

Illustrated Bible Life

Never Alone

A few years ago, I set out on a hike with my brother James and his youngest daughter Samantha. The hike was not a long one, about two miles out and back, nor was it particularly strenuous—although it climbed to a rise, the slope was gentle and the path an easy one to follow. Yet it was one of the only hikes I've ever taken that I couldn't complete. Why? Because the temperature that day was well over 100 degrees.

The hike started well enough. We ate a good breakfast, and hit the trail before noon. However, by that time, the temperatures were already soaring, and the heat rising from the slick rock of the desert floor was like a hot blanket around my legs. I was glad I had slathered on the sunblock that morning, as I could almost see my skin baking.

Usually I like the heat, but that day, I just couldn't go on. I finally told James and Sam that I was pretty much done. Sam volunteered to stay with me, but my brother wanted to power through, so my niece and I found a shady spot and waited for him to return.

I hated to miss the end of that trail—our destination was the Copper Ridge Dinosaur Tracks Interpretive Site, near Moab, Utah. This was a particularly impressive site that I had always wanted to see, and I had been excited to be making the trek with my brother and niece. After what seemed a very long time, James came marching back, full of stories about the wonder he had seen.

A year later, I finally was able to complete that hike. The temperature this year was a not-unpleasant 80 degrees, well below the previous summer's heat. I called my brother on my cell phone and asked if he thought I could make it. "Go for it!" he advised without hesitation.

I stayed on the phone and chatted with my brother as I made the climb to the top of the ridge. I reached the point where I had stopped the summer before, and although even 80-degree heat is a challenge in a barren, rocky desert with little shade, the encouraging voice of my brother kept me going till I finally came out on the plateau with the tracks. That encouragement made all the difference.

In our first unit this quarter, we follow Jesus through the Lenten season to Palm Sunday and Easter. Along the way, Jesus spends some of His last moments of freedom with His disciples in the Upper Room, where He encouraged them in spite of the upcoming darkness of the Passion events. His promise to them was that they would not go through the darkness alone, nor would they ever be alone again. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17). Like my brother's encouraging voice on my trip to the top of Copper Ridge, the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit is ever in our ears, encouraging us onward in our journey with Christ.

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