

A father writes, "Not long ago, one of my daughters set my phone alarm tone to match that of her favorite animal. It's labeled "Horses Neighing." It should be called "Death by Stampede." At 5:30 in the morning my alarm went off and I shot straight up, wide-awake, a stampede charging through my bedroom.

While changing it back to my standard alarm, I noticed a wide array of other options. Some of the sounds wouldn't do anything to get me up, like the one labeled "Harp." It trills a soft melody, and just listening to it makes me sleepy. The most effective alarm ringtone for me is labeled "Old Car Horn." Think in terms of a house alarm that you can hear on the other side of the neighborhood. Now imagine that you are sleeping inside the speaker. It's highly effective. And the great thing is this alarm has a unique backup system that's almost fail proof – my wife.

But here's what I've discovered: the effectiveness of any alarm is in direct correlation to how much you don't want to hear it. In other words, until your desire not to hear the alarm outweighs your desire to keep sleeping—you're not going to wake up. (Kyle Idleman)

This is true both literally and figuratively. We know the literal effect of our sleeping alarms, right? Have you ever had a sudden awakening take place when God finally gets your attention? God's alarm sounds, and this time you immediately become aware of your present circumstances and the reality that something special has just occurred and you have a renewed opportunity with God by your side?

The Prodigal Son experienced this in Luke 15. After taking his inheritance money from his father, wasting it, and reduced to feeding pigs, the Bible tells us the son, "came to his senses..."

Have you ever had a moment like this? The Holy Spirit opens your eyes, and you see something that you had somehow missed before. You have a startling realization that soon enough changes everything.

Maybe you've heard someone refer to a "God moment." This usually is a special time when it is clear that God has intervened and shown God's self in an exceptional way.

This brings us back to our 1 Samuel text today in which Samuel erects a giant stone- "a stone of help" called an "Ebenezer"- to make the place where God interceded on behalf of the Israelites to defeat the Philistines. It was intended to serve as a constant reminder to the people of what God had done for them.

Samuel recognized the power of God present with the Israelites and celebrated that God-moment with an Ebenezer.

I will say this. The word ebenezer sounds as though we should be saying “gazuntite” or “God bless you” after.

In all seriousness, an ebenezer is defined as a “stone of help.” The origin of the word is found here in 1 Samuel, first appearing in chapter 4 and then in chapter 7. More important to note, however, is the origin of its meaning and the power it has beyond its inception.

Samuel placing the Ebenezer was to mark the place God showed up for the Israelites, and it served as a call to hope that God would continue to be faithful. It was a tangible reminder for future generations to trust in the power of God displayed in the story of God showing up on behalf of their ancestors.

We might liken the origin of stained-glass windows, as they were created to help tell a story of a moment in which the light of God shined and reflected not only through the glass, but through the circumstance. Have a look around the sanctuary for several examples.

In our modern day, “Ebenezer” has come to symbolize the ways in which we too mark the moments where God shows up in our lives, or the lives of our families.

Robert Robinson includes the power of an “Ebenezer” in the writing of the hymn, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. The hymn in its entirety is a prayer. A prayer about what? A prayer asking God to come and be a source of help, a source of joy, a source of safety, a source of strength, a source of blessing, just as God has done before. It is also a prayer of thanksgiving and remembrance as Robinson writes about the ways in which the power of being sought by God changed him from “stranger” to believer, from lost to found. Verse 2 resounds:

“Here I raise my Ebenezer; Hither by Thy help I’m come; And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home. Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed His precious blood.”

What is your Ebenezer?

Are there events or times in your life that serve as a reminder of God’s goodness and presence? Maybe the church has rallied around you during a season; maybe you have attended an event; maybe God boldly acted and did something miraculous (healing, deliverance); maybe you have witnessed God work in the lives of others you are close to and that is a reminder of God?

When everything else tried to break you and you are still standing — a God Moment! When unexpected circumstances tried to break you, yet, you endured — a God Moment! When a pandemic tried to break you, but you are still here despite it all — that's another God Moment. When fear tried to break your spirit, God whispered in your spirit — HOLD ON — that was a God Moment. Ever feel serenity. How about peace? Love? Joy? Talk about real-time God Moments. It could be as poignant as a phone call you receive from someone “randomly.”

These God moments, these faith moments, our stories, have power, and the times where we feel the presence, power, or provision of God should be marked in some way by an “Ebenezer”. This can be a tangible stone, a piece of paper, a quote on the wall, or art hanging. For some it might be the design of a tattoo. Maybe it is a gravestone or plaque or statue or yard marker. It is important to notice and appreciate these unique moments and interventions of God in our lives. These moments are important to recognize not only for our own remembrance and need to keep our eyes on God rather than on the world around us, but for others as well. These God moments marked as “Ebenezers” can become special teaching moments when we use them to minister to others. They can increase faith and intensify worship.

An “Ebenezer” celebrates the power in everyone’s faith story. By faith story we are talking directly to encounters with God- not just here at FPC, but what it is that has connected you to God throughout your life (community, mission trips, youth group, Sunday school, baptism, communion, creation), and how you have felt God’s presence in your life (peace, hope, joy, love, compassion).

Here is the thing. As the body of Christ, the Church, we are connected in community, and that includes at times bearing each other’s burdens as well as celebrating each other’s joys. Our willingness to not only mark but also share our “Ebenezer” moments inspires hope and faith in others across experiential, denominational, language, and cultural differences. God cannot be kept neatly in a box or be bounded in any way. God is able and willing to reach us wherever we are, and God is able and willing to help us wherever we are.

Psalm 46:1

“God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Psalm 121:2

“My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

Psalm 146:5

“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.”

Isaiah 41:10

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”