

Calvary MESSENGER

“... God forbid that I should glory, save in
the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Galatians 6:14

FEBRUARY 2017

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Calvary Messenger

February 2017

Purpose of Calvary Messenger is:

- To propagate sound Biblical doctrine;
- To stimulate a deeper study of God's Word;
- To anchor and fortify the faith of Christians;
- To point lost and dying souls to Christ the Savior;
- To welcome prodigals back to the fold and family of God;
- And to help defeated Christians find victory in Christ Jesus.

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Precious Jesus

Elmer Schrock, Stuarts Draft, VA

Jesus Savior, Thou art precious, to my weary, sin-sick soul.
 Now to Thee I turn with longing. Cleanse my heart and make me whole.
 Fill me with Thy gracious Spirit. Give to me a Christ-like mind.
 That in all my heart and being I can feel Thy love divine.

Search my heart and cleanse my motives. From all self and sin set free.
 Self denying, serving Jesus. In His image I would be.
 Change my spirit to Thy likeness. Use me just as pleaseth Thee.
 That my life in all its effort to Thy will shall yielded be.

Quench my thirst with living water. Feed me with that heavenly bread.
 That my hungry soul and spirit from Thy table may be fed.
 Day by day, to be more holy is my longing and my goal.
 Full surrender to Thy Spirit, of my body, mind, and soul.

While I'm plodding ever onward, through this world of sin and woe,
 May I show the Love of Jesus, where I am and where I go.
 Thus to live for Christ my Savior brings me peace and deepening joy.
 As I travel on life's journey, in my blessed Lord's employ.

Looking forward to that moment, from earth's cares to be set free.
 Be in glory with my (our) Jesus, all because of Calvary.
 Such a prospect gives me courage, looking forward to that goal.
 Forever with our Lord and Master. Perfect dwelling for the soul.

Teach me Lord, my days to number. Wisdom to my heart supply.
 Humbly serving Christ my Savior till my summons from on high.
 When in glory, there forever, angels, mansions to adore,
 With the saints who've gone before us; Be with Christ forevermore. 

Positive or Negative? Which?

Discussion seems to take a brisk turn when the principles of Scripture are considered. Such a discussion occurred in the early church at Jerusalem (Acts 15) when they were faced with a decision about how people from non-Jewish backgrounds who came to faith in Christ should live. Jewish Christians were conflicted about what to ask of Gentiles who came to Christ, but were not keeping certain ceremonies in Moses' law. Special attention was given to whether circumcision should be required of non-Jews for full acceptance as members in the Christian church.

How the early church processed that question is instructive. I shall return to this situation later but will first look at two New Testament Scriptures pertaining to this important question:

2 Tim. 4:2

“Preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all

longsuffering and doctrine.”

Every Christian has the assignment of presenting the Spirit-filled life. This needs to be done, also when current issues are discussed. Sustainable modest dress, brotherhood relationships, homosexuality, pornography, the emergent church..., to cite several current examples.

We are partly responsible for those who note our life and message so that if we fail to warn them of danger, their blood figuratively stains our hands. (See Ezekiel 33:1-10 and Acts 20:26.) Responsible preaching and shepherding requires loving courage that seeks to proclaim “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). To be “*in season and out of season*” suggests that it must be done without falling back on excuses, like: “I cannot,” or a wimpy, “I don’t *feel* like it.”

Sometimes faithfulness includes “reproof,” pointing to the need for correction. If Peter could say, “Save yourselves from this untoward

generation” (Acts 2:40), we cannot expect to dodge all negative comment in presenting the Gospel. In our day, respect for God’s holy standards is often missing. In the changes we see so far in the 21st century, society in the West is going downhill.

“Rebuke” assumes that someone is asked to turn away from what they’ve been believing and doing.

Negative comment is needed, but this shall be *preceded by generous positive comment. In fact, positive communication is primary.* “Exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” includes what is to be believed and done. It is a tall order, but very needful. “Longsuffering” indicates *how*: a manner of patient kindness. “Doctrine” indicates *what*: The Faith is a message that brings salvation. The Faith alone brings a soul out of darkness into light.

Acts 20: 28-31a

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things,

to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch...”

Where only positive, sunshiny messages are given, the flock is ill-protected against life-threatening dangers. Dangers may come from outside or inside the church. The flock can expect to face false doctrine and/or false brethren. What is even more sobering is that any of us, leader or lay member, can bring this danger into the church. Only as the flock stands together on the New Testament is the flock safe.

Cowardice may choose silence about error so that people don’t leave. Dangers from without come in the form of persecution. Let us not offer welcome or make adjustments in teaching for anyone to belong to the local church without fruits of sincere repentance and saving faith in Christ.

Prescription and Proscription

Prescription is positive; *proscription* is negative. Prescription outlines obedience; proscription outlines disobedience. Thus the flock that has only a vision for positive teaching (without lines of demarcation that say: “This is *in* and that is *out*”) is exposed to needless danger.

Proscription is often succinct. Its brevity made the Ten

Commandments clear and powerful. When people in Jesus' time thought it through, they could see that the two greatest commandments (loving God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves) were contained in the Decalogue.

Returning to Acts 15 and 16, we note that after the apostles, who were Jews, had wrestled through the issues regarding Gentile acceptance, they decided that the Holy Spirit was telling them not to require circumcision, but that they should forbid eating blood or meat which (they knew) had been offered to idols. (See 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, for how Paul interpreted the proscription against eating meat offered to idols.) The apostles resumed the Old Testament's proscription against immorality. Thus the apostles went out from Jerusalem carrying prescription and proscription as "part and parcel" of heaven's message of salvation. As they went through the cities, "they delivered the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles which were at Jerusalem" (Acts 16:4).

Their primary message was positive—that Jesus saves all who believe. That message further included what was always forbidden and what was forbidden under

certain circumstances and what was never to be required.

The call to repentance is two-fold. It is a negative call to stop sinning, but this emphasis is not lopsided. The positive and negative together present a balanced call to belief and amendment of life.

A tragedy of our time is that some would teach and give hope of heaven to people with little regard for what people believe or how they live. The Gospel of Christ is exclusive. ***Only genuine faith in Jesus saves.*** Other faiths must be acknowledged as powerless to deliver a soul from death, or to infuse a life with purpose and victory that triumphs over sin. Thank God, The Faith also provides assurance of eternal bliss with Jesus in heaven forever! Hallelujah!

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In the last item Bro. David L. Miller wrote in "Observations" (January, 2016), he recommended a book for both men and women: *Feminine Beauty* by Evelyn Miller. Here's how to obtain this book. Order from:: Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites, P. O. Box 106, Harrisonburg, VA 22803 Make checks payable to Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites. Price postpaid \$10.

-PLM 

Announcements

The board of Amish Mennonite Aid announces the appointment of Bro. Mark Webb as personnel recruiter, effective January 1, 2017.

Bro. Ray Stutzman has been doing the recruiting for the past 15 years and feels the time has come to step aside and have the work carried by a younger man. We, the AMA board, wish to express our sincere appreciation to Ray for the faithful and diligent service he has given in finding and preparing workers for the field.

Let us welcome and support Mark in this work. He may be contacted at either 540-717-2116 or amapc66@gmail.com.

Philip Beachy, Chairman AMA

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REACH 2017—March 23-24, 2017

REACH brings together fifty conservative Anabaptist ministries and Kingdom-workers from all walks of life. The two-day program includes over 100 breakout sessions addressing a wide variety of ministry-related topics. Ministries share their vision and work in breakout sessions and displays. General assemblies tie the entire event together with worship, messages, and prayer.

Location: Calvary Church, 1051 Landis Road, Lancaster, PA 17601

Registration Open

More information and registration is at reach.fbep.org. A paper registration form is also available. Contact Faith Builders at (814) 789-4518 or fbep@fbep.org for more information or to request registration forms. 

reader response

Re: The Electronic Dam is Breaking, December, page 6.

I very much appreciate this article.

I recently read an article concerning a survey done with local hospitals. This survey stated that a large percentage of walk-ins to emergency rooms for broken fingers, broken noses, or

bruised faces are from these “*phone-walkers*” who walk into objects that choose not to move, or from stumbling over objects that cause the pavement to suddenly rise to eye level.

To me it seems so unlike the nature of God that we are called to put on, when we see many carrying their electronic

gadgets into the house of worship. Jesus said we must worship in spirit and truth. Can God have our undivided attention for at least two hours of the week? If God is not first in our life how will we fare at the judgment?

