

*Paoli Presbyterian Church*

*September 2009*

*Awake to the Wonder  
of Grace & Equipped  
to Serve*



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**A devotional guide to help you discern how God is  
calling you to make YOUR ministry matter!**

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

What? It's not January 1!

But it IS the beginning of a new church year and you are  
invited to  
*Awake to the Wonder of Grace. You are Equipped to Serve!*

Our church theme this fall is Awake! In a World of Wonder  
Awake to the wonder of ministry,  
Awake to fellowship,  
Awake to prayer and worship,  
Awake to use your gifts in discipleship,  
Awake to new and renewed relationships,

And best of all, Awake to the Grace which  
God freely gives to carry out our ministry.

Awake—look with fresh eyes—  
and see what God has in store for you.

In *Journey to the Heart*, Melody Beattie tells us, “New beginnings hold the promise of new lessons to be learned; new territory to be explored; old lessons to be recalled, practiced, and appreciated. Let yourself begin anew.” Pack in your bag, she says, “some humility and lessons from the past. Toss in some curiosity and excitement about what you haven't learned yet. A new journey has begun!”

**Awake to the wonder of God's grace.  
You Are Equipped to Serve!**

I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and foolish.

*Romans 1:14*

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Has the thought ever crossed your mind, how much of what we do is in reality a nameless activity? Yes we do things today for a cause that will have an effect on someone tomorrow we have no idea about today. It all is a part of the stream of ministry. Our connections go far back in time to people that are nameless and faceless. Where exactly did my DNA come from that causes me to look and act in certain ways? What habits and traditions did I inherit that shape my life, relationships and being? Yes, I may have received the color of my eyes from a dominant gene of an ancestor but the question goes much deeper than that.

Who was it that shared a random act of kindness that swayed some ancient ancestor to embrace the Christ who now has such a significant influence in my life? And of course the obvious question is what in my life and times will I be doing that will shape a nameless and faceless person down the line? How is it that my efforts in preparing a Sunday school lesson, saying a prayer for a child, teaching responsibility to an exuberant youth, or delivering a meal to an ill person will make a difference?

Paul in *Romans 1:14* says he is a debtor to many who have done their part in shaping his life. They are nameless and faceless except for him calling them Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish. The acts of seemingly small efforts are never done without the blessing and guidance of an all knowing God. God honors our efforts and guides them to people and places we have no idea of.

We all are dependent on nameless faithfuls who did their part in God's call to serve. In the stream of service one waters the seeds another has sown, yet another cultivates while someone else harvests. We are recipients and donors of this nameless process that is never fruitless, joyless or without a sense of "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Pastor Ray Larson

**Prayer:** God, help me to see the face of Jesus in all those faceless ones who have fostered my life of faith. Amen

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Jesus said, "I pray not only for them, but also for those who believe in me because of their message. . . I made you known to them, and I will continue to do so, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and so that I also may be in them."

*John 17: 20-26*

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When we moved to the Paoli area in 1991, neither of us had had any experience with missionaries. The typical Presbyterian churches we had belonged to hadn't supported missionaries financially, and hadn't brought them into the pulpit or the life of the congregation.

What we've discovered in getting to know missionaries here at PPC is that missionaries carry with them extraordinary experiences. We in the West, especially in an area such as the Main Line, often think we can meet our needs and solve our problems based on our own abilities. We rely on our own network of contacts, on our jobs, on our bank accounts, on our possessions.

But missionaries, who typically have very little income and who work in unfamiliar environments, understand that they have to depend on God. As a result, they often see God at work in ways we do not see. They experience miracles that either we do not see -- or do not avail ourselves of -- because of our self-dependency.

Our involvement with missionaries at PPC has been a blessing to us. Hearing their personal stories has allowed our faith to grow. They have shown us that, by relinquishing control of our lives to God, we will become more aware of God's power and the abundance of His miracles.

Gail & Tom Infield

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you for giving us the privilege of knowing servants who, through their complete trust in you, can help us to see the magnitude of your power and love. As our faith opens us up to miracles, encourage us to be witnesses to others. Amen

 *Awake to the Wonder of Grace & Equipped to Serve*

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them “Go in peace; and keep warm and eat you fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself if it has no works, is dead.

*James 2:15-17*

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One of my first experiences in the PPC Food closet was a woman hugging me, crying and saying thank you because she did not know with her income what she should buy, her RX meds or food. Fellowship at our food closet is important to many of our clients. For some it's the only outing in a week. 60-75% of our clients are elderly. These people enjoy talking to the team members and looking at the different types of food.

