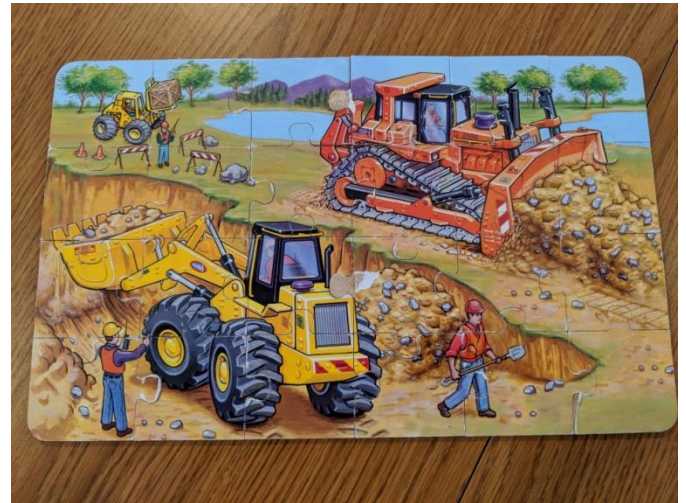


Piecing It All Together

One of the favorite activities of our 2 and 3 year old granddaughters is putting together puzzles. The 2-year old assembles the wooden puzzles where each shape fits into an opening of exactly the right size, while the 3 year old is quite adept at the more traditional cardboard puzzles. The 2 year old analyzes the shape of each jagged piece as she puts it into place, while the 3 year old methodically looks at the picture, starts with the outside pieces and works from there. I enjoy watching the satisfaction on their faces when they complete a puzzle and can see the big, completed picture.

Growing our faith is like putting together a complex puzzle. It comes together, piece by piece, but it takes a while before we get an idea of what it is going to look like. We put things together in stages, starting with the simple and continuing to a more complex understanding. When we are young we are taught simply that “Jesus loves me.” That message is expanded when we begin to learn more about Jesus and “*why* and *how* He loves me.” Jesus becomes the answer to about every question at church, and in a more complex way, is an answer to our adult questions, too. As youngsters we are told bible stories about characters such as Noah and Paul. During the Christmas season we focus on the events leading up to the birth of Jesus. At the same time we begin to learn Christian values from our parents and other leaders. Throughout your life God is methodically putting more and more pieces in place to help you more fully understand His plan for you.



As we get a little older we hear stories about Moses leading people to the Promised Land and receiving the 10 Commandment tablets. With each new learning opportunity our understanding expands from a man named Jesus to a loving God at the controls of some pretty miraculous events. In our own life we develop a sense of reality, but what we hear about God’s power is anything but possible in our minds. But then, we hear the words “*the peace of God passes all human understanding*” (from *Philippians 4:7*). With God all things are possible. We are told, “*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see*” (*Hebrews 11:1*). Each is a foundational piece of the big picture. More of the puzzle is being filled in.

As we reach the teenage years we become aware that our peers may not have been introduced to the same faith puzzle pieces that we have. They may encourage us to stray from God because we can’t see, smell, touch or control Him. Our world is all about the tangible. *Jesus himself said, “... Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29)*. Without someone keeping us on track to complete the puzzle we may give in to our culture’s push back. That is when parents need to step up their game. Sometimes parents go the other way and set their children free to make their own choices about attending church. It is easier that way, but the result is anything but an easy life without the Grace, Peace and Love of God. Our puzzle is at risk of not being completed. Hopefully, the foundation of faith has been established and our teenagers and young adults may eventually return to active participation.

In our adult lives, if we stay on track, we learn more sophisticated insights into God’s story. We also may feel a calling to acts of Christian service. In those times we become a piece of our puzzle as we find ways to put faith into action. In any event, each piece put in place becomes the foundation to seeing how everything fits together. A big step towards seeing the puzzle in its entirety is when we come to the realization that merely knowing there is a God is isn’t enough. Being a person of faith isn’t an academic exercise but establishing a personal relationship with God. We must receive Jesus in our heart for our puzzle to include us.

The last pieces of the puzzle are completed at the end of life when God welcomes us home to eternal life with Him. Before that we can only imagine what the picture of Heaven will be like.

When my 2-year old granddaughter completes her puzzle in my presence she gleefully says, “We did it!” I look forward to the time when, in the presence of the Lord, He says, “We did it!”

My prayer for you is that you will continually work on placing more pieces in your puzzle, as you continue to grow on your faith journey, one piece at a time.

The Bible says: *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).*

Question: How far along are you in completing the puzzle depicting God’s direction for your life as you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Prayer: Dear Lord. What You have done for us is nothing short of miraculous, so much so that it is often difficult to comprehend. We pray we will stay on track to more fully understand our place in Your kingdom. Amen.