



CEO

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GOD'S GRACE AMIDST TRAGEDY

God came to earth as a human; Jesus Christ the Saviour to rescue us from the death of sin. Soon after, King Herod commands all two-year-old boys in Bethlehem to be slaughtered. This is a detail of the Christmas story you do not often hear. Jesus is called wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace. Upon His shoulders will be the governments of the world. But until then there will be tragedies both for the Christian and non-believer. This is a by-product of living in a sin-ridden world. So, what's the good news?

God's Grace is sufficient. He did not promise we would be free from suffering, but He did promise He would *be with us in the suffering* – never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb.13:5). Bad things will always happen to good people. However, God causes all things to come together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8). It is not always easy to see how this comes about for God's people. Sometimes this isn't played out for us while we're on this earth but only in heaven. Imagine the Apostle Paul working as hard as he did, never knowing if the churches he planted ever succeeded or if the books he wrote were ever read. All he saw was hardship and prison bars, and yet Christ used him powerfully as God had a plan.



God's grace does not promise a tragedy-free life, but He does promise you will see Him if you obey His commands. In December, our Canadian team joined our Cuban team in Pinar Del Rio (Cuba). Suffering from nationwide food and medicine shortages, 18-hour blackouts, a dengue plague spread by mosquitos, and now a hurricane. An old man sitting among the rubble of his home shared that a few weeks prior he left witchcraft and gave his life to Jesus. Shortly after, hurricane Ian ripped through and took away his roof leaving the man with no shelter, no business, and very little hope. He must be wondering, "did I make

a mistake trusting God?" Have you ever wondered that for yourself?

Matthew 5:45 describes how it rains on both the just and the unjust. Both the Christian and the witch doctor lost their home in this storm. Both the Christian and the non-believer can suffer depression, divorce, and tragedy. What then is the difference between those who trust in Jesus and those who trust in demons? *The difference can be seen in God's people for He lives in them.*



God commands us to love others. No one from the idols' community came to visit this man. No one from his former life, no witch doctor, no charm maker came to see how he was doing or offer relief. But his newfound family in the church came with food, support, and a new roof. Not only that, it was the Christians that went out into the entire community helping believers and non-believers, anyone who needed help when no other group or government did. This made the gospel speak volumes to the community at large. In John 15:12 Jesus commands us to love one another as He did; for greater love has no man than He who is willing to lay his life down for his friends. And when we do this, He will show Himself to us (John 14:21). This is the message of the true meaning of Christmas, and this is the reality seen in those who truly follow Jesus' commands. May you seek God this year in a new way by loving others as Christ loves you, and in doing so may He show Himself to you. Blessings. *BJ*

Province of Pinar Del Rio, Cuba: I had a mix of emotions on this trip. When I went to help Baracoa Cuba after Hurricane Matthew hit in 2016, it looked as if someone dragged a giant blender across the face of the earth. I had never seen devastation like that before – you can see a video report at ceoministries.ca in the videos section. When I heard that Hurricane Ian hit Pinar Del Rio much worse than Baracoa, I wasn't sure what to expect.



Result of 185 km/hr winds

When arriving, I discovered something worse than the actual damage of the hurricane. I saw roofs missing from homes, massive sideways cracks along the walls as if the winds were ripping the buildings in two, and watermarks up to hip level indicating that nothing and no one was safe neither inside nor outside of their homes. The people's stories were terrible. What was even more devastating was to hear that the officials had done nothing so far to help--well after two months of the storm. Typically, aid is usually clearing some roads, just long enough to get a photo-op to show how they're responding. But that is as far as it goes. It was reported to us that there were even homes that had not yet recovered from the last hurricane a few years ago.

Back in August 2022 most of the fuel tankers located in Matanzas exploded, driving the country into a fuel crisis. The officials reported it was a lightning bolt that detonated the tankers. Locals believe it was someone "closer to home" as they heard an explosion prior to the fireball shown to the right. While these tankers burned, the officials were doing a welcome presentation at the airport for some international visitors. Not the same sentiment is shown for the people in Pinar Del Rio. Apathy. It concerns me for my family in Cuba.



Rice and beans to hand out

But these are details that cannot be openly shared online or out loud because there can be serious repercussions. This is a character trait of communism, no matter what influencer says otherwise. I've risked quite a bit, even with the little I've written here. But if no one knows the truth, how can they help?

With much joy, I am happy to share that even though darkness prevails in many areas of the world, there is a light

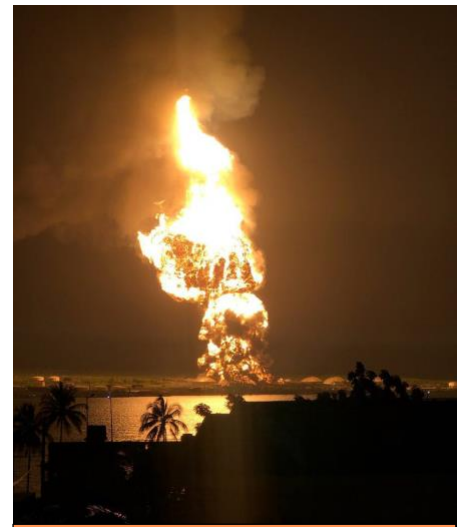


"Struck down but not destroyed"

that cannot be quenched. The light of Jesus (John 1). As we spoke and served in many different churches, though you could see the pain on their faces, the people still found hope in God. They still prayed. They still worshipped. They still smiled and gave thanks over a simple 5lbs bag of beans (a commodity incredibly difficult to get). I could hear them saying "I can't believe we have beans! Praise God."