In the late 50's and during the 60's many took a clear stand against the radio and TV. Now a greater and more formidable enemy is at our doors and sweeping many off their feet and causing a lullaby effect in the very hearts of God's people. Many are unable to stand. Why? Because we fail in our vision for truth and preserving future generations.

May I be so bold as to say that those who become addicted to and intoxicated with electronic gadgets to the point that they must text during worship, do not know the God of Daniel who, "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat"?

Denver Yoder, Somerset, OH

• • • • •

I wanted to write a few lines with a desire to encourage someone to stand for truth and right. The electronic dam is breaking for many and how sad it is. Many people today are addicted as slaves to much of today's electronics.

It will destroy family life, family devotions, and will ruin, with time, church life. Satan knows the church

grew through times of persecution hundreds of years ago. Today he is destroying and drawing away many souls from following God, His Word and the church through the enticements of the world's electronics.

Is there anyone today who is willing to take a stand and make a hedge against this evil? Ezekiel 22:30, Is there anyone who is willing to stand in the gap before the Lord in the land?

This article should wake up parents, ministers, and churches. It is a serious matter. I feel sorry for many people, even in plain circles, who seemingly cannot live without these things.

God can help man overcome electronics. We do not need to be held in bondage to such things.

"Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith he Lord." If we know much of today's electronics are spiritually dangerous to our soul, why not abstain from them? "...That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15b).

"Can man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov.6:27).

Let us not take the chance of selling our soul, as it were for a morsel of today's electronics. May we be faithful. Jesus is coming again. We will some day stand before God.

Homer Yoder, Sparta, TN



Read and Understand

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

A few years ago I first saw the manufacturer's decal on a piece of machinery that said, "Read and understand operating instructions before using this machine." Previously such decals merely said, "Please read the operator's manual before operating this machine." I can imagine someone bringing a frivolous law suit, claiming that, "Yes, I read the manual, but I didn't understand it."

What next? Now every operator is responsible to not only read that machine manual, but besides, he is to understand it. How difficult can life get?

A whole sermon (that might even go over-time) could be given on what the Bible says about the understanding.

In Bible study we refer to the law of first mention. The first use of the word *understand* is in Genesis 11:7 where the Lord came down to get a close look at the architect's blueprint of the tower of Babel after it was already being built. And God said,

"Go to, and let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not *understand* one another's speech."

At Pentecost, by contrast, they earnestly wanted to please God and they all understood each other.

The first mention of *understanding* is in Exodus 31:2 and 3 about Bezaleel, "And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship."

The men who came to David at Ziklag and Hebron were a total of 340,000 that were counted. Out of these were singled out an important, select group, "And of the children of Issachar, which were *men of understanding of the times*, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads if them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Proverbs gives an interesting foursome of succession. God puts a premium on the knowledge received

from His Word. The succession is knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and righteousness. (In Proverbs 1:1-7 and 8:1-21)

- Knowledge leads to truth.
- Wisdom is always found in truth.
- Understanding is the revelation of truth.
- Righteousness is the result of truth.

The Apostle Paul had insight by the Holy Ghost in these same things. “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9).

Faith is not the same as understanding. Faith can be full at the same time that understanding is less than full. It is possible to insist on needing to understand something before it is believed and accepted. As a result, such concepts can be rejected as unreasonable because reason cannot reach it.

Therefore, our first response to God and His Word needs to be a faith response. Biblical faith comes before understanding. As an example, the Bible says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Through faith we understand...” (Hebrews 11:1,3). Faith does not doubt that

which it cannot see when God has spoken it in His Word.

The Bible also speaks well of sanctified understanding. “Yet in the church I had rather speak forth five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be children, but in understanding be men” (1 Cor. 14:19, 20). That ratio is five to 10,000! It has been determined that the average speaker speaks 120 words per minute. At that rate, it would take 83 minutes to speak 10,000 words!

A researcher tabulated the total words spoken in a day by both men and women. It was discovered that the lowest number of words spoken in an average day was 800. The highest number of words was 47,000! And surprise! Both of these records were set by men!

One of the classes I taught at Calvary Bible School was on the Psalms. One of the assignments I made included that each student was to choose a favorite verse in Psalm 119. One of the young men in the next class session gave his as being verse 99, “I have more understanding than all my teachers.” I don’t know who he was, but I could wish he would let me know who he is. Should he call me

to identify himself, my first question would be, "Have you been ordained yet?" I went to a public, one-room school. One day, Mrs. Moore, an older Presbyterian, called me up to her desk. She told me she thinks I will be ordained some day. That felt, well, rather important. Then she added, "I have noticed that in the Mennonite Church it is usually the boys who were naughty who are ordained!"

The Bottom Line is that our Bible reading should open our

understanding in special and marvelous ways. To read and understand is our responsibility upon receiving God's good gift. Somehow, faith comes first. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

A man of simple faith on his knees can see farther than a humanistic philosopher on his tiptoes. 

Liberal Theology and its Woes

A concerned sister

Liberal Theology! (L.T.) What does it mean? How does it come about? Are we not satisfied with the way the Bible was given by God as He spoke to men that were moved by the Holy Spirit? Let's see if we can find some answers to these questions.

In the account of Eve and the serpent, the serpent made it sound and look so appealing so that Eve began to DOUBT God's commands. So, could just doubting the Scriptures in what appeared to be a small thing to Eve be the beginning of L.T.? Doubting the Word of God may be one of the first signs of L.T. When the

door of doubt is opened even just a little, more doubt and unbelief will enter in.

We might ask, could God really be so harsh that a failed marriage followed by a legal divorce would not clear the way for seeking another marriage partner? Especially since we notice that second marriages are often better, would they not have God's blessing? A peaceful marriage must prove that it's OK with God, for surely He does not want us to be unhappy or lonely, does He?

Another issue arises about church leaders, to whom is given responsibility/authority in the

congregation they serve. Ephesians 4:11-17 gives us a picture of their responsibilities. They are to teach, preach, edify the church to bring the flock all together “unto a perfect man,” bringing them to the unity of the faith and to becoming more like Christ. The goal? That we aren’t tossed to and fro like children going after every wind of doctrine, following false teachers who wait to deceive us.

In Hebrews 13:7, God instructs/commands us to remember and follow after those who faithfully teach us. Then, more strongly, verse 17 adds that we are to OBEY those that have the rule over us because their responsibility is to watch over/for our souls. But what do we see and hear in our churches today? Too often the above commands are nixed and people are doing “their own thing.” They begin to wander about looking for acceptable ways of following Christ that are less restrictive.

They really don’t appreciate being reminded of Romans 12:1 and 2; 1 Timothy 2, and 1 Corinthians 11:1-15. The cry is that other churches who don’t practice these things seem to have strong testimonies for God. This seems to be followed by a trend toward fashion, competitive sports, and taking part in politics. Those dissatisfied begin gradually

borrowing worldly fashions which accent the body. We should cover our bodies in such a way that when speaking to someone, they are not distracted by the things we wear.

Youth activities are seen as too tame or boring for some and so they run after sports that are more exciting than church-sponsored activities. Spending time with their families in the evening isn’t very appealing; they want to be on the go. So what happens to that precious time in which they could be acquainting themselves in the study of God’s Word or reading books with good morals? Thus they bypass the essentials of the Christian life and of growing in Christ.

Once politics enter the picture, we become like more like the world in our everyday walk of life. We have difficulty explaining to our new acquaintances that we believe in two kingdoms. We belong to Christ’s kingdom, but that’s very difficult to say once we have gone this far. It becomes quite confusing, and too often, too difficult. So they follow the crowd they have chosen to please.

Do we get the picture of how Liberal Theology begins? It doesn’t begin by studying the Scriptures diligently. It starts when we begin to doubt and disobey the Word of God. Also we drop those unwelcome

traditions that the Bible commands us to do.

A dear brother who has departed this life had a real passion for God's Word. He believed the Bible is THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH. He preached that it must be practiced in order to receive God's reward. He frequently preached on this theme. "One of the most dangerous trends the church faces is that of LIBERAL THEOLOGY, which doesn't begin in the study of the Bible at all; it begins with liberal practice; it doesn't believe in the Virgin Birth, nor does it believe the Bible is wholly inspired by God, but it contains the Word of God, leaving each one to decide which part God really means. This leaves them without hope, because if we don't believe in the Virgin Birth, for example, we have no Savior, and

therefore cannot be saved."