During the holidays we have coffee and punch for people to sit down and socialize. The look on the children's faces is precious when they can have a cookie and even better - more than one. We've been known to stuff cookies in the children's pockets. We served a man who had not yet gotten his green card. His wife was expecting their first child. He came for food for several months while awaiting his green card. We supplied nutritious food for them. When the baby was born, they brought her and were so proud. He had obtained his green card and was working at a car dealership. They would not need to come for food any more.

A well-dressed woman came. She was in tears because she was embarrassed. Her husband had lost his job 5 months prior and they needed food. We comforted her, gave her food and talked. We comfort people that have lost loved ones, have lost jobs, and have had bad times.

***Sermons We See** by Edgar A. Guest*

*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;*

*I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.*

*The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,*

*Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;*

*And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,*

*For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.*

I believe the Food Closet is a sermon that is seen by all it serves and all of us who serve it. Without everyone on the team who contribute their special gifts we could not touch the lives of people in need. My faith has been energized in this ministry. We have a wonderful fellowship with the people coming in for food, with our community, and among the food-closet workers

. Debbie Engers

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, you promise in Proverbs 19:17 that “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.”. Thank you. Amen.

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Shout for joy, O Heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song,  
O mountains!

*Isaiah 49:13*

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Annville, PA - 1977 - 5 blocks from Lebanon Valley College, one of Pennsylvania's successful Schools of Music. Across the street from us lived an adjunct Professor of Piano at LVC and the soprano soloist at my church. Our neighbor to the right was also a private piano teacher. My dad, to this day, plays tuba in the hometown community band. My parents both sang in our Methodist church choir, and my mom also dabbled at the piano, playing out of the hymnal here and there. I often sat on her lap – singing and trying to learn how she played. God had SOMETHING up his sleeve, when he chose this environment for my childhood. My favorite place was my Grandma and Grandpa's house in Hershey, PA. It was special to the 11 grandchildren because it was always filled with fresh produce from their gardens, Bible stories, love, laughter, and homemade baked goods.

At naptime, my grandma would pull me onto her lap and we would sing and sing all the favorite children's songs. She would always ask me to choose my favorite song to sing, and I supposedly said one day, "Let's sing anything, Grandma, but not *Jesus Loves Me!*" That was the special song that put me to sleep! So that of course became the family joke for many years to come. "*Don't Sing Jesus Loves Me* at the Christmas dinner table because Jon will pass out in his mashed potatoes." Everyone else laughed. I didn't think it was that funny as a college sophomore.

My parents sent me to piano teacher across the street because we attended the same church. 11 years later, I would still be her student. A classically trained concert pianist, she told me one day, "These black notes are just a form of written notation without a voice. It's you, the musician, who gives meaning to the notes." Sitting at her Steinway piano, I immediately realized what I wanted to do the rest of my life.

What is a song? Mr. Webster has several definitions for a song. A song to me is a musical poem being delivered from the heart.

 *Awake to the Wonder of Grace & Equipped to Serve*

Sitting on my mom's lap at the piano, I knew those hymns were not coming from the notes on the page. They were coming from her heart.

Now I sit over at the PPC organ, and hear all of you sing hymns. Have you ever really studied the words to the song *Days of Elijah*, or really listened to the beautiful melody of *In Christ Alone*? This world is full of song, familiar and unfamiliar. Are they all just notes? Are they written all the same?

*Isaiah* 49: 13 says, "Shout for joy, O Heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains!" The Bible does not tell us what kind of song. It does not specify how long the song must be or what instrumentation to use. No matter what style of song we choose to sing, sing it with all your might and look closely at what the song is saying. Join one of PPC's musical ensembles. God does not listen to the style of the song we personally choose. God listens to all. God doesn't mind if the song is a little off key, or if there are different kinds of drums in church. He cares about the meaning behind the song and the message coming from our hearts.

My music ministry here at PPC can be summed up in my favorite Bible verses from *Ephesians* 5: 19-21. "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." I translate that for me to say, "Always sing a song from the heart. Sing it with all your might, saying thank you to God for giving us the talents to sing that song. But listen to each other's song, because we all humbly belong to Christ through God the Father."

Jonathan Kreamer  
Director of Music

**Prayer:** I pray that You will give me eyes and ears to recognize my passion and the gifts You provide so I can share that passion with others to Your glory. Amen

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Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

*Proverbs 22: 6*

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My career and passion in life is to touch the lives of children. I am a pre-school teacher and have been at my current school for 14 years!! I get so inspired by little things that make children smile or when I see that something I said or did gets them excited to learn more!!

