

this issue

An Old Missionary... P.1

Ministries to Families P.2

Boxes of Love P.3

Coffee with the Homeless P.4

10 Years of Christmas Eve P.5

Preaching Around the World P.6

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Sundays at 11:00 AM

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An Old Missionary, Christopher Columbus, and Babe Ruth

Pastor Eric Johns

What do you do when you find yourself between a rock and a hard place? Some people stop, refuse to move forward, or put their vision on hold and simply loose heart. I have seen it happen to pastors, churches, business owners, and individuals.

Some people are unable to overcome the circumstances pressing in on them. The result is that they never accomplish much for God's Kingdom.

They were between a rock and a hard place. They could not find the wisdom or the courage to press over the obstacles that stood in their way.

Sometimes what we are focused on makes all of the difference. Will you focus on the problem or on the presence of the One who will help you overcome? People often explain to me in intricate detail why they are stuck in a mess. They can't see beyond the present problem to God's possibilities. Their focus is on their present location instead of where they are planning on going.

That is why we have to fight. We have to press through. You don't get strength for the battle; you get strength from the battle. Fleeing battles never won a war.

Remember Moses and the Israelites? There were giants in the land – The Promised Land! The people ran from the battle. They ended up in the wilderness for forty years. Then it was Joshua's turn to lead the people. Before he went into the Promised Land, God told him to be strong and very courageous. Why did God say that? The reason is because receiving what God has promised is not always easy.

We want God's best, but we want it handed to us. The first thing that Israel faced in the Promised Land was not a party. It wasn't the rivers of milk and

honey. The first thing they faced was a battle! As they fought their way into God's promises, they acquired both strength and courage to continue.

David had the same spirit as Joshua. Before David fought Goliath, he had already killed a bear and a lion. There is nothing unusual about the story of David and Goliath. As a matter-of-fact, you could argue that it wasn't even a miracle. Why? David already had battle experience. He gained strength and courage from the battles he fought.

In First Samuel chapter fourteen, there is a story of two men who literally found themselves between a rock and a hard place. The Israelites and the Philistines had set up camps and drawn battle lines. Neither army was making a move. Jonathan, Kind Saul's son, laid out a plan with his armor bearer.

His plan was for the two of them to show themselves to the Philistines. Based upon their response, he would know whether

or not God was with them. There are four observations for overcoming in battle from this story.

First of all, you must never stop. You must keep on going. In this Old Testament story, the Bible tells us that Jonathan "sought to go over". In other words, he decided to keep moving. This is vital to success.

Overcoming is like running a marathon. A marathon isn't completed by how fast a runner leaves the blocks. It is not won by reputation or previous awards. It is won by constant commitment to the race over a very long period of time. When your lungs are going to explode – keep on running! When your legs feel like jelly – keep on running!

David already had battle experience. He gained strength and courage from the battles he fought.

The second thing necessary to overcoming is to encourage someone else to keep going. First Jonathan said that he was “going over,” but then he said, “Let us go over.” He encouraged someone else to keep going.

One of the best ways you can push through your obstacle is to encourage someone else to keep going.

The third thing that is important is to realize that you will pass over. Jonathan did not say, “I think we are going to pass over.” He said, “We will pass over.”

An old missionary once said, “We’re going to make it. We may not look like much when we get there, but we’re going to make it.”

In his journal, Christopher Columbus wrote many times that he was in danger of being thrown overboard by his crew. His crew thought he

was crazy. They thought they were going to die with him. Nevertheless, when Columbus wrote in his journal, the last thing he wrote at the end of every entry was “and this day we sailed on”.

God is faithful! But His faithfulness does not mean we just sit around and wait for Him to do a miracle. We must realize that God has been faithful to give us what it takes to get beyond the rock and the hard place. We need to be faithful to fight with His help.

Finally you need to announce that you are going on. Let everyone know that you are moving on and not quitting.

Babe Ruth was known for taking the baseball bat and pointing it to where he was going to hit the home run. I like someone like that! They are positive and confident in the face of the opposing team. It was like he was saying, “Hey!

I’m hitting it right over there, and there isn’t anything you can do about it!”

That is the kind of spirit we need to have.

Many of you have been praying for the Buffalo Dream Center. By now you have heard about our need for a new church building. For now, we have been given an extension to stay at the Buffalo Christian Center. We have been looking at many facilities, but we have not been able to find a place for the large number of children we bring to the after-school program and Sunday services.

