



How one Covenanter
found that being part of
the body of Christ means
trusting other people to
care for you

CARRIED OVER THE WALL

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As we walked up to our first challenge, it was nothing short of formidable: a thirteen-foot-high wall without steps, without a ladder or anything to serve as a handle. Our task was to get the entire team up and over the wall. This was going to be interesting.

I was taking part in a leadership program sponsored by the local chamber of commerce. This challenge was one of many we would face over two days, designed to teach us lessons in teamwork, and—to my surprise—lessons about ourselves.

On the other side of the wall was a five-foot piece of rope that could be used *after* the first person had successfully scaled the wall. The team quickly realized that we would have to get a tall, strong person up and over the wall. Once that was accomplished, that person could let down the rope and we could use it to get the rest of the team over with relative ease.

The plan worked like a charm. Everyone worked together toward the goal and the enthusiasm grew with each person who went over the top. We each filled an important role in the process and did all we could to assist our teammates. My job was to stand at the base of the wall and let my legs and shoulders be used as steps. It was all going quite well until it was my turn to go over the wall.

I am not small. I am six feet tall and weigh 230 pounds, and I was convinced that the team could not hoist me over the wall. I decided to drop out. We would simply be one person short of the goal.

The team, however, would not hear of it.

I was quickly lifted up and told to step on the shoulders of some teammates. I did that and once I grabbed the rope, was summarily launched over the top. No grunts, no groans, no injuries from those who had sent me over

the top. There were, however, lots of words of encouragement and congratulations.

As I reflected on my experience at the wall, I realized something about myself. I was willing to do almost anything to help my teammates achieve their goals. I lifted others up, provided a bent leg to serve as a step, and encouraged everyone as they approached the wall. But when it was my turn to rely on my teammates, I balked. When I had to let other people assist me, my response was, “Thanks, but no thanks.”

I had a number of reasons for wanting to drop out of the exercise. I did not want to burden others or impose

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myself on my teammates. And if the truth be told, relying on my teammates meant I had to trust them more than I wanted to. I realized that if I was ever going to be an effective team member, I absolutely would have to let others help me the same way I had helped them. Great lesson. But the learning didn't stop there.

Leaving the training program, I felt I had learned some lessons to take back to the office and to the committees that I served on. But seeing this as a larger life lesson or a major spiritual lesson simply did not cross my mind. It wasn't something I could apply to the rest of my life.

Then I had to take my three-year-old daughter Katie to the hospital.

Katie had been having severe stomach cramps for days. At first the doctor's office told us it was a stomach virus and we should let it run its course. But the cramps continued. They did not run their course. In fact, after a few days, there was some bleeding involved. The doctor was now clearly concerned and

ordered some tests. One of the tests I immediately knew was going to be nothing short of horrible—a lower gastro-intestinal exam—or lower GI for short.

Our church is very good about praying for one another and coming alongside each other in times of crisis. With the initial onset of Katie's distress, I didn't think the illness was anything to burden the church with so I didn't make any calls. I thought differently as the hospital and its tests were suddenly upon us.

As my wife, Linda, Katie, my older daughter Becky, and I walked into the hospital, suddenly I wanted to call the

church. I wanted my church family to pray for us. I wanted them around us. By then, however, it was too late.

After leaving Becky alone in the waiting room, Linda and I took Katie into an examination room where the imaging machine awaited. Little Katie was terrified long before the staff even touched her.

For more than half an hour, Linda and I held down our screaming three-year-old, tried to comfort her and tell her not to be afraid while the hospital staff tried to see what was going on inside her intestines. As the lower GI was being performed, Becky sat alone in the waiting room listening to her sister scream while others in the waiting room said things like, “Wow! I wonder what they're doing in there to that poor kid.”

Katie's test proved inconclusive. Basically, the doctors found nothing. This was, of course, good news. A few days after the ordeal in the hospital, we

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learned Katie had been dealing with salmonella, a result of eating some contaminated tomatoes. Her malady was identified, and thanks be to God, she has recovered and is fine. But the ordeal exposed a shortcoming that needed some work.

I came to realize that I simply do not want to rely on others. When it was my turn to go over the wall, I did not want to be lifted up and carried over. When I desperately needed our church to lift my family and me up, I refused to ask for help, and as a result I felt isolated during a difficult time. I did not allow my church family—our team of faith, if you will—to carry me.

Afterward, I wondered why on earth I had not contacted the church. I had shared much of my pilgrimage of faith with these folks, but when it really mattered, when I was facing one of the darkest hours of my life, I was mute. In considering what the reasons could be, I came across something written by John Eldredge that was a bit of an indictment.

“Our sin is that stubborn part inside that wants, above all else, to be independent,” he wrote. “There’s a part of us fiercely committed to living in a way where we do not have to depend on anyone—especially God. Then culture comes along with figures like John Wayne and James Bond and all those other ‘real men,’ and the one thing they have in common is that they are loners, they don’t need anyone. We come to believe deep in our hearts that needing anyone for anything is a sort of weakness, a handicap.”

For years I have hidden behind a number of excuses that have kept me

isolated. As I considered Eldredge’s words, all the excuses, all the reasons why I chose to isolate myself came rushing back like a bunch of old sound bites:

“You don’t want to impose yourself on anyone else, do you?”

“People asking others to pray for them are whiners.”

“Suck it up!”

All of these excuses were leading me toward isolation—sending me in the opposite direction from the way God



has called us to live. The church, the body of Christ, is made up of people who are supposed to rely on each other, not go it alone.

As I thought about these things, some images from many of the wild-life films I’ve watched over the years came to mind. In those films, being alone is a very dangerous place to be. Whether the films were of great white sharks or lions or wolves—every predator in them had the same tactic: isolate the prey. The predators looked for the one animal that had strayed from the herd and attacked it. Left to its own

resources without the help and protection of others, the prey was an easy target. Those images reminded me of something from 1 Peter 5:8: “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.”

By being a loner, by trying to handle everything on my own, I was isolating myself and my family. In the case of my daughter’s medical tests, we were without the much-needed support of our church. And, remaining isolated clearly could lead to an array of attacks that I could not hope to withstand.

Fortunately, however, the Scriptures point to a safer place and offer a clear alternative to isolation. In Hebrews, God speaks directly to our need for community: “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:24-25).

We are further encouraged to care for one another in Galatians 6:2, where Paul writes, “Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Since my daughter’s tests in the hospital, other challenges have come along. As they have, I have made certain that our church was aware of what our family was facing. I have asked for prayer frequently and welcomed offers from our church to help me carry my burdens. The challenges have still been formidable but now I know I can get over them—just like that thirteen-foot wall—with the help of others. □