

Dear Mountain Family,

I wanted to touch base with you about a few things as we get ready to head into the weekend.

First, for those of you who are still mad about the Colts leaving town umpteen years ago, I suppose Saturday when the Ravens play the Indianapolis Colts will either be a time of sweet revenge, or an extra bitter exit from the Playoffs. I think I may have some encouragement for you Ravens fans. You know how sometimes my Bible just falls open to passages and it appears to be a message from the Lord? Well, that happened this morning!! I am thinking, what word can I give to Ravens fans today, Lord? And then WHAM - my eyes fall on Mark 11:7 which says "they brought the **colt** to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it." As near I can figure, this can only mean the Ravens are going to squash the Colts. Even Jesus is going to sit on them.

As for the Vikings, let's hope our Sr. Citizen quarterback can outlast the Dallas Cowpies on Sunday.

I'm excited to tell you that the number of Mountain people who have signed on to be part of the new Bel Air campus which is launching in March is 458! That's great and we're on our way. Lots of work to do, and there will be something for EVERYONE. Stay tuned. If you are planning to go to the site, be sure to fill out a card so we can keep you posted on things coming up. This Sunday I am excited to be introducing our newest staff person who will play a pivotal role in the worship at the new site.

I mentioned at our Christmas Services that Matt Silver, our Student Ministries Pastor, and his wife, Carrie, have learned that their little three-year-old Ian has Leukemia. He has been diagnosed with the type of Leukemia called "ALL" and they are in a crucial window of time right now which will determine future prognosis and treatment. The entire family is taking a day at a time with amazing resiliency and faith. They are very appreciative of the prayers of the Mountain people - so let's keep it up! Remember also little bro Nate during this crazy time in their family. Matt says to pray for God's will to be done and to pray hard! Mom and Dad say Ian is doing great, but is pretty tired due to the treatments. He's not quite himself, but is a trooper nonetheless. We are all in God's hands. You can follow the updates, see pics, sign the journal and offer prayers and encouragement by going to www.caringbridge.org/visit/iansilver.

On a much more serious note, we all felt the shock when the largest earthquake they have had in a century shook the tiny island nation of Haiti on Tuesday. Our hearts sink at the massive destruction and loss of life in the poorest nation in the western hemisphere. We have received many reports from several eyewitnesses and missionaries, all of them devastating and heart wrenching.

One report said this: As the ground began to tremble, thousands of people ran screaming into the streets in a state of utter panic. Even as the shaking subsided, further panic ensued as it became clear that neighbors and loved ones were trapped in the fallen rubble. The earthquake and numerous aftershocks collapsed buildings, toppled debris into roadways, and knocked out electrical service throughout most of the capital. Phone lines into the country failed soon afterward. Tuesday evening was a night of near-total darkness in the streets of Port-au-Prince. One indicator of the damage caused to buildings and other structures was a huge plume of dust which rose up over the city, obscuring the view from surrounding hillsides for about 20 minutes. Traffic around the city was snarled as fallen debris blocked many of the roadways, impeding rescue efforts and preventing many of the injured from reaching hospitals and clinics.

Our own Rob Kastens is with a team in Ecuador this week, on a trip sponsored by Compassion International. They are estimating that 1/3 of the 65,000 children Compassion sponsors there were impacted by the earthquake - about 22,000. Staff and families they work with and care about are missing in collapsed buildings.

With much of Haiti's population already living in poverty, many homes and buildings easily collapsed, including hospitals, schools, government buildings, and mission centers and churches.

Of course we want to know "how can we help?" First we must pray! Pray for Haiti, for those who suffer, and those who help them. Pray that this is the Church's finest hour - to rise to the occasion and assist in all the ways love and human compassion can when it is empowered by God's grace.

For those who want and are able to give financially to help, Mountain is going to be assisting by focusing our giving through two excellent mission organizations with whom we have a strong relationship. They have longstanding works in Haiti, and connection to many churches and missions that are on the ground there. By funneling our support to the Haiti relief effort through them, we have a way of jumping in to help with short-term immediate relief aid for those in crisis, but also long-term follow up help. We will also be forming teams to go and help with medical and construction work when it is clear that that is possible and beneficial. The two organizations we will be working through are FAME and IDES. FAME is a medical evangelism ministry that has lots of work going on in Haiti. We appreciate and trust this ministry totally. You can check them out at <http://www.fameworld.org>. IDES is a disaster relief organization we have worked with many times. Their website is <http://www.ides.org>.

If you wish to give, you may do so by giving through Mountain any time, or directly through these organizations on their websites. If you give to Mountain just be sure to clearly designate it from your regular offerings so we make sure it gets to the right place.

This picture was sent to me with the following caption:
"He's still standing."



He is still standing, indeed. Let's pray that through the rubble and the tragedy, many Haitians - and others around the world - may be drawn to the One who towers above the wrecks of time, and who is our only stable source of strength and help in time of need. Somehow through this, we pray that many will be drawn to God who promises: "'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be moved, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my promise of peace be taken away,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10

Ben

P.S. Sunday we will close out the Prodigal series with a surprising look at what the word PRODIGAL means!