Please continue to pray for and support the Buffalo Dream Center as we move forward. To be honest, it has been a difficult season. We feel like we are in a battle for our future. But we have not stopped. We have no plans to quit. We are moving forward, knowing that God is faithful!

MINISTRIES TO FAMILIES LIVING IN POVERTY

Not many churches have a warehouse. However, the Buffalo Dream Center reaches out to families living in poverty throughout the week. Many of these families need food, clothing, and other household items. During the Christmas season, Boxes of Love assists thousands of families with food and toys. The Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry, Project Prevention, and Boxes of Love all operate out of a warehouse. Without that space, these ministries would not be able to serve people.

The Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry is the only mobile food pantry in Buffalo. Most food pantries are located in churches and community centers. People in need of food walk or drive to these locations. By making the food pantry mobile, the Buffalo Dream Center has been able to serve families who would not be able to travel to a food pantry. The box truck pulls up into six neighborhoods every month. People are often seen lining up down the sidewalk hours before the truck arrives.

The bags of groceries given away at food pantry sites are also used when teams visit families

with Project Prevention. Many of the families helped through this ministry are refugees. Arriving

from distant foreign lands, many of these families are in need of appliances, mattresses, dishes, towels, clothing, food, and many other things. Project Prevention volunteers often help families understand how to pay their bills or do things we all take for granted like going to the grocery store.

Thousands of people are assisted throughout the year by these vital ministries at the Buffalo Dream Center.



What Happened in 2014 with the Warehouse Ministries?

The Joseph Project Mobile Food Pantry served 24,220 people.

198,409 pounds of food was given away to families in need.

BOXES OF LOVE BRINGS TOYS AND FOOD FOR SIXTEEN YEARS

2,500 families received food and wrapped Christmas gifts for their children. Seventeen distribution sites were located throughout Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and the surrounding area. Churches and community centers hosted distribution sites. Families, church groups, and businesses sent volunteers to wrap gifts, pack bags of food, and give away Boxes of Love to families in need. By the end of December, many people were helped. Children were happy to receive gifts. Mothers cried, thanking the Dream Center for helping their families. People experienced the love of Jesus through the simple act of giving.

The Boxes of Love story begins with the Biggest Christmas Party in Town. Nearly twenty years ago, Pastor Eric and Michelle gave Christmas gifts to children who attended this large event at the Dream Center. Year after year, the doors would be locked and people would be turned away as the auditorium filled to capacity. Boxes of Love began when the Dream Center began to help families by going directly to their homes and into their neighborhoods.

Boxes of Love started with Pastor Eric and Michelle helping five families. Every year it grew. What began in a two bedroom apartment, soon became a massive ministry that needed a warehouse and forklifts. Tractor trailers filled with pallets of food from organizations like Feed the Hungry and Feed the Children began assisting with the annual ministry. Today, Boxes of Love is a network of churches and organizations that help thousands of families in different neighborhoods.

"Boxes of Love is both big and small," said Pastor Eric. "It is big, because we help so many people. We have a big warehouse where we wrap gifts and pack bags of food. But it is small too. It is small because churches in seventeen neighborhoods are able to impact their communities.

When a family goes to a church in their neighborhood for toys and food, they usually do not have any idea about the big warehouse. They only come into contact with the people from the church around the corner from their house."

Boxes of Love is not just a huge distribution. Volunteers and church members are able to make direct contact with families that they can continue a relationship with throughout the year. This was evident this year as a group of four churches from North Tonawanda, a suburb of Buffalo, took part in Boxes of Love for the first time.

Meredith McLaughlin, a member of Lumber City Church, took charge of the churches in North Tonawanda. She was amazed at the connection they were able to make with families at the distribution sites.

"Many families stayed and talked," said Meredith.

"One family, who lives down the street, has started to attend on Sundays. We have gotten to know the kids really well already."

She described the cooperation that took place between the four churches and the impact it had on her community.

"We have also developed close relationships with the North Tonawanda schools. They are starting to call us when there is a family in need. Now we can respond together with other churches to meet those needs and introduce families to Jesus."

"Everyone talks about the church working together," said Pastor Eric. "I have never seen anything come close to Boxes of Love. Churches are working together to help families and it is a testimony to our city."

Hundreds of volunteers from the United States and Canada wrapped gifts, packed bags of food, and helped at distribution sites for Boxes of Love.



CUPS OF COFFEE WITH THE HOMELESS

In November, during the week of Thanksgiving, Pastor Eric Johns hit the streets for his sixteenth year of living on the streets with Buffalo's homeless. Like previous years, his goal during his week-long life as a homeless man was to draw attention to the needs in his community. The week has always received news coverage from television, radio, and printed media.