We sent funds to Cuba prior to this trip for preparation of food distribution, specifically in Pinar Del Rio. The small Canadian team then went and connected with our Cuba team to help make sure everything was running as planned, but also to connect with old friends and team members that we had not seen since the lockdowns. Cuba is very different than it was before and it was very important to connect with them as soon as we were able, to encourage them and let them know they are not alone. Looking forward to helping them rebuild! There is much work to be done.



40% of Cuba's Fuel up in flames



Still praising God





Viktor – Moldova: I’m sure you follow all the news about Ukraine. The truth is that it’s much worse than any news. Blackouts are especially terrible because most city people in apartment buildings are not used to living without electricity... plus all the water, heating and communications depend on it. This will be a strange Christmas considering the war, but it has amplified our

awareness and need for help from God as well as our gratitude for when help comes. Thank you for your prayers and support. Please pray for Ukraine!



Traveling is dangerous but essential



Food distribution lines in volatile places



Vicki – “The Monkey Farm,” Costa Rica: Hello Prayer Warriors in Canada. I need to ask you for prayers for something specific. The seller of our farm announced that since our option to buy the farm has expired, he is listing our farm for sale with a realtor for \$160,000. He will still sell it to us for \$125,000 which we agreed on 10 years ago if we can raise the money and close quickly. Last Friday he brought bankers and an appraiser to see the farm and discuss the



sale. He is serious. We already have someone committed to match the first \$25,000 raised so NOW IS THE TIME!! Please pray for our campaign to quickly raise the funds needed to continue our work!



We recently started a computer training program that teaches our patrons various skills from the very basic computer operation up to learning and being certified in the use of all the Microsoft Office programs!

One of the guys, Gabriel, said to me that he never dreamed he would have the opportunity to learn English and now he can’t believe he’s learning how to use computers. His dreams have been exceeded! Gabriel is the one that was homeless for 33 years; since he was 9 years old.

We couldn’t do this without the support of generous people like you. Thank you so much for helping to change the lives of these men, their families, and their children. Many blessings to all of you. Merry Christmas and a very blessed New Year! Love and hugs.

Vicki and all the guys at the farm. Thanks for the funds to buy a pig for our Christmas meal. The guy will love it.



Hope: Now may the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

I shared the 'Refiner's Fire' with the Cuban people this December in *Daniel chapter 3*. When Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego would not disobey the clear command of God to obey the king, they were prepared to experience the consequences. They were not intimidated by the disobedience of the multitude of Hebrews who acquiesced to the king's command nor to the fire that was intensified. They would rather be tied and incinerated than disobey God. They were not alone—they had each other. They also experienced Christ amid the fire. The 'Refiner's Fire' burned the bands that bound them.

As individual believers, or corporately as churches, we will experience the Refiner's Fire. It may come in different forms, such as health or financial challenges, or relational challenges in marriage or family. The result of obedience in Daniel 3 caused the King to recognize the true God.

Will we, as individual believers or corporately as churches experience a Refiner's Fire in 2023? Will we face it alone or do we have strong friendships that will help us face it together? We know that we will experience a closer walk with Christ amid our fiery trial. Will it refine us? Will it purify the church? David faced Goliath alone and Elijah confronted an entire nation and the results were powerful.

I am reminded of the story of some soldiers who entered an African church. Aiming their weapons at the congregation, they declared that anyone who wanted to deny Christ as God could leave the church, but those who remained would be slaughtered. Most fled the church, and only a few remained. Then the soldiers put down their weapons and asked those who remained to teach them how to be Christians.

Paul said, "...in my flesh, dwells no good thing...". Jeremiah said, "If you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become my spokesman." Jer. 15:19. This is true for the individual, and corporately for the church. Will you commit to obeying Christ in 2023 and pay the price, if need be? Christ paid the price. TL



Prayer, Praise & Finances

Prayer: We are facing extreme challenges in all of the various countries we are serving in. This Newsletter just gives you a glimpse into some of the difficulties God's people are facing. One of the main focuses of our ministry is to train and strengthen national leaders because the time may be rapidly coming when we can no longer be there to help them.

Praise: In this last trip to Cuba, Dr. Lewis was able to train pastors in two seminars. It is the National Christian Leaders that are and will be the most critical and crucial tool to keep the church strong as it faces tremendous opposition. In Cuba, the media is promoting hate against the churches and churches are being pelted with stones. In school, children are being forced to learn occult practices and Christian children are being bullied. Christian families are being targets of hate.

Finances: I am writing this on December 15th and in the next two weeks we still need over \$100,000 to meet the needs we have prioritized. We cannot meet all the needs but focus on the most urgent. For instance, it costs \$900 to put a roof on a house or a church in Cuba and we would like to roof 10 buildings. Medicine, food, clothes, blankets are needed in Ukraine, etc. etc. **Thank You!**

Join us... next trip to Cuba is in the first week of March, 2023. We are presently planning a trip to the Holguin area of Cuba to train various leaders and visit missions and the Teen Challenge Centre. There will be an opportunity to minister in many ways to the various needs. If you are interested, contact us below.

We are on one of God's Teams...
Empowering Ministries to... Reach the *Lost*,
Revive the *weak*, Rescue the *fallen*, Restore
the *broken*, Reconcile the *offended*, Release
the *discipled*

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