture of exhilaration and helpless trust. I find that picture so very compelling.

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I have been inspired by the example of our Jews for Jesus staff in Ukraine. In the face of the violence and unrest that is plaguing their country, they have chosen to increase their efforts to be visible, vulnerable and available for the glory of God.* When unrest and violence were exploding in Maiden Square, Kiev, they were there to give out the good news. When Odessa was in flames, they stood up and made known the grace of God, despite fears for their own safety. I am proud of their willingness to trust in the control of the One who called them into service. I think God wants us all to live like that. I pray for that kind of courageous risk-taking for all of us in Jews for Jesus. And I pray that for you as well, my dear Jews for Jesus friend.

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JEWS FOR JESUS™



Holy Spirit Harvest



by Laura Barron,
Toronto, Canada

Ever fall into the trap of thinking that God counts on you to draw others into His kingdom? I have. I know I'm called to be a witness and that He uses me to touch other people—but that is different from worrying about how His work will progress in someone's life when I'm not there to nurture them. I didn't even realize I was thinking that way until I returned from a busy season of traveling and reconnected with several people I minister to regularly. God surprised me with what He had done while I was away.

Alice* and I had been studying the Gospel of John together. We first met when she attended my Christ in the Passover presentation at a local church. She is my age, Jewish, and was open to learning more about Jesus, though not at all convinced that He was the promised Messiah of Israel who paid the price for her sin. Alice had close Christian friends, enjoyed going to church and loved reading the Bible—but it was hard for her to believe that she could be Jewish and believe in Jesus. Our times together were helping Alice understand the Jewishness of the gospel as well as her personal need for Jesus. I hated to leave her but between Passover time and summer campaigns, it would be a few months before we could meet again.

When I returned, Alice told me that during the summer, she'd gone on an outing with a group from the church she was attending. In a boat out on the lake, one of the believers engaged her in the gospel story again and asked if she was ready to receive Jesus. Alice said YES and she was baptized in the lake right then! My mouth must have been wide open the whole time she told me the story! We are still studying the Bible and praying together, but now her heart is hungry to grow in her newfound faith!

I called another woman I'd been meeting with, Julie.* She was attracted to Jesus more

as a good teacher than a personal Savior. Most of her community, social network and family were Jewish, yet she'd stayed in close contact with a Christian friend from school days. Before I left for the campaign, Julie wasn't ready to ask Jesus into her life. But when I came back, she had news: she was pursuing a close relationship with Jesus. She had surrendered her life to Him during the few months we had been out of touch. In fact, she had walked into a local church and asked the pastor to baptize her! Once again, I was astounded—in a good way!

But that's not all! Sarah* had been in touch with me on and off for a couple of years and was drawn to Yeshua, but not ready to receive His redemption. She would read the Scriptures with me but wasn't ready to relinquish her heart to the Lord. Then she was diagnosed with late stage breast cancer. Sarah and I would talk and text often, and I prayed for her as she was going through her treatments. While I was traveling, she began regularly attending a local Messianic congregation. When I returned from campaign in Israel, she was ready to pray with me to commit her life to Jesus! Sarah actually thanked God for her cancer because it brought her to faith in Yeshua. I'm rejoicing at the Lord's providential work in her life. She will be baptized in a few months! I count it a privilege to participate in building God's kingdom and I want to be faithful to minister to the people He brings into my life. But it's good to be reminded that this harvest is truly the work of the Holy Spirit, and He often works through many individuals to touch one person at a time. Please continue to pray for Alice, Julie and Sarah as they pursue their lives as new creations in Messiah—and thank you for joining us in the fields!

*Not their real names

BITS from the BRANCHES

ESSEN, GERMANY

Leonid Dolganovsky reports, “Sometimes missionaries get a ‘difficult’ person, someone who thrives on making us feel uncomfortable. Dmitry would listen attentively to what I’d say, but seemingly only to come back with questions that he thought could ‘outsmart’ me. In seeking God’s wisdom for how to minister to him, I came upon the story of the paralytic man in Mark 2:3-5, ‘Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”’

“The men’s faith in God’s power gave them the strength to climb to the roof, dig a hole, and lower the paralyzed man down to Jesus—and Jesus helped their friend. I was encouraged, and knew that my faith was more powerful than my contact’s unbelief. “When I shared Mark 2:3-5 with Dmitry, he replied, ‘The four Jewish people are you, and I’m the sick person.’ ‘Yes,’ I said. ‘You are paralyzed with your sins and can’t set yourself free. I want to bring you to the One who can set you free.’ ‘And this is Jesus? This is serious; I will need time to think.’ ‘Jesus is waiting for you, I told him, ‘but you don’t have forever to decide what to do.’ He agreed, and I think next time we will have a very different kind of visit.”