This year Pastor Eric wanted to "pass the baton" to the next generation. Several young men from the Buffalo Dream Center went with Pastor Eric as he ate in soup kitchens and slept under bridges.

On Wednesday, Pastor Eric did something he has never done before. He went home for twenty-four hours while his wife, Michelle, took his place. She and a group of ladies from the Dream Center walked the streets of Buffalo, reaching out to those in need with love and compassion. The following are excerpts from Michelle's journal during her day with the homeless.

At the soup kitchen, we were treated nicely and felt welcomed. They put us first in line, ahead of the people who were getting seconds. Our team divided into three groups and all sat in different places. Debra and I sat at a table with James who has been sober for two weeks. He was very talkative and open about his life. He almost died several times and was suicidal. He said he gets depressed and doesn't want to live any more. We shared God's love with him and his friend.

After the soup kitchen we went to the bus station. This was my favorite thing we did all day. I brought ten dollars with me, just in case something came up. When we were in the bus station we had a brilliant idea. We would use our emergency money to buy coffee for homeless people. My daughter, Emilie, actually did it first. We walked in the bus station and she said, "I want to buy a coffee for a homeless person." Immediately after she said that, we met a homeless man named Gary.

Gary had just been released from jail. I am not sure the reason why he was in jail. I didn't ask. I figured it didn't matter. He had a bag of chips and a bottle of pop. He asked if he could trade them for a cup of coffee. Emilie bought him a large coffee. He was so excited and blown away that a teenager cared enough to buy him a coffee.

We sat and talked to Gary for a long time. He was lonely and sad. He lived in a rooming house but didn't want to go back because everyone there does crack. The courts wanted to send him to a rehab in Pennsylvania. He seemed excited about going. I hope he gets to go.

Rue was standing for a long time near the coffee shop in the bus terminal. I walked up to him and asked if he wanted a coffee. He said that he actually wanted a hot chocolate and an apple fritter. So that's exactly what I got him!

I was going to get him a small hot chocolate but then I decided to get him a large. He was thrilled! He had the biggest smile in the world on his face. It was like Christmas when I handed him the hot chocolate and donut. Then I spotted Al sitting all alone at a table. He was lonely and homeless. I bought him a hot chocolate too. Soon his friend Isaac joined him. Isaac was so excited when I bought him a coffee that he stood up and kissed me on the cheek.

It was upsetting to see how the police treated the homeless population in the bus station. I understand they have to keep the bus station safe for travelers. I understand that they may even have to ask homeless people to leave the bus station. However, what I don't understand is why they treat them so badly and why they try to kick them out when they are paying customers at the coffee shop. They should be treated the same as everyone else in the bus station.

I talked to a lady named Martha for a long time. She held my hand while she talked to me. Her life seemed so sad. She was living in an abandoned building on the east side. None of her family wanted anything to do with her. She was so happy just to have a friend. She acted like I was her best friend in the whole world even though we had just met.

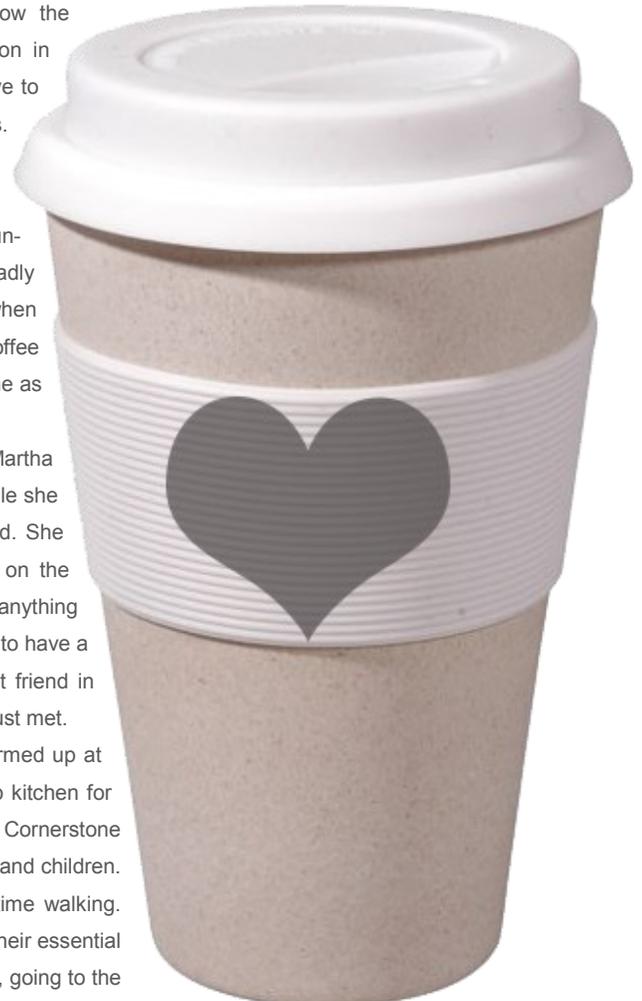
After the bus station we warmed up at the library and headed over to a soup kitchen for dinner. Then we walked far to get to Cornerstone Manor, a homeless shelter for women and children. A homeless person spends a lot of time walking. They spend a lot of time just meeting their essential needs in a day - eating, keeping warm, going to the