At Paoli Presbyterian, I have been asked many times to be a Sunday School Teacher. Every time, I have refused because it is what I do all week and I see the weekend as a break. Instead, I help out in the Sunday School office during the SS hour as a superintendent. This, in fact, has given **me** a gift- it is MY turn to be inspired as I walk around from classroom to classroom and see the children smiling and enjoying their time during their Sunday School activities!! We are blessed to have so many awesome people to teach and touch the lives of the children who will one day be our leaders!! It is very apparent that “They’re beautiful, God loves them and we love them too”!!!!

I thank God every day that I have the gift of inspiring children to give **and** receive!!!!

Lauren Slimon

**Prayer:** *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.” Amen*

*Matthew 11: 25—26*

 *Awake to the Wonder of Grace & Equipped to Serve*

I may be able to speak the language of men and angels...  
have the gift of inspired teaching...have all knowledge and  
understand all secrets, have all the faith needed to move  
mountains, but without *love* I am nothing.

*I Corinthians 13*

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More than sixty women gather in Fellowship Hall on Tuesday mornings for Bible study, representing a diversity of backgrounds and religious denominations. Friendly fellowship and refreshments are followed by a large group lesson, well prepared and researched, conducted by several teachers each week. The study is a catalyst for what many of the attendees have expressed as the most meaningful portion of the program, a time when they separate into small groups to discuss the preceding lesson. Each one speaks from her own background, life experience and understanding. Serious and painful concerns are frequently raised for needed prayer and, at times, praise for prayers answered. Finally, the women come together in an expression of Paul's quote on *love*. They understand the other's pain, pray for each concern and learn from shared wisdom and insight. Each comes to know the other more intimately and each experiences an ambience of support and comfort. For me, Tuesday mornings are the highlight of my week. Others have marked this day, as well, as the most looked forward to and fulfilling time of their week.

Ruth O'Ryan

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, reach down and touch us with your wisdom and healing power. Thank you for the blessing of shared insight into your realm of being, for forgiveness of sins and for your presence in our lives to enlighten, to teach, and to bring us ever closer to the perfection of Jesus Christ, Your Son. In His name we pray. Amen

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Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's money, why should you be trusted with money of your own?

*Luke 16:10-12*

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The Stewardship and Finance Committee is charged to make financial decisions for our church in both large and small matters. In these current difficult times it is challenging for us when we have limited resources to make prudent financial decisions and have a clear vision of our financial future. PPC income fluctuates greatly throughout the year with December being almost double our normal month. We have faith that people will continue to give in the same consistent giving patterns until the end of the year so we can meet our budgetary obligations.

We have several ministry teams which include check signers, the money counting team on Mondays, the Fall Stewardship Campaign, and One Great Hour of Sharing. Those who serve on these ministry teams do much to help the mission of PPC.

Who do we touch with our ministry? The answer is *everyone* in the church because money needs to be collected, bills need to be paid, and budget obligations need to be met. We approve payment to missionaries, salaries for staff, and lights and heat for our building. Without these basic items the mission of PPC could not continue.

Bruce Bittenbender

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, to get money is difficult, to keep it more difficult, but to spend it wisely most difficult of all. Lord, when it comes to what you have given us, there really are no small things. Grant us grace to be wise and faithful stewards of what you have entrusted to us. Amen

 *Awake to the Wonder of Grace & Equipped to Serve*

For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

*Romans 14: 7-8*

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Recently I attended a week-long conference for Stephen Ministry Leadership Training in Pittsburgh. A unique feature was pairing up with someone that you did not know as a prayer partner. Mine was the Rev. Don Bommarito from Arizona. We met each morning and prayed for each other and for the conference. One day I suggested that we share a favorite scripture. Don read this verse from *Isaiah* 43:19, “Behold, I (God) am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

OUR MINISTRY MATTERS to God and to the world; it is one way that God continues to do new things. I share from *Romans* 14:8b, “..whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” All my life, and especially now as I get older and more gnarled, I have known that God loves me. I truly have been blessed, and I try to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

By sharing God’s love, lives are touched and new things happen every single day.

Pastor Jim

**Prayer:** Gracious God, let us anticipate; let us see new things for PPC. Surround us with your Love and hold us close. Amen.

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## Our Ministry Matters

These devotions have been written by fellow disciples at Paoli Presbyterian Church. Stories are told of gifts discovered — stories of God's leading us to reach out to others. They tell the story of how people like us have been *blessed to be a blessing*.

As we are **Awake to the Wonder of Grace**,  
see the wonder of discovering that  
we are **Equipped to Serve**.



*Paoli Presbyterian Church  
225 South Valley Road  
Paoli, PA 19301  
610/644-8250  
[www.paolipres.org](http://www.paolipres.org)*