



### **A Prisoner at School**

By Wes Eby, Global Representative

One Black Friday, I decided to catch up on some work in my school office. Alone in my office, due to Thanksgiving break, I reasoned I could accomplish a lot. One of my major responsibilities in this K-8 school was coordinating the Title 1 program for disadvantaged children. I desperately needed to complete a report with an impending deadline.

#### **I am in trouble!**

Arriving at the school, I started brewing coffee and then hurried to the restroom before settling down. As I exited and entered the restrooms' lobby, the door to the administrative wing was locked. Frustrated, I kept turning the knob. Firmly locked! *This cannot be true*, I thought. *Really, now! What am I going to do, God?*

Panic struck suddenly. Heart pounded. Brow sweated. Stomach tossed. What a horrible, nauseating feeling! I confess I was scared. Really scared!

Thoughts flooded my mind. Phone—unavailable. Screaming—futile. Escape—impossible. My colleagues would not show up until Monday. My wife, not expecting me until evening, would not contact anyone for hours. I was a prisoner. In a school restroom, of all places!

## What were my options?

I plopped down on the floor, leaning against a wall. Shaking my head at my stupid carelessness, I considered the options. *Panic will not help, I determined, but prayer will.* Indeed, praying is always a good starting place.

I looked at the ceiling tiles and contemplated climbing on restroom fixtures, escaping across steel girders. I did not waste too much time on that risky idea. Then, I noticed the narrow, vertical, reinforced window in the door—about 18x6 inches. *That's it. If I can break that glass, I can reach through to the other side and turn the lock. But I need a tool to break the window.* I first tried my shoe's heel. Absolutely useless. I searched for something else—anything—that would be a tool to escape from my confinement.

I noticed a steel kick plate on the bottom of the door. *If I can remove it, surely it would break the window.* Tiny screws attached it to the wood. Using fingernail clippers, I removed a few screws, but some were too stubborn. Finally, I put my fingers behind part of the loosened plate. Using my strength—with divine help, I know—the steel plate ripped off.

In a matter of minutes, I broke the glass, reached through the opening, and flipped the lock. Freedom! Glorious freedom!

## Prisoners of Circumstances

How often do we as educators find ourselves as prisoners of circumstances—many of them beyond our control. An irate parent. A defiant, unruly student. A conflict with a colleague. A deadline without adequate time to accomplish it. A devastating pandemic. An unreasonable demand by a supervisor. A lack of teaching resources. A requirement to teach something against your values and teaching philosophy. (I trust you never faced a locked restroom.)

What do we do? How often do we fail to call on the all-powerful God? I have been guilty, I admit. But sometimes we find ourselves caught by surprise, and we do not have time even to think about praying. One time, an angry father entered my classroom uninvited and threatened to sock me with a raised fist. At that moment, I had to trust my heavenly Father to care for me—and He did.

## Five Actions to Take

What is the answer? Thinking on my lengthy career as an educator, allow me to remind us of five important ways.

**1. Pray specifically each morning:** “Father, I do not know what I might face this day. Please go with me and provide for my every need—even those I do not expect or plan for.” Commit this verse to memory: *“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears”* (Psalm 34:4, NIV).

**2. “Pray without ceasing”** (1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV), as the apostle Paul exhorts. *“Never stop praying”* is the way the New Living Translation words it. Easy? Not really. It is living and working in an attitude of prayer and relying on almighty God to take care of us as He promised. And what an awesome way to live—and teach!

**3. Ask your family and loved ones to intercede to God for you daily as you encounter new circumstances and mind-boggling challenges.** *"Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out"* (Ephesians 6:18, MSG).

**4. Find one or more prayer partners.** The partner(s) may be from the staff at your work or your church. Covenant to pray for each other daily. What a comfort to tackle each day knowing that your partners have covered you in prayer. *"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2 NLT).

**5. Ask your pastor to have special prayer in a worship service before the beginning of the new school year, inviting all teachers/educators to gather at the sanctuary altar.** This may (should) become an annual tradition. *"**Pray for each other.** . . The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results"* (James 5:16, NLT, emphasis added).

As you dive into a new school year, may your prayer to the loving God who delights in answering the desires of the heart be the "Source" you rely on, not just to survive, but to thrive.

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