bathroom, staying clean, and finding a place to sleep.

Our team planned on spending the night at Cornerstone Manor. This way we could interact with the ladies. As soon as the residents found out we were spending the night we earned instant respect from them.

Our team did the evening chapel. Victoria, Emilie, and Laura played some games with the ladies. Barb, Debra, and I shared. It went really well. At the end we prayed for everyone. After chapel was over some ladies asked us for personal prayer. Many ladies hung around and talked to us. Then we joined many of the ladies for snack in the dining room. We spent time sharing with each other. It was a beautiful time. I almost didn't want the night to end.

There are so many lost and dying people in this world. Many people are neglected. We must never get so busy that we don't have time to stop for the one who needs us.



TEN YEARS OF TURKEY DINNERS ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Ten years ago, the Buffalo Dream Center came together with Hearts for the Homeless to feed people on Christmas Eve. The tradition has continued year after year.

On Christmas Eve, about four hundred people filled the auditorium of the Buffalo Dream Center. Many of Buffalo's homeless men and women came for a delicious turkey dinner. They were joined by families in need of some extra help during the holidays. Fifty senior citizens also received meals which were packaged and delivered to their homes.

More than one hundred volunteers helped host tables and serve the food. Everyone enjoyed a program filled with Christmas music, a drama, and even free prizes. At one point during the program, there was a dance contest. It was incredible to see all of the homeless people forget about their problems and dance alongside volunteers. Even Santa Clause danced to the music!

Every year the turkey dinner is prepared by Lou and Joanne Williams. This year, along with the turkey, stuffing, and potatoes, everyone also enjoyed biryani, an Indian dish prepared by a local Pakistani restaurant. The Pakistani and Indian restaurant, Zaiqa, is owned and operated by Masud Qazi. Masud has become friends with Pastor Eric and Michelle, often pulling up a chair to their table and eating with them.

Masud has a desire to help those less fortunate. One cold nights, homeless men and women receive free meals at Zaiqa. Sometimes, when the weather gets extremely cold, Masud allows a homeless man to sleep in his restaurant.

When the terrorist attack happened in Pakistan, Masud's home country, he was compelled to do something in memory of the children who died. He donated biryani, a rice dish famous in India and Pakistan.

Following the program, before the food was served, an opportunity was given for people to give their lives to Jesus. More than one hundred people responded. Homeless people, single mothers, and volunteers gave their lives to Jesus on Christmas Eve.

Boxes of Love 2014

Households Served
2,500

People Assisted with Food and Toys
8,000

Distribution Sites
17

Organizations Involved
72

Volunteers
824

Food Given to Other Ministries
4 Truckloads





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PREACHING THE GOSPEL AROUND THE WORLD

The Buffalo Dream Center has planned several mission trips in 2015. You can be a part of a team that impacts the lives of people in another country. Trips this year include Honduras, Guatemala, and India.

There are also opportunities to be a part of a trip to the inner city.

Many churches and youth groups are choosing to spend a week in Buffalo. These trips have been life-changing for many people.

During the week groups get to feed the homeless, take part in children's programs, and

reach out to refugee families. The summer is filling up fast. If you want to bring a team to Buffalo, please contact the Buffalo Dream Center as soon as possible.

Maybe you are a young adult who wants to make a difference.

Inner City Boot Camp may be the perfect thing for you. Imagine spending a month of your summer with the leaders

at the Buffalo Dream Center! Inner City Boot Camp provides training and practical experience to teens

Please email us to apply for one of these trips at information@buffalodreamcenter.org.

