

The DIAZ Dispatch

January 2018



GLANCING BACK WHILE FACING FORWARD

Psalm 71:17 says:

O God, you have taught me from my earliest childhood, and I constantly tell others about the wonderful things you do. [NLT]

In case you didn't realize it, this is the verse from which our ministry derives its name. We chose it not just because it creates a great palindromic logo, but because it reminds us every day to look back at God's goodness in the past while we focus on ministering for Him in the present.

In keeping with this verse, we would like to share some of the things God has done this past year and is continuing to do right now through 71:17 Ministries:

Weekly Bible studies – Every Monday morning, Gwen meets with a group of women. Right now they are studying the book of Nehemiah. And early Wednesday mornings, Ed meets with businessmen who are currently studying the book of Mark.

Church Ministry – This past year, God led us back to First Presbyterian Church where we had previously ministered for more than 20 years. Ed had recently spoken at a couple of their men's retreats and is now returning to help disciple men. He has already been asked to moderate a panel of business leaders for a seminar they are hosting for the community on February 16th, titled "Faith at Work." If you are interested in attending this morning seminar, please contact First Presbyterian Church at 863-686-7187.

Individual mentoring – The cornerstone of our ministry is sharing the Good News with individuals in the "marketplace." (This is explained more on the backside of this newsletter.) So most of our time is spent meeting people where they live and work.

With this goal in mind, Ed can often be found eating lunch at Palace Pizza with an individual or a group of guys. Other times he meets with them in their offices. Gwen's "marketplace" venue is usually Mitchell's Coffee House (conveniently located just downstairs from our

office) or around someone's kitchen table. Mentoring often takes place on bike rides or walks around the lake.

Books and writing – Once someone has accepted Christ's sacrifice on the cross for their sin, it is our goal to help them take their first steps on this exciting new journey. As an aid to this discipleship ministry, Gwen recently wrote a Bible study called *First Steps on a Journey With God*. We are not the only ones using it as a resource. We have received several encouraging notes from others embarking on this six-week course – including one from a Prison Ministry in Texas! Recently Gwen was asked to train leaders who will then teach it to the many young women who are requesting spiritual direction following their contact with Options for Women Pregnancy Center.

In addition, God continues to use the books Gwen has written for teenagers. Denise Jones (who sings with Point of Grace) recently began studying through *Sticking Up For What I Believe* with a dozen teenagers including her own daughter. In November, she texted Gwen to let her know how well the study is going. "I have loved it!" she said. But she has found that she is not only using the material during her time with the teens. "It's strange how many other conversations come up where I have been able to use what I've learned from the book," she added.

"Oh My Baby" – We have delivered more than 70 Starter Bags to Lakeland Regional Health Center for new mothers who do not have the items necessary to meet the needs of their new babies. Each Bag contains a toddler Bible. This is just one tangible way we have shared God's love with those in need.

But as we continue to read Psalm 71, we discover that verse 18 is every bit as important as verse 17. It challenges us to continue ministering in the future:

Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me. [NLT]

Not only do we want to thank God for His abundant and faithful provision throughout 2017, we want to continue serving Him just as vibrantly in 2018. But we need your help now more than ever!

As you know, Hurricane Irma left its mark in Lakeland in many destructive ways. The cost of major repairs has cut deeply into people's ability to support our ministry, and we fully understand this. So please pray with us that God will supply the finances we need as we enter 2018. ***We cannot continue to minister without your prayers and financial support.***

Thank you for all you do!

[We are mailing this early so that if some of you would like to receive a tax-deduction for 2017, you still have time to do so.]



THINGS I HAVE LEARNED and WANT TO PASS ON

by Ed Diaz (with a little help from Gwen)

#3 - Am I a Lizard or a Frog? It's important to know!

In 1989, a friend of mine named Lee Yih stood in front of a congregation 4000 evangelical Christian leaders in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, and talked about lizards and frogs! Yes, that is actually what he spoke about!

You see, a mentor of ours named Bill Garrison had written a paper on two different styles of evangelism, and Lee was asked to summarize it and present it at the Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelism. Here, in part, is what he said:

Have you ever noticed how differently frogs and lizards acquire their food? The frog just sits and waits and lets the food to come to him. When an unlucky insect happens to fly by, he simply sticks out his tongue and reels it in.

On the other hand, if the lizard chooses to do as the frog does, it will starve to death. He cannot afford to sit and wait, but must go out into his world, know where his food can be found, and hunt for it.

The vocational Christian worker is like the frog. He goes off to seminary, gets a degree and joins the staff [of a church] somewhere, and somehow people know he is in the business of meeting spiritual needs. Ministry opportunities come to him and, before long, he has his hands full. Many evangelists today are frogs in that when they come to town, without much effort on their part, an audience always assembles to hear them speak.

The layperson, on the other hand, is like a lizard. If he were to put out a notice saying that he is coming to town, no one would care. Ministry does not

seek him out. In order for him to have a ministry, he has to learn to hunt. He must move around in his environment; assess his sphere of influence; establish friendships; serve people; and, once he has earned the right to be heard, be ready to give an account for the hope that is in him.

I think the main problem today in world evangelization is the under-utilization of the lizard. The lizard needs to discover how God can use him as the lizard that he is! And when he catches that vision, when he learns that evangelism is not an event but a process, and when he tastes the joy of seeing a friend find the Savior, he'll never want to give the ministry back to the frog again!

I've always felt that I could be a pretty effective frog. For whatever reason, the Lord gave me wonderful gifts in the "up front" arena. I have always been able to "deliver the goods" from the podium. And God has provided many opportunities for me to do this.

But also, for whatever reason, He never called me to be a pastor. This used to concern me, but once I discovered the difference between frogs and lizards, I never questioned God's decision again. Grasping this paradigm in the early years of ministry was very freeing and fulfilling. Embracing my role as a lizard allowed me to participate in God's work in a much more personal and powerful way than I could have if I had insisted on trying to be a full-time frog.

As I studied the scriptures, I realized that the apostle Paul provides a great example of a lizard in action. He was a tentmaker by occupation, and we know that he continued to work at this trade throughout his ministry. Acts 18:3 tells us that when he came to Corinth he met Priscilla and Aquila. It says, "*and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.*" Acts 17:17 says that while he was in Athens, "*he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.*"

We don't know whether Paul was selling his tents in the marketplace while sharing the Gospel message or just mingling with a motive to lead people to the Lord. But he do know that he was always looking for an opportunity to talk to people who needed Jesus.

As we enter 2018, I want to re-commit myself to imitating Paul – and the ambitious, adaptable, resourceful reptile that my friend Lee Yih talked about that summer in 1989. But, more than that, I want to renew my efforts to encourage people like you to do the same.

If you would like to explore the possibility of becoming an effective lizard, please contact me. We can "catch some lunch" together as we discuss how God can best use you in your workplace to bring others to Him.

We could certainly use more lizards in Lakeland!