NEW YORK CITY

Stewart Weinisch reports, “It was 11:30 on a Saturday night after the last speaking engagement of my recent tour. I’d just unloaded materials at the office and the only thing on my mind was going home—when I realized that I’d left my glasses inside our office building. Because I had to retrieve them, I left the office for the second time just as a couple had stopped to take pictures in front of our display window. Rebekah and Jacob introduced themselves as a Jewish couple from Pennsylvania.

“‘What is this stuff?’ Jacob asked me.

“‘We are Jews who believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah.’ After fully sharing the gospel, I urged Jacob to investigate before reaching a decision. He seemed willing to do that, because when I gave him a copy of ISSUES with my testimony in it, he said he’d read it and get in touch with me. Please pray that he calls back challenged by what he’s read. I guess it’s a good thing I can’t drive without my glasses, or else I may never have met Jacob and Rebekah!

WILL YOU BLESS ME IN MOSCOW? by Svetlana Kotlomina

In the days leading up to our Moscow witnessing campaign, I asked God for His blessing more times than I can remember. You can see for yourself how He answered.

One evening, a volunteer and I came to our designated place for our sortie (tract-passing expedition). I looked around to see where we should stand. Immediately I noticed a huge, non-stop stream of people, a perfect place to hand out broadsides, meet people, and hopefully get contacts for further ministry in Moscow. The crowd was to my right, whereas to my left, only a few people were walking by, scattered across a large area. Clearly it would be difficult to offer anyone a gospel tract or start a conversation there. Suddenly, my volunteer said in a commanding tone, “Now listen, I’m going to stand on the right and you’re going to stand on the left. My eyes widened in surprise. But I heard a voice in my heart, “Accept this.” I was about to tell the volunteer, “We will both stand on the right, where there are plenty of people to take our broadsides.” However, again, I heard the voice in my heart, “Accept this.” I smiled and replied to the volunteer, “OK!”

For the first half hour, I observed my brother gladly handing out broadsides to a crowd which could easily have used two people, while I stood at an empty site. I thought to myself, “There is no doubt that God Himself told me, accept this. Perhaps this sortie is just a test on my humbleness and obedience to God? Lord, will the entire sortie go like this?”

Then a Jewish man stopped to talk with me. “I’ve been an atheist for all my life, but over the years, I’ve begun to understand that it’s important to believe in God. I have a children’s Bible, and I love this book.” Ilya had a lot of questions; he gave me his contact info, and I promised to give him a Bible.

I turned my head, and there was a Jewish woman waiting to talk to me. When Yana heard about the way of salvation, she too gave me her contact info. It happened that we were having an event in just one hour, presenting Marc Chagall’s work in the framework of the gospel. I told her about it and she said she would go. And so it continued. On that “empty” site, God gave me seven conversations with Jewish people, and all seven gave me their contact info.

A few hours later, I learned that Yana had attended the Marc Chagall event and prayed the sinner’s prayer, recognizing Yeshua as her Savior. Each day of the campaign, I saw how God answered my question and my prayer, “Will you bless me in Moscow?”

After the campaign was over, I stayed to help



with follow-up. I ministered to many people on visits, and remembered my promise to give Ilya a Bible. The night we went, there was a heavy shower and cold wind. It took two hours and three different kinds of transportation to reach his apartment building. I rang the doorbell, but I couldn’t hear any sound. Maybe I needed to push that button at a certain angle, and then it would ring? I kept pushing the doorbell button again and again. I did not hear a sound, but apparently Ilya did.

Ilya finally opened two security doors and invited me in. The apartment was filled with smoke, and it was difficult to breathe. Ilya was running to open all the windows and doors, yelling, “You just saved my life! Do you understand that I’m serious? Jews for Jesus, I will never forget you, as you just saved my life!”

It turned out that Ilya had put something on the stove and while it was cooking, he went to another room (his apartment is large and the room was far from the kitchen) where he fell deeply asleep. The burning food had filled the apartment with smoke while Ilya continued to sleep. It was the repeated ringing of the doorbell that woke him up.

