

Church Office

101 E. Milwaukee St. #401

Janesville, WI 53545

608-758-0943

[jefc@inwave.com](mailto:jefc@inwave.com)

[www.inwave.com/~jefc](http://www.inwave.com/~jefc)

Meeting location

Marshall Middle School

25 S. Pontiac, Janesville

Pastor:

John Swanson

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*Declaring the greatness of God and serving  
others for joy and His honor (II Cor. 4:5)*

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March 3, 1999

Dear «Greeting»,

In the movie, “Field of Dreams”, one of two famous lines from the movie is, “Is this heaven? No, it’s Iowa.” (If you tell me the other famous line.... I’ll think you’re pretty smart! ☺) It’s not very often we’re tempted to ask if this is heaven. During the past few weeks I’ve been reminded in a number of ways that we are definitely not in heaven yet. It seems to me that we are experiencing the reality of Jesus’ statement in John 16:33, “In this world you will have trouble.” and of Paul’s in Acts 14:22, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

How we handle the reality of suffering and disappointment is one of the most critical issues we face as Christians. Jesus warns in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13, Mark 4, Luke 8) that some mishandle suffering by concluding that if God really loved them, then this bad stuff wouldn’t be happening, so they abandon all pretense of faith. Others ignore the dozens of places where we are told to expect trouble while we live on planet earth and teach that because Christians are “children of the king” and Jesus promised an abundant life (John 10:10) then nothing bad will happen to Christians. According to these teachers, if bad things happen to you it is because you’re not a Christian or you don’t have enough faith. This heretical teaching will either make you a hypocrite or cause you to despair.

The biblical way to handle the suffering and disappointment of life is twofold. First, we are to “cast all our anxiety upon the Lord, for he cares for you” (I Peter 5:6) and to “Be anxious for nothing but in everything with prayer and petition along with thanksgiving make your requests known to God” (Phil. 4:6). Second, we are to be submissive to all that God sends to us. “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Heb. 12:7) and “Let him who suffers according to God’s will entrust himself to his faithful creator and continue to do good.” (I Peter 4:19). Sometimes God graciously delivers us from the particular suffering and sometimes he graciously gives us the faith to trust him through it.

However he decides my case here, I am to have my sight fixed on heaven and that eternal reward that comes only to those who persevere to the end. We need to be able to say with the apostle Paul, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (II Cor. 4: 16-18).

It has been my experience, and I think it is the teaching of Scripture, that one of the primary helps God gives to enable us to persevere is the presence of other Christians. Their prayers for us sustain us (Luke 22:31-32, Phil. 1:19-20) and their practical help and love are God’s love for us (I Peter 4:7-11). It is my prayer and ambition that we will be a church that has its gaze fixed on heaven while we encourage each other to persist in faith in the midst of all our trials.

Seeking the unseen,