

## Stepping into 2023 with Courage

The year 2020 was a year to remember ... or more precisely, a year we'd like to forget. With the pandemic, economic failings, and murder hornets, we were all glad 2020 was coming to an end. *"Boy, I'm glad that's behind us! Things will get better in 2021."*

I laugh about that now. The year 2021 was not better. The pandemic continued, political dissension and unrest worsened, and we had historic winter storms and summer heat. *"But, hey, 2022 will be better!"*

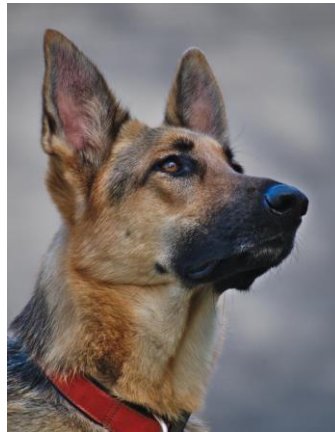
So now we're coming to the end of 2022 with its inflation, supply chain issues, economic uncertainty, rising global unrest, and oh yeah, Covid-19, which refuses to go away. People have gotten wary about flippant comments that next year will be better.

I don't know what 2023 holds, but I refuse to be afraid.

The year 2023 may very well be another year of being blown and tossed by the wind, a boat facing pounding waves. In Matthew 14, Peter walked on water even as the wind and waves threatened him. He did fine as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. We can do the same.

Many years ago, I sat in a discipleship group in which the leader told us of a news article he had read regarding the training of guard dogs. According to this Dallas newspaper, guard dogs understandably go through intensive training in protecting life and property. When a trainer thinks a dog is ready to graduate, he puts the dog through one last test. Before the test, though, the dog is not fed.

On the day of the test, the dog is brought out and commanded to sit and stay. A juicy steak is placed at the dog's feet. The purpose of the test may be obvious, but the trainer wants to ensure that nothing can distract the dog. If a burglar can simply toss a steak and keep the dog from defending the home, he's not much of a guard dog.



Our group leader told us that the trainer made an interesting observation. The dog that kept his eyes on his trainer—the one who told him to sit and stay—passed the test. Even though he was hungry and his mouth might be watering, he didn't budge. But the dog that glanced at the

steak—even for a moment—succumbed to the temptation, went for the steak, and failed the test.

Keeping your eyes on the master. It worked for these guard dogs. It worked for Peter—and it will work for us.

It is critical that we keep our eyes on Jesus.

I hope 2023 is a better year, but I will not let my confidence or mood be dictated by the circumstances that will come with 2023. The waves of economic uncertainty may still threaten. The winds of the culture may continue to blow against all that is right and good, but I will keep my eyes on Jesus.

Does that make me courageous? I don't know, but I do know I have yet to find a better, more reliable place to look. Keeping my eyes on Jesus have served me well thus far, and I will continue to keep my eyes on Him.

*"Lord, bless this year. Make it a good one. Regardless of what happens, though, I will keep my eyes fixed on You because You are good."*

"But my eyes look to you, Lord, my Lord. I seek refuge in you; do not let me die" (Ps. 141:8).

"Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus" (Heb. 12:1-2).