So my plea to our dear ministering brethren is: Be faithful in teaching Bible truths and doctrines of practice and the "whys" and "wherefores" of our brotherhood standards. Our children and youth especially need specifics explained. Even though they are baptized believers, they are yet inexperienced and immature in their growth, even as a small child needs reminding and correcting until he has proved that he/she will obey his parents without being reminded daily. He has learned what is expected of him and that his obedience will bring rewards and respect from his parents. That family principle also applies to life in the body of Christ.

This does not exhaust this subject, but I trust that this will suffice as a reminder to all who desire to walk with God.



Something for You to Read

Marie Yoder, Standardsville, VA

As the Christmas holidays approached, Willie walked up to the man dressed in Santa attire ringing a jingly bell, obviously wishing to attract donors. "Here's something for you to read," Willie said with a

smile. The bell ringer looked startled as he read the title of the tract, "Is Santa Claus Another God?" Then regaining his composure, he said, "Thank you, sir. Have a merry Christmas!"

Willie, single and middle-aged, has found an effective way to share the Gospel. He delights in giving Gospel tracts to neighbors he knows or to strangers in public places. He loves meeting people, never meets a stranger, and has a compassionate spirit. Before going to town, he makes sure his shirt pockets are well-supplied with tracts to hand out.

In his private life, he enjoys reading Bible stories and praying. He does not have a driver's license, has never owned a car, does not make phone calls, nor does he have a cell phone. Sports don't attract him, but he loves listening to joyful Gospel singing. Electronic devices hold little attraction for him.

At church he usually listens intently to the speaker. He has never conducted a devotional, given a topic, or led a song although he has readily selected many. He testified to Jesus being his Shepherd and he being Jesus' lamb, before he was baptized upon his confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

In public, when shopping in a grocery or department store, he makes use of the opportunity to approach an employee stocking shelves and, with a winsome smile, offers him something to read. The

usual response is, "Thank you, sir," and Willie goes his happy way. He uses the same approach toward a policeman on his coffee break or the checkout clerk in the store.

Recently Willie was sitting with a friend in a fast food restaurant when a middle-aged man approached him and said, "I want to thank you for the Gospel tract you gave me several years ago. I read it and became a Christian. May I have another tract today?" Willie's smile broadened as he gladly handed him a tract, rejoicing that God's truth found a home in this man's heart. Willie couldn't readily carry on a conversation with this man, for you guessed it, he is one of God's special people interested in helping others find the way to Heaven.

"Ye shall receive power , after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

[A true account from "Truth for Youth" in Companions, December 4, 2016. Christian Light Publications, P.O. Box 1212, Harrisonburg, VA, 22803-1212. Used by permission. Submitted for publication by Rosa Yoder, Partridge, KS.]



Facing God's Tests

Stephen Miller, Belle Center, OH

Some call it foolishness. Some call it ridiculous. But call it what you may, it still will not change the fact that God in His wisdom saw fit to put a forbidden tree right “smack-dab” in the middle of the Garden of Eden. And not only that, this forbidden tree was also “pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise.”

Then of all things, God told Adam to take care of the garden—“to dress it and to keep it.” And the forbidden tree too? Surely not!

There it was—right in the middle. He couldn't miss it. Almost any direction they looked, there it was. Or while walking from one side of the garden to the other, they couldn't help but going past it. It was a very beautiful tree.

When they awoke in the morning, there it was! They couldn't miss it—or forget it. As the fragrance of those blossoms drifted in the evening breeze, “Do not eat; Do not eat;” kept ringing in their ears.

But how about you and me, my dear friend? Is there something—just one thing—that God is withholding from you? Something that would be very pleasant —“something to be desired.” If only we would have this one thing, we would be so happy! The key to our

fulfillment in life is contained in this one thing—or so we think.

We are reminded of it when we go to bed at night. In fact, we let our whole day be consumed with thoughts of “if only, if only!” “Why can others have it and I can't?” For you it is one thing, for me it is something different. There it stands—right “smack-dab” in the middle of my path—*forbidden!*

Foolishness you say? Ridiculous? But God has a reason!

Our dear brother Paul found himself in a similar situation. He called it “a thorn in the flesh.” So after pleading with God three times to have it removed, the Lord said, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness!” And there is the answer! (or at least part of it) For the best was yet to come: “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” The ultimate! (2 Cor. 12:9)

And so, my dear friend, we have a choice in the difficulties of life. If God is withholding something from us, we can choose to become bitter—or better. The choice is ours. If indeed we would choose the latter, we will find that the grace of God is sufficient. His strength is perfect and the power of Christ will rest upon us! Hallelujah!



marriages

May the homes established by these marriages be little substations of heaven, where God reigns and His blessings flow.

Kauffman-Hershberger

Bro. Michael, son of Gary and Laura Kauffman, Thomastown, GA, and Sis. Janelle, daughter of Jesse and Mary Ellen Hershberger, Staunton, VA, at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship, Stuarts Draft, VA, on Oct. 8, 2016, by Simon Schrock.

Rohrer-Miller

Bro. Kenton, Atwater, MN, son of Ernest and Sharon Rohrer, Conrath, WI, and Sis. Sabrina, daughter of Marvin and Neva Miller, Grove City, MN, at Evangelical Free Church, Paynesville, MN, for Believers Fellowship Mennonite Church, Grove City, MN, on Dec. 10, 2016, by Melvin Beiler.

Yoder-Yoder

Bro. Timothy, son of Joseph and Ruth Yoder, Dundee, OH, and Sis. Roselyn, daughter of Marion and Lizzie Ann Yoder, Big Prairie, OH, at Mennonite Christian Assembly for Grace Haven Fellowship on Nov. 5, 2016, by David Yoder.

Yutzy-Graber

Bro. Wendell, son of Ferman and Lorna Yutzy, Goshen, IN, and Sis. Doris, daughter of Naaman and Virginia Graber, Goshen, IN, at Fair Haven A.M. Church for Woodlawn A.M. Church, on Oct. 29, 2016, by Steve Miller. 

cradle roll

The children which the Lord hath graciously given . . . Genesis 33:5

Bontrager, Vernon and Ada (Miller), Middlebury, IN, fifth child (one deceased), second son, Bradley William, Oct. 26, 2016.

Boylan, Chris and Shannon (Findley), Cedar Hill, TX, sixth child, third son, Caleb Thomas, July 22, 2016.

Burkholder, Philip and Eleanor (Schrock), Rushsylvania, OH, sixth child, fourth son, Carson Wade, Dec. 24, 2016.

Farmwald, Michael and Frieda (Miller), Bloomfield, IN, third child, first son, Avery Norman, July 8, 2016, by adoption.

Graber, Josh and Allison (Beachy), Auburn, KY, second child, first son, Patrick Joel, Dec. 21, 2016.

Gerber, Collin and Becky (Ropp), Gadshill, ON, fourth child, second daughter, Maria Rose, May 17, 2016.

Gerber, John and Tanya (Jantzi), Millbank, ON, fifth child, second son, Felix Daniel, May 16, 2016.

Gingerich, Derek and Deborah (Wagler), Odon, IN, third child and son, Braydon Luke, May 16, 2016.

Glick, Alan and Emily (Stoltzfus), Laurelville, OH, second child, first son, Bryant Alan, Dec. 6, 2016.

Harvey, Josiah and Kate (Wade), Columbus, OH, fourth child, third daughter, Alainna Jewel, Dec. 9, 2016.

Lengacher, Brent and Julianna (Wittmer), Loogootee, IN, fourth child, second daughter, Morgan Brooke, Sept. 20, 2016.

Miller, Christopher and Rachel (Yoder), Oswego, KS, first child and son, Cameron Daniel, Nov. 25, 2016.

Miller, Jared and Jennifer (Yoder), Leon, IA, second child, first son, Easton Patrick, Nov. 5, 2016.

Miller, Matthias and Cynthiann (Schrock), Bloomfield, IN, seventh child, fourth son, Kaden Lane, Nov. 4, 2016.

Miller, Nathan and Marietta (Schrock), Bloomfield, IN, fifth child, third son, Donovan Thomas, Aug. 20, 2016.

Miller, Philip and Edith (Martin), Grandview, TX, fifth child, third son, Douglas Isaaik, July 17, 2016.