How different everything might have turned out had I not listened to God’s voice to stand where I never would have stood on that sortie. The seven Jewish contacts, Yana’s salvation, Ilya being woken before the smoke overtook him . . . it’s quite amazing. I’m not advocating for missionaries to allow volunteers to dictate how we conduct our outreach, but God sometimes works in mysterious ways. He wants to speak to our hearts. And although we may think we see the best course of action, God may direct us differently. Walk in obedience to Him; there will be abundant fruit for the Lord’s glory, and your life will be filled with the privilege of being a participant in His miracles.

Svetlana Kotlomina ministers with our Kharkov team.

PRIORITY

Go to the Jew First



Bob Mendelsohn
Regional Director - JFJ AustralAsia

Some literary giants were sharing together one evening. “What one book would you like to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island?”

The British man announced, “Frankly, it would be The Complete Works of Shakespeare.”

The American said, “Without a doubt, the Bible.”

They asked the great biographer, G.K. Chesterton, who replied, “Only one? I suppose Thomas’ Complete Guide to Shipbuilding.”
Priorities. We all have them. Sometimes we don’t like them, but they are fundamental to our lives: You have to do the housework before watching the footy, grades one and two before high school. Chesterton understood priorities.

It’s true even in spiritual areas: faith before good works, dying to yourself before you enter the kingdom of life. How about priorities in evangelism? Should we have them? Whom should we reach? To the local neighborhoods, worldwide megacities, the poor, the “churched” . . . where do we start? Jesus taught that our priority is first to the Jewish people. He came to Israel, not to Rome or Canberra. Out of all the places Yeshua could have been born, He chose to be born in Bethlehem in Judea. That selection is also a de-selection of all the other options. When the Syrophenician woman begged the Lord to heal her daughter by casting out a demon, Jesus thought “the children” (the Jews) should be “filled first” (Mark 7:27), that

he was “not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24). That doesn’t at all mean He didn’t care about the Gentiles, but His ‘first’ coming was first among Jewish people.

Luke records the “great Commission” saying “that repentance . . . should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 4:47). Again, He cared to reach all people, but in order: first Jerusalem, then Judea/ Samaria, and then the uttermost parts of the earth (which must include Australia). In His life and in His teaching, Jesus had physical Israel as His priority.

The Apostle Paul followed Yeshua in this regard as well. His classic statement to the Romans is recorded: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first . . .” (Romans 1:16). In Paul’s teaching about world evangelism, Jews are front and centre. Then in his conclusion of what would usher in the final moments of the last days in Romans chapter 11 Paul says Jewish consideration is a major component. (11.11-15)

Similarly, whenever he traveled into major cities, Paul would stop first at the local synagogue to bring testimony about God’s love in Jesus, even though he was the apostle to the Gentiles (Act 9:20, 13:14, 17:1, 2, 17). This happened even AFTER he shook the dust off his sandals at Pisdian Antioch, and the apostles went next to Iconium--- to the synagogue! (Acts 13.51-14.1, Matthew

10.14) In his life and in his teaching, the Jews were Paul’s priority.

Let me be clear: priority does not mean exclusive charter. We have much work to be about. What I’m saying is that the Scriptures teach that Jewish evangelism should be first in your concern, your prayers, your finances. Then come all the other evangelistic concerns: “...and also to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16) and “to every other creature” (Mark 16:15).

You might object: “What? There are only 14 million Jews in the world. With over 1 billion people in China and another billion in India – all dying without faith in Jesus Christ – you want me to devote myself to Jewish evangelism?”

Not exclusively, but principally. Paul said it this way: “If their [the Jews’] fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? . . . if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world [meaning the Gentiles have an opportunity to be saved], what will their acceptance be but life from the dead.?” [that is, the resurrection, or the culmination of all things] (Romans 11:11-15).

The world will not be completely evangelized until we bring the message to the Jews. Not just in Israel, but in New York, Sydney, Florida, London, everywhere. Paul seemed to say that world evangelism is dependent on our evangelism of the Jews. What are you going to do today, this month, this year, to help get that done?

Lessons from Noah’s Ark

Everything we need to know, we can learn from Noah’s Ark.

1. Don’t miss the boat.
2. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the Ark.
4. Stay fit. When you’re 60 years old (or even 600 years old), someone may ask you to do something really big.
5. Don’t listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety’s sake, travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn’t always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you’re stressed, float for a while.
10. Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there’s always a rainbow waiting.



