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EMMAUS
NEWSLETTER
... Strengthening the Local Church

People Are Like Watermelons

“You can tell a lot about them after they have been thumped.” As many of you know, I was pretty severely thumped in mid-July when I flipped my bicycle on a paved country road 10 minutes after taking my helmet off. That “thump” left me with several head injuries, broken ribs and collarbone, a concussion, and 4 ½ hours of amnesia. Six days later I returned to the hospital with blood clots in both lungs. I thank all of you that came by to visit, that fixed food, and that sent cards; but most of all, I thank you for your prayers. I firmly believe that without those prayers, I would not have recovered as well as I have, and may not have lived through it at all.

Your prayers, and the prayers of other friends and family, were answered just as we wanted them to be, but many prayers are not. Does that mean that God likes me better than those who don’t recover, or that God decided to heal me because so many people prayed? Certainly not! Remember, “Prayer does not change God, it changes us.” God always answers prayer, and somehow uses these prayers in our lives, but not always in the way that we want.

On Sunday evening while I was in the hospital, Eric Fritz (Spring ‘01 Men’s Lay Director) gave a talk at our church with the title that I stole for this article. In it, Eric defined suffering as, “not an injustice or a punishment, but rather a harrowing and unwanted invitation to a higher relationship with God.” He said that when people get thumped, they usually turn away from God and look to the world for answers, or they turn *to* God and accept the invitation. None of us would choose to suffer, but God’s working through our suffering is often the most important aspect of our life. He quoted Rich Mullins, “Don’t resist the work of God by seeking or asking for an easy life.” Eric also said, “Peace is not the absence of trouble or problems, it is the presence of God.” As I lay in the hospital, I knew that people were praying for me, and that God was using those prayers in ways that only God knew would be best. Though I was in pain, I was at peace, for God was present.

On Sunday morning a month after my accident, our Associate Minister, Caryl Griffin spoke of finding God’s presence in the fire. It’s easy to find God in the burning bush and Pentecost fires of our lives – those times of great revelation or when God’s Spirit works through us in powerful ways. But God is also to be found in the fires of life that cause suffering. Caryl spoke of “God’s fire *within* the world’s fire,” God’s fire that not only refines and purifies us, but also protects us from the fires of suffering. When we seek God’s presence in the midst of the fire, God’s presence can “keep the furnace cool,” just as it did for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. On that same Sunday, our Senior Minister, Jack Edwards, told the story of a child trapped in a burning house crying, “Daddy, daddy, help me!” His father told him to jump from the upstairs window and he would catch him. The boy shouted, “I’m scared daddy, I can’t see you!” The father shouted **back**, “That’s okay, I can see *you* – just jump!” That’s how we are to respond when we get

“thumped” or find ourselves in the midst of a raging fire. We are to seek God’s presence and trust that God is there for us, even if we can’t see him at the time.

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