Nisly, Matthew and Andrea (Mast), Partridge, KS, third child, first daughter, Cadence Noelle, Dec. 21, 2016.

Otto, Jeremy and Lynette (Gingerich), Crossville, TN, second child, first son, Lincoln Cole, Nov. 22, 2016.

Pichiya, Obed and Johanna (Kirkman), Odon, IN, second child and daughter, Kenia Lorene, Aug. 11, 2016.

Peight, Ben and Joanna (Coblentz), Swanton, MD, eighth child, third son, Benson Wade, Nov. 14, 2016.

Petersheim, Michael and Melissa (Sommers), Salisbury, PA, third child, first daughter, Liliana Brielle, Dec. 12, 2016.

Ropp, Michael and Connie (Bontrager), Kalona, IA, first child and son, Austin Lamar, March 25, 2016.

Schrock, Karl and Darla (Ulrich), Covington, TX, fourth child, third daughter, Samantha Lynn, July 1, 2016.

Stoltzfus, Mervin and Katy (Troyer), Advance, MO, fourth child and daughter, Alexia Kate, Dec. 4, 2016.

Stutzman, Matthew and Mindy (Yoder), Advance, MO, second child, first son, Travis Benjamin, Nov. 21, 2016.

Villalobos, Charles and Loretta (Miller), Itasca, TX, third child and daughter, Sharilynn Serenity Faith, Sept. 14, 2016.

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Wagler, Alan and Joyce (Jantzi), Millbank, ON, first child and son, Tyrel Alan, April 14, 2016.

Wagler, Gerald and Esther (Stoltzfus), Washington, IN, fourth child, second son, Hans Isaiah, Oct. 9, 2016.

Weaver, Andre and Sharon (Miller), Wellston, OH, second child and daughter, Shana Rose, July 27, 2016.

Weaver, Jeremy and Jennifer (Miller), Wellston, OH, fourth child, second daughter, Hanna Faith, July 18, 2016.

Yoder, JoeAllen and Glenda (Bender), Rural Retreat, VA, presently in Kisumu, Kenya, second child, first son, Elliot Layne, July 11, 2016.

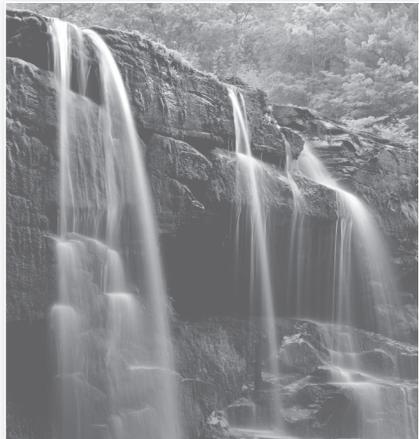
Yoder, Sam and Naomi (Imhoff), Covington, TX, sixth child, second son, Simeon Kenneth, July 30, 2016.

Zook, Tony and Judith (Yoder), Wytheville, VA, presently in Nakuru, Kenya, third child, second son, Kaiden Anthony, Sept. 30, 2016. 

May the grace of God be upon our brothers as they minister faithfully. Let us pray for them.

Bro. Gerald Wagler, 40, (wife Esther Srtoltzfus) of Washington, IN, was ordained as deacon at Mt. Olive Mennonite Church of Montgomery, IN, on June 12, 2016. Preordination messages were given by Mark Webb of Aroda, VA. The charge was given by Dave Wittmer, assisted by Leland Wagler and Homer Zook. Philip Knepp was also in the lot.

Bro. Joash Yoder, 30, (wife Loretta Wengerd) was ordained as minister at Living Waters Mennonite Church, Lexington, IN, December 11, 2016. Preordination messages were given by Gary Raber, Clarkson, KY. The charge was given by Floyd Lengacher, assisted by Josh Yoder and Dean Farmwald. Terry Yoder and Sheldon Lengacher were also in the lot. 



Chupp, Eli M., 87, of Shipshewana, IN, died Dec. 4, 2016 at Parkview Regional Medical Center, Fort Wayne, IN, of complications with blood clots. He was born July 20, 1929, in Arthur, Illinois, son of the late Jacob and Mattie (Herschberger) Chupp.

He was a member of Fair Haven A.M. Church, rural Goshen, IN.

On May 20, 1952, he was married to Anna Weirich at Shipshewana, IN. To this union were born six children: Betty (Mark) Miller, Carrier Mills, IL; Esther (Larry) Yoder, Middlebury, IN; Carolyn (Edwin) Beechy, Millersburg, IN; Loretta (Robert) Otto, Shipshewana, IN; Linda (Wilbur, Jr.) Mast, Mentone, MI, and Eugene (Laura) Chupp, Three Rivers, MI; 29 grandchildren, 62 great grandchildren and three great great grandchildren. Other survivors include three sisters: Edna Schrock and Clara (Edward) Schrock, both of Arthur, IL, and Wilma (Eli) Yoder, Crab Orchard, KY, sister-in-law, Esther Chupp, Bristol, IN, three brothers: Lewis (Mary) Chupp, Edward (Verna) Chupp, and Omer (Lorene) Chupp, all of Arthur, IL.

Preceding him in death were Elizabeth Arkeketa, Roseanna Chupp and brother, Joas Chupp.

The funeral was held on Dec. 7, at Fair Haven Church, with Wilbur Yoder and Dan B. Miller serving. Burial was in the Thomas Cemetery, Goshen.

Kurtz, Marvin Lee, 78, of Plain City, Ohio, died peacefully on Christmas night, Dec. 25, 2016, at his home surrounded by his family. He was born May 14, 1938, to the late Joseph H. and Freda (Troyer) Kurtz.

He was a member of Bethesda Fellowship, rural Plain City.

On April 14, 1964, he was married to Wilma M. Gingerich. She survives. Also surviving are three children: Jay (Doreen) Kurtz, Plain City; Sharon (Dale) Headings, Plain City; and Joe (Dorcas) Kurtz, Laurelville, OH; 13 grandchildren; a brother, Lloyd Kurtz, sisters, Loretta Kurtz, Rachel (Klaas) Friesen; uncle, Enos C. (Nettie) Kurtz, aunts; Ada Beachy and Sarah Frey.

Preceding him in death were a son, Steven and a brother Joseph Henry Kurtz.

The funeral was held Dec. 28, with Ray Stutzman officiating. Burial was in Bethsesda Fellowship Cemetery.

Miller, Clara Viola (Miller), 92, of Kalona, Iowa, died June 7, 2016, from complications after a stroke. She was born in rural Hutchinson, KS, March 2, 1924, daughter of the late William Edward and Emma (Nisly) Miller.

She was a member of Sharon Bethel A.M. Church.

On Feb. 20, 1949, she was married to Levi M. Miller. To this union were

born James (Melody) Miller, Kalona; Phil Miller, Kalona; Nathan (Cheri) Miller, Kalona; and Emma (Phil) Stutzman, Montrose, CO. Also surviving are 17 grandchildren and 29 great grandchildren. Close relatives surviving are: sister-in-law, Clara Miller and 12 brothers and sisters: Bill Miller, Paul Miller, Ellen Morehouse, Fred Miller, Daniel Miller, Eli Miller, Katie Miller, Amos Miller, Ida Trout, Fern Swartz, Rose Bontrager, and Joe Miller.

Preceding her in death was a brother, Ira Miller.

The funeral was held June 10, at Sharon Bethel Church, with Delmar Bontrager serving. Burial was in the church cemetery.

Miller, Emanuel E., 84, of Utica, Ohio, died at his home Oct. 5, 2016. He was born Oct. 17, 1931, in Mount Hope, Ohio, to the late Eli J. C. and Clara (Weaver) Miller.

He was a faithful member of Melita Fellowship Church. He enjoyed farming his whole life. His love for family genealogy was well-known and he especially delighted in hosting at Miller's Essenplatz.

On Nov. 17, 1955, he was married to Clara Mae Coblentz, who survives. To this union were born eight children: Carol Ann (Dan) Hostetler, Utica; Ruth Elaine (Marlin) Miller, both of Utica; Timothy Ray (Sarah) Miller, Sarasota, FL; James Alan (Carolyn) Miller; Daniel Ellis (Carolyn) Miller; David Emanuel (Wanda) Miller, Darryl Eugene (Renee)

Miller; and Michael Andrew Miller, all of Utica; 46 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren. Other survivors include one brother, Eli (Carol) Miller, and two sisters, Susie (Jake) Mullet and Ada (Jacob) Nisley.

He was preceded in death by two brothers, Christian and Aden and one sister, Effie (Eli) Yoder.

The funeral was held on Oct. 9, with Alan Byler officiating. Burial followed in the Melita Cemetery.

Thomas, Susie (Beachy), 84, of Goshen, IN, died at her home Oct. 6, 2016. She had been in declining health for several years. She was born Oct. 13, 1931, in Custer County, Oklahoma, to the late Joel and Malinda (Yoder) Beachy.

She was a member of Woodlawn Amish Mennonite Church, Goshen.

On Oct. 7, 1952, she married Ira Thomas, who survives. Also surviving are four daughters: Sharon (Marvin) Weirich, Middlebury, IN; Linda (Samuel) Miller, Strawberry, AR; Leona (Tim) Beachy, Columbia City, IN; and Lisa Yoder, Middlebury, IN; 17 grandchildren, 10 great grandchildren, two step grandchildren, two step great grandchildren, brother David Beachy of Leon, Iowa.

She was preceded in death by son Marion Thomas, two sisters: Edna Miller and Elizan Yoder, and brother, Melvin Beachy.

The funeral was held Oct. 10, with Steve Miller, Arlen Bontrager, and Glen Miller serving. Burial was in the Thomas

Cemetery, with the committal by Dean Miller.

Yoder, John H., 96, of Plain City, Ohio, died Dec. 14, 2016 at his home surrounded by his loving family. He was born Feb. 5, 1920, at Mark Center, Ohio, son of Sylvanus and Sylvia (Miller) Yoder.

John was a faithful member of Haven Fellowship Church. He was known for his love of farming, horses, sheep, but his greatest devotion was to his Lord and Savior, along with his wife of 69 years, Fannie Mae.

On Feb. 14, 1946, he and Fannie Mae Yoder were married. Survivors are a son: Nate (Janae) Yoder; Grandchildren, Bryce, Sean, Brianna, Ashlynn; siblings: Mary Yoder, Erma Hostetler, Lester (Ada) Yoder, Sarah Mae (Alvin) Troyer, and Edna Faye Miller; sisters-in-law Clarabell Yoder, Mabel Yoder, Erma Yoder, Fannie Yoder, and Wilma Yoder; and brother-in-law, Ray S. (Bonnie) Yoder.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Fannie Mae, in May, 2015; grandson, Lane Yoder; brothers, Alvin, Howard, Mose, Menno "Brownie", Freeman, and Loyd; brothers-in-law: Perry Yoder, Dan Hostetler, Sam Miller, and Leander Miller; sister-in-law, Ella Marie Miller.

The funeral was held on Dec. 18, with Lonnie Beachy, John Dean Hostetler, and Shannon Martin serving. The committal and burial were conducted by Lonnie Beachy in the Haven Cemetery.

Zehr, Mary Ann (Erb), 100, died Nov. 21, 2016. She was born Aug. 6, 1916,

daughter of the late Christian and Nancy (Wagler) Erb.

She was a faithful member of Cedar Grove A.M. Church, Wellesley.

On Jan. 16, 1936, she was married to Aaron Steckly, who predeceased her on Oct. 25, 1977. On Dec. 19, 1981, she was married to John L. Zehr, a deacon.. John predeceased her Dec. 28, 2004. Surviving are a daughter, Beatrice and Peter Petrovic, and two grandsons, Matthew and Timothy; two stepsons: Mahlon (and Frieda) Zehr, New Hamburg; Laverne (and Merrill) Zehr, Millbank; two stepdaughters: Mary Zehr, Crosshill; and Florence (and John) Albrecht, Whitechurch, 12 step grandchildren and 11 step great grandchildren. Other survivors include her sister Amy (and Norman) Zehr, two brothers-in-law, Elmer (and Ethel) Zehr and Jacob (and Alma) Zehr and three sisters-in-law, Laura Jantzi, Mary Gerber, and Esther (and Ohmer) Jantzi. Preceding her in death were brothers and sisters, Annie and Sylvester Martin, Esther and Amos Steckly, Dan W. and Tina Erb, Katy and Chris F. Gerber and brothers-in-law: Peter and Ida Steckly, Mattie and Aaron Kuepfer, Mary F. Gerber, Nancy and Amos Zehr; Sarah and Rudy Jantzi, Elizabeth and Emanuel Gerber, Ezra and Katie Steckly, Katie Steckly, Emma Gerber Steckly, Emma and Alan Wagler, Amos Gerber and Elmer S. Jantzi.

The funeral was held on Nov. 25, with Paul Jantzi and John Gerber serving. Burial was in the church cemetery. 

I've noticed that many churches in our fellowship have a cemetery on the church grounds. I'm not sure of all the reasons for this, but it is at least partly a reflection of the fact that our churches have a disproportionate presence in rural settings. A church house in the country has a better chance for an adjoining cemetery than one in town. Within the last year our little congregation acquired a plot of land on which we hope, some day, to build a church. Our church is more than 13 years old and we haven't had our first funeral yet. Now that we have a piece of land we have the option to have a cemetery on church property. When our church brethren were discussing the pros and cons of starting a new cemetery or using what is currently available in the community, one brother shared an observation I had never thought of before. He commented something to the effect that we communicate something when we don't sequester the graves away somewhere where we don't see them. When they are on the church property we bear silent witness to the fact that death is as real as life, and we aren't fearful. After all, the grave

has an important connection with our eternal hope.

.....

We need to pray for President Donald Trump. I'm not sure how well he understands that. The exhortation to prayer in I Timothy 2 for kings and all who are in authority is preceded by the reminder to pray for all men. That includes us. When we are tempted to feel insecure about the current social and political situation, it's probably just as important to pray for each other that our witness would be clear and our faith would grow and our courage would be constant, as it is to pray for "kings and for all that are in authority..." I'm impressed that what goes on in Christ's kingdom and His church is really important to Him. Investing our prayers there should be a high priority for us.

.....

This past year, Christmas Day fell on Sunday. I'm not prepared to cite exact statistics, because I didn't note them well, but I read somewhere that between 5% and 10% of churches in the USA canceled Sunday services on December 25. The church of my childhood observed a Christmas tradition of holding a Christmas

morning church service regardless what day of the week Christmas occurred. That tradition persists to this day.

The clash between giving first priority to family activities or Lord's Day church services isn't one where we can abstain from casting our vote. We vote with our presence and our absence. This past Christmas was but one example of many throughout the year where we cast our vote. In conversation with a brother from another state, he reported on a weekend camping trip his family enjoyed with friends from church. Since he feels it is important to be in church on Sunday morning, he left camp with his family in time to be in church. The others elected to stay and return sometime after church on Sunday. I commend this brother for making the right call. It isn't important to know whether this event occurred in one of our Beachy churches or not, because it is typical.

Here are some reflective questions that I find helpful. What are we communicating when our family vacations and outings are specifically scheduled to minimize conflicts with our work, but that Sundays are fair game? What are we communicating when we cancel or shorten Sunday services to facilitate other activities?

What are we communicating when church attendance is negotiable, but social events are not? How do you feel about the fact that there are usually fewer people in church for mid-week services than on Sunday morning? Or maybe you didn't notice because you aren't there?

Is it not true that the answer to these questions is that we are expressing our values to our children, to our brothers, and to our Lord?

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Since Brenda and I spent more than 6 years of our adult lives in El Salvador we needed to learn Spanish. I count it a privilege now that our conversational communication can include English, Pennsylvania Dutch or Spanish. Many years ago, in Costa Rica a little girl sat in church listening to Sanford Yoder translate into Spanish the message of an English speaking preacher. She turned to her mother and asked in Pennsylvania Dutch why Sanford was imitating that man, thus betraying her mastery of three languages.

When Brenda and I visited Paraguay in November, Samuel Bontrager spent a good bit of the day showing us around. Most of our conversation was in Pennsylvania Dutch, but we spoke English quite a bit too. While interacting with

the Paraguayan people during the day, he seemed to switch effortlessly between Spanish and Guarani. When talking with one of the local Russian Mennonites he used his Plaut Dietch. In addition to this repertoire of languages some area people are also comfortable conversing in Portuguese and maybe one or two more languages. I am amazed.

My wife and I failed to maintain the Spanish that our older children had learned and to teach it very effectively to the rest. So, these comments are directed as much to me as anybody else. Let's not be too quick to drop a language we know. Discarding a language is effortless. Acquiring one isn't—unless you're a child. However, we need to remember that we usually aren't kind when we speak a language without interpretation in the presence of a person who doesn't understand it – unless of course your name is Ronald or Brenda and you are trying to decide if you should serve ice cream for supper when the children are listening.

•••••

Since the elections in the fall of 2016, nine US states have legalized the use of marijuana for recreational purposes. A few more than half of the states have approved medical marijuana use. The uneasy tug of war

continues between those who believe the law should limit things that are potentially harmful and those who feel as if personal freedoms are more important.

•••••

On the 25th of November, we acquired the title of “Grandparents”. We're enthused. This brings back a host of memories of the six babies that joined our family one-by-one. I am reminded that a person doesn't have to be very old before the Adamic nature finds energetic expression. Babies make connections and associations pretty early in life. Careful parents try to not reinforce unregenerate behavior with pleasant outcomes. Since babies don't do much talking it can be difficult for adults—even parents sometimes—to understand if a baby is trying to communicate a legitimate need or an attitude problem. This should temper the judgments and conclusions of distant observers about how babies and their parents are interacting with each other.

The innocence and charm of infancy pulls together people in a way that is quite disarming and unique.

I'm not sure what all this has to say to people who advocate for the right to elective abortion, but I'm pretty sure it isn't anything favorable.

-RJM 

Comforting Friends or Condemning Foes?

Simon Schrock, Catlett, VA

He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke” (Revelation 10:2,3).

The angel’s right foot on the sea and left foot on the land indicate that his words of judgment deal with all creation. The voice of a roaring lion and seven thunders indicate power and might. Think what it will be like to be found guilty before God, what will happen “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his mighty angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (Rev. 6:16).

For believers, however, Jesus and the mighty angels are good news. Jesus said, “I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8). Christ promises all who are faithful that he will represent

them to the Father in the presence of those mighty angels.

The ones who are welcomed by the blood of the Lamb need not be frightened by the Lord’s return with the mighty angels. How comforting to know that the saints are safe in the arms of Jesus!

O come, angel band, come and
around me stand.

O bear me away on your snowy
wings, to my immortal home.

(Jefferson Hascall, 19th century)

If this angel with a lion’s roar seems scary, take inventory and be sure you are ready for the coming of the Lord. Then the angels will be your comforting friends instead of your condemning foes.

[From page 131 of Revelation Day by Day, by R. Leslie Holmes and Richard A. Bodey, Eds. Published in 2001 by Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group. Used by permission.]



The Testing Tree

Submitted by Floyd Stoltzfus

Joseph, fifteen-year-old Christian young man, got up after stroking the curly wool of his lovely, fat lamb he had named Abel. From the muffled wails coming from the houses of Chief Madonga, Joseph knew that Gambai, the chief's son, had died.

Suddenly, a savage figure on a black horse appeared from among the chief's houses. Madonga, the grief-stricken rider, was striking out against the village, lashing out in every direction with his whip made of rhinoceros hide and tipped with bits of lead.

Joseph hugged his lamb and huddled against his parent's hut. At that moment he saw the whip cutting through the air in his direction. Joseph screamed even though he didn't feel any pain. Puzzled, he looked down at his lamb that was bleating frantically. He saw a red stain seeping out over the white wool. Abel had received the blow.

The young man lost no time in picking up his wounded pet and

taking refuge in the hut with the rest of his family. While Madonga raced on in his macabre ride, the heart-rending screams of the women in the chief's house made the three Christians pray fervently that God would illuminate the people of their tribe. Joseph and his parents were the only Christians in the pagan village of Nungari.

"Now that Gambai has crossed the river, Sarobi, the witch doctor, will find a scapegoat to blame," said Joseph, still fondling his lamb that had stopped bleating by now. "If only our village could accept the truth of Christ, the Lamb of God who can cleanse us of that sinful superstition!"

The Christian family was silent as the harsh voice of the witch doctor cried out to the spirit world.

"Oh spirits who live in the hidden places," cried Sarobi, "show me who it is that is possessed of the evil spirit that has caused the death of Gambai, the son of Madonga."

The grisly charms that hung from his neck and waist rattled as he

walked and struck terror into the hearts of the people of Nungari. They did not know who Sarobi would blame.

Joseph and his parents remained on their knees on the floor of their hut and prayed as the wails of the witch doctor grew closer

Suddenly Sobari stopped at the entrance of the hut. His mouth twisted into an evil smile.

“Come out of there,” Sobrai screamed. “The spirits have showed me that you are the guilty ones!”

Joseph hesitated. Then he hurried out to face the witch doctor, with Abel following at his heels.

“Poor Gambai died because he did not receive proper care,” he told the witch doctor bravely. “If Chief Madonga had allowed us to take him to the Christians, the missionaries would have saved his life.”

As if by magic, a crowd of villages gathered to listen to Joseph’s conversation with the witch doctor. A triumphant and covetous look disfigured Sarobi’s diabolical face.

“The spirits have showed me that this obnoxious Christian has caused the death of the chief’s son. He has an evil spirit. Capture him! Take him to the Testing Tree.”

Paying no attention to the pleas of his parents, the savage men of the Nungari tribe seized Joseph and

dragged him to a macabre-looking tree in the center of the village. Sorabi took a fiber rope and tied Abel, the lamb to a stake near the tree. By that time, Chief Madonga had finished his violent circuit, and stopped his black horse beside the Testing Tree.

“Are you telling me that you have found the one who is responsible for my son’s death, Sarobi?” the Chief asked the witch doctor.

The look of satisfaction from the witch doctor was all the chief needed to start lashing Joseph’s back with his rhinoceros hide whip, tearing his flesh until the blood started flowing.

“You will have to climb up to the highest branch of the Testing Tree, according to the custom of the Nungari people!” The chief spat out his words. “Then you will need to jump. You will be innocent only if you are not hurt. We will see if your God can protect you!”

Joseph stood trembling beside the Testing Tree. His father could stand it no longer. “Chief Madonga,” his father cried, “let me climb up and jump in Joseph’s place. It is not fair for him to die so young.”

“He destroyed Gambai because of the evil spirit that possesses him!” insisted Sarobi, “Therefore as the chief has said, the Christian boy will have to jump from the Testing Tree

to prove his innocence. But I already know that he is guilty because Sarobi, the witch doctor, is never mistaken.”

Joseph looked sorrowfully at his parents. At first, his limbs refused to move, but as he slowly started up the tree, he was able to climb faster and faster up the rough trunk of the Testing Tree. Halfway up, he stopped to talk to the people.

In a loud clear voice, he said, “I have often spoken to you, oh, Nungaris, about Jesus, the Lamb of God, who took our sins on the cross of Calvary. May He forgive you for this terrible sin you are committing. If I die, I will go to be with Jesus. But if he still has work for me to do, He will save me.”

Abel, Joseph’s lamb that was still lashed to the stake where Sarobi had tied him, bleated frantically and tugged as hard as he could to free himself when he heard the boy’s voice.

“Climb on up, murderer of my son!” yelled Chief Madonga. “Climb up to the highest branch and jump. Otherwise, my Nungari people will shoot more than 100 arrows through you.”

The men of the tribe were delighted to watch the trial of the young Christian. The warriors drew back their arrows, ready to shoot. Joseph’s mother sobbed uncontrollably at the

foot of the Testing Tree.

Silently and skillfully, the brave young man climbed up to the branch from which he had seen others of his people jump to their ill-fated deaths, at the witch doctor’s insistence. Joseph stood still for a little, but straight and confident. “My Savior, the Lamb of God, suffered in my place,” Joseph’s voice rang clear, like a trumpet. “I am ready to give my life for Him if that is necessary.”

At that, Sarobi yelled, and Joseph was forced to jump. At that moment, Joseph’s lamb pulled out the stake that held him and ran toward his master’s voice. With a dull thud, Joseph’s body struck the bundle of flesh and wool. Shocked, the heathen villagers sighed deeply as they watched the young Christian stand up apparently unharmed beside his lamb’s dead body.

“A miracle!” shouted an elderly Nungari. “The Christian is innocent.” Joseph’s parents ran to their son and hugged him as he stood upright although he was still trembling.

“Yes, my people,” the young African finally said, “My lamb died, just like the Lamb of God gave His life for our sins. Oh, how I loved my lamb!” Joseph buried his face in Abel’s soft wool.

Chief Madonga got off his horse and walked over with long strides.

He looked bewildered. “Let me see, I am sure that you have more than one broken bone!” shouted the chief.

“No, Chief Nadonga,” said Joseph calmly, “My body is perfectly well. The death of your oldest son grieves me, but Mapula, your ten-year-old, is still with you. Bring him up in the true ways of God. If you trust in Jesus, the Son of God, your younger son will bring great joy to your heart.”

“You may be right,” said the bewildered chief. “The Christians’ God has showed Himself powerful in your behalf today.”

“Yes,” answered Joseph, “I want you and the Nungai people to place your faith in Christ. He died on the Testing Tree of His own country.”

“Young man,” said Chief Madonga, “you speak to me in a dark language. But I am willing to call the missionary. I and my people are willing to learn about Jesus, the one you say is the

Lamb of God.”

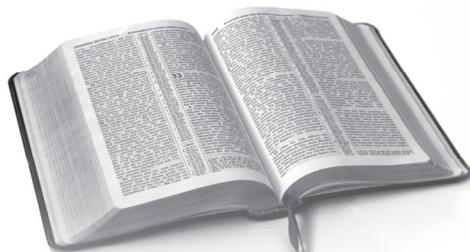
Suddenly the Chief’s demeanor changed and furiously yelled, “One moment! Where is that lying witch doctor? He must pay for having deceived us about this young Christian!”

But Sarobi, seeing that his authority was destroyed had disappeared into the jungle. The Nungari tribe never saw him again.

Joseph took Abel’s body in his arms and started for home with his parents. The villagers respectfully made way for them. “My people,” Joseph said as he passed through the crowd, “The lamb died so that we, the Nungari people, could live.”

And everyone nodded and said, “That is what the Testing Tree showed us.”

(This story was published in The Torch of Truth adapted from Youth for Today. Used by permission.) 



***The value of the Bible is not simply
in knowing it, but in obeying it.***

Friendship

Mary June Glick, Seneca, SC

Friendship is an essential element in a person's life. I hesitate to say that friends are more important to women than they are to men. I am becoming more aware of the need in a man's life for friendship. One of the most poignant examples of friendship in the Bible is expressed by two men, David and Jonathan. The story is recorded in 1 Samuel 21. In the Book of Ruth is a beautiful story of a deep friendship between two women, a mother and daughter-in-law. Friendship between two people can happen in the most unusual and unlikely circumstances.

There is, however, a difference in men and women's friendships. Men tend to do things together such as playing ball, working, or fishing. Sharing includes bouncing ideas off each other, discussing spiritual values, ethical principles, politics and their jobs. These friendships are necessary

to a man because it is a form of sharing from their hearts and binds them together as they discover like personal values with another man.

Women share what is in their hearts as well. However our heart needs are for nurture, affection, an understanding of who we really are, and what is important to us. We desire intimacy. There are always exceptions to this male and female identity but this is the norm, and the reason we so often misunderstand each other. Our husbands should be our best friends. Yet a woman also needs another woman with whom she can share those inner longings and insecurities. Perhaps we can understand our husbands better as we realize the difference in our friendship needs.

This article will relate specifically to a woman's friendship with another woman. Perhaps in this world of homosexuality we become frightened by friendship with the same sex. Just

a word of caution, any friendship should never become exclusive of others or become dependent on one person.

Intimacy is risky. You always risk getting hurt. Who wants to be hurt? Who wants to be lonely? So we take the risk and we become a friend to someone. Friendship involves sharing. It also includes honesty, transparency and being vulnerable. Who really needs a friend who always has everything together, someone who lives in a picture perfect world. Why would we share our brokenness with someone who has never been broken? I have been amazed how often as I share some hurt in my life, the other person opens up with a similar hurt in her own life. This immediately causes a camaraderie between us.

A common saying is, A friend is someone with whom you can be yourself is a common gem. Even this has its limitations. No one needs to know all about you, your husband, or your family. Be cautious of what you share, even as a prayer concern. Avoid gossip. If your friend talks about other people to you, it is possible she may be talking about you to others.

Kindness is a key to friendship. You show kindness by your words,

your facial expressions, and by a touch of love. Kindness is love in action. It is being available when a friend is going through a difficult experience. It is a listening ear when she wants to talk. It is a hand on the shoulder, a spoken prayer.

What if your friend has hurt you, do you confront her? Do not take offense easily, but when necessary confront in love. Admit you were hurt but acknowledge you may have been in the wrong, too. Love is forgiveness, we forgive and move on.

We need friends, however be careful of having just one “best friend.” Do not become exclusive of others. Especially in a church setting, reach out to those who may not make friends easily. There are lonely people in our churches who need someone to talk to them. Older people enjoy the friendship of those who are younger and vice versa. Reach out to the “unlovely person” in your congregation; she may not be as unlovely as you thought. Share your friends with others. Broaden your horizons.

Remember, only Jesus can satisfy your deepest inner desires. He is a friend who will walk closer to you than any friend on this earth. Find your fulfillment in Him. 

It Was Sea Snakes!

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

Greg and Sally were delayed—waiting to board a ship with their three active sons.

Waiting is the name of the game in many foreign countries. Greg took Sally and his sons to a quiet beach for a swim, a beautiful spot with azure water. As a dutiful dad he got in first to make sure there was no deadly undercurrent or steep drop off. The beach was deserted and quiet. He wondered about a nearby sign written in Farsi.

The five of them had just started swimming when Sally screamed. “Snakes, they are all around us.” Greg says he had not yet learned the worthwhile lesson of listening to his wife.

He confidently declared, “This is salt water, they can’t be snakes.” He insisted his family stay in the water. For 45 minutes the eel like creatures swirled around their legs. “They are just having fun with us,” Greg assured his family.

“Is there such a thing as a sea snake?” Sally asked a crew member

when they finally boarded their ship. “Indeed!” she said. “They are very, very dangerous.” Greg remained unconvinced.

Years later. Greg was paging through an old issue of National Geographic. The featured article was sea snakes. Gregg’s heartbeat increased and his eyes widened as he read that indeed sea snakes are one of the most poisonous creatures on earth. If bitten only once, a person is paralyzed within ten minutes and dead within twenty. Off the Gold Coast of Australia and the southern coast of Iran are the only two places they can be found.

Greg fell to his knees, crying in repentance and worshiping the Lord Whom he certainly knew had protected his family from the sea snakes years ago.

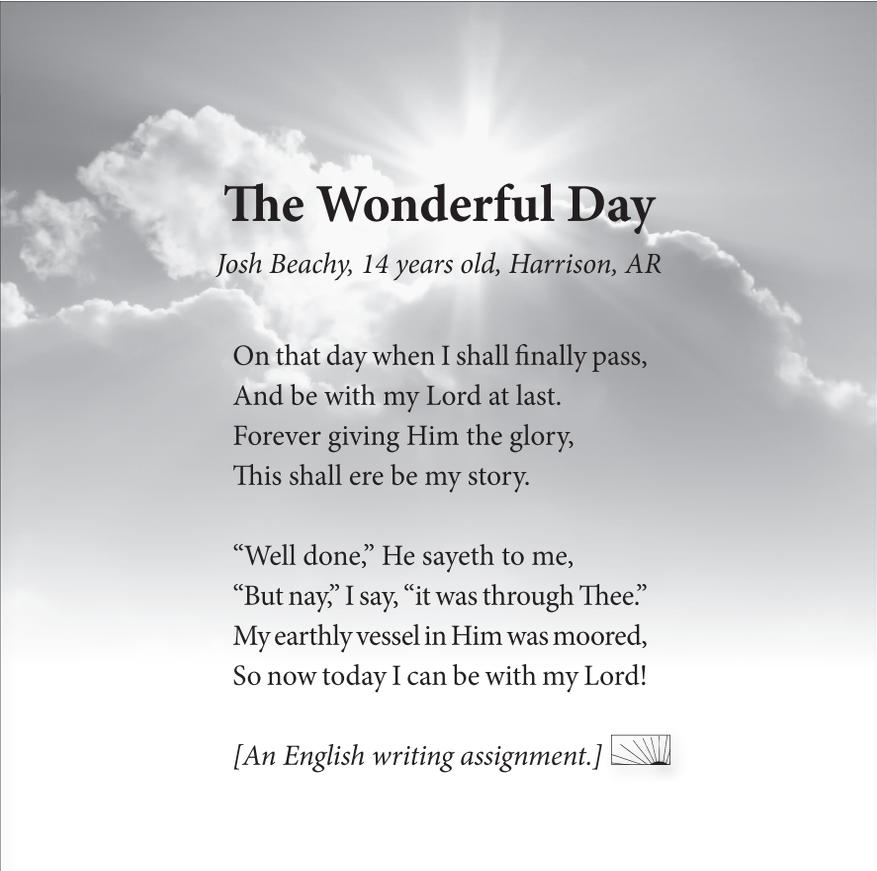
Looking back to that day he knew God was there. As a rerun of Daniel in the lion’s den, God simply told those snakes: “No bites.”

Though many years have passed Greg’s son, David, knows he will

always remember that day. If his wife is afraid to take their children swimming in the sea, he will retort, “Don’t be silly, my dad took my brother and me swimming in the sea off the coast of Iran in water infested with deadly poisonous sea snakes and nothing happened to us.”

Greg Livingstone worked in many different countries. He and his wife, Sally, and three sons had all kinds of difficult, wild, and wonderful experiences.

Resource: You’ve Got Libya , 2014, Greg Livingstone. 



The Wonderful Day

Josh Beachy, 14 years old, Harrison, AR

On that day when I shall finally pass,
And be with my Lord at last.
Forever giving Him the glory,
This shall ere be my story.

“Well done,” He sayeth to me,
“But nay,” I say, “it was through Thee.”
My earthly vessel in Him was moored,
So now today I can be with my Lord!

[An English writing assignment.] 

Fantasy Stories Re-Examined

Wolfgang Miggiani, Millersburg, Ohio

It was with great interest that I read Sheri Yutzky's article in the December *Thinking Generation*, "Why Should Mennonites Read Fantasy Stories?" In brief, the article could be summarized as the following:

Fantasies stimulate our Imagination.

Imagination shapes and fuels our Faith.

Without Faith we will not be able to enter God's kingdom.

Therefore, the implication is that if we do not encourage fantasies and fantasy literature/media, we may be missing out, possibly jeopardizing our eternal salvation by stifling our Faith.

This is especially true, since we are a stoic and strong people who cling to the rational (things of the head), and are tempted to push away things of the imagination (things of the heart).

There are many good points that Sheri brought up, and a number of things in which we all should agree:

First, like Martha, that the cares and duties of the world can distract us from what is important—sitting at

the Lord's feet, "to hear His word." (Lk 10:38-42) It is especially noteworthy, however, that the early Christians and our Anabaptist forefathers did not have need of fantasy literature and media to shape and fuel their Faith.

Next, that imagination can be used in many wonderful ways, including the shaping and fueling of Faith. Imagination is truly an essential element of Faith. If "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1), then it stands to reason that we must be able to imagine what we cannot see.) At the same time, Imagination is also an essential element of Doubt.

One whole genre of fantasy literature and media is based on using Imagination to foster doubt in a sovereign and omnipotent God: The Horror genre ("Nightmare on Elm Street," "The Shining," etc.) are fantasies that imagine a realm of the real world in which God has no authority or sovereignty—where evil triumphs and reigns with impunity.

Conspiracy fantasies use a seed of truth in order to deceive the audience into a false “image” of God—one in which there is no holiness (*The Da Vinci Code*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, etc.). In days gone by, these would have been called blasphemy. Is it too judgmental to call it just that today?

Finally, it seems to me, that the very important “message behind the message” is that it is too easy for our Faith to feel like it is running on empty—that there needs to be something more that is needed to “fuel” the fire. Is it looking to the wonders and mindscapes of fantasy novels and then naturally, the next logical step, the CGI (computer generated imagery) of fantasy media/movies?

Jesus said, “I am the living bread . . .” (Jn 6:41) He is the Gospel, the True doctrine. If legalism and ritual is a “little leaven” that corrupts/leavens the whole batch of dough (Gal 5:9), then can’t also the other extreme corrupt? The opposite of legalism is antinomianism—unbridled liberty. To partake in the perfect Bread, there must be no leaven from any source.

Just as legalism can squelch the fires of one’s faith (rendering a Christian’s shield useless), so too can an undiscerning mind detach the Belt of Truth (Eph 6:16,14), rendering a

Christian’s armor vulnerable to attack from the Devil.

Eight More Things to Consider

Consider the following additional eight ways Christians can open themselves to attack in reading fantasy books and watching fantasy movies:

Many fantasy stories fuel and shape a factually INCORRECT faith. The modern film “Noah” portrayed a Noah who was an environmental anti-human Social Justice Warrior who was distant from God, needing a mind altering drink to connect with Him. (Even the director said *Noah* is “the least biblical film ever made.”) In *Exodus*, God and Moses are deranged and Pharaoh is reasonable. Miracles are simply well timed natural occurrences. The actor who played Moses called his own character “schizophrenic” and “barbaric.” Is this the Biblical view that we hope to convey?

Many fantasy books and movies undermine the uniqueness of man, blurring the image of man in his relationship to God. A great number of works in the genre of Science Fiction fantasy imagine a world in which aliens exist. If there are other peoples, wouldn’t they also need a savior, their own Jesus? Yet, Jesus (God’s ONLY begotten son), came down from heaven only ONCE,

as a final living sacrifice (Hebrews 9:23-28). When we fantasize about such science fiction, we dream of a universe in which man, and God's plan for him, is insignificant—in direct contradiction to scripture.

Many fantasy stories promote evolution. Referring again to *The Lord of the Rings*: There are überhuman races (elves) and subhuman races (hobbits), as well as near beast humanoids ready for the slaughter (orcs, trolls). Isn't this a perfect depiction of evolution—multiple species in an epic struggle of dominance and survival? Additionally, the anthropomorphism (where animals take on human character) of a vast array of characters depicted in the *Narnia* series (including Reepicheep, the warrior mouse, and Mr. Beaver the faithful guide), like evolution, cheapens the uniqueness of man. Furthermore, the “good” Narnian centaurs (unlike the troublemaking Greek originals), which are half man and half horse, add to the moral confusion, creating a muddle of Greek mythology and Christian allegory. So if some of the heroes speak, act, dress, and think as a human, then in what way, aside from appearances, are they not human? If these animals are essentially human, then doesn't it stand to reason that

some (many) of the baser humans are essentially animals?

Many fantasy stories describe good as evil and evil as good. The Bible says we need to avoid this mindset at all costs (Isaiah 5:20). In the Harry Potter series, it is easy to see that the witches and warlocks are the “good guys.” Dumbledore, the kindly head warlock is homosexual. A number of fantasy books have “Christian” based allegories, like *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Yet, for example, despite all the good intentions, one of the main heroes, Gandalf (who represents Jesus), assumes an unBiblical role of wizard and sorcerer. This casually disregards serious scriptural prohibitions against the occult (Lev 19:31, Acts 19:19, Rev 22:15, etc.).

Many fantasy stories inspire worldly self-righteousness and violence. Because of this skewed sense of good and bad, right and wrong, and because the author has the literary license to create a lop-sided caricature of the antagonist, the reader/viewer is often drawn into a worldly view of vengeance and “might makes right.” Almost all have some form of violence, where works, not faith in God, is paramount. Many are about endless wars—think the *Star Wars* and the *Star Trek* series, or Tolkien's continual Middle-Earth

carnal wars and battles. I'm at a loss to think of a major modern fantasy novel or movie that depicts **overt**, God—honoring *personal* repentance, while subjugating self-righteous vengeance. (Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (Rom 12:19)).

Fantasy stories, by definition are other-worldly, but can dull and adulterate true holiness. I gave a talk in church a couple of years ago, warning of this concept. To illustrate, I showed a short clip of the scene in *Frozen*, in which the evil/good sorceress, Elsa creates her own ice castle. Except it looks like a cathedral, and she creates it in about 3 minutes. Using astounding visual effects, and moving music with catchy lyrics, Elsa builds a temple to herself in about 3 *minutes*. Comments from the very young included, “That’s my favorite song!” Contrast this with the Biblical story of how Jesus would *symbolically* rebuild the temple in 3 *days*. I posed this question: in the eyes of a child, who wins out for attention and time—Jesus or Elsa? We need to seriously consider that what we “imagine” does not become a “graven image” in our minds.

Fantasy stories can add to a sensory tsunami. An *overactive* imagination can be as bad as being *unimaginative*. Jesus stated, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my

blood remains in me, and I in them.” (Jn 6:56). Because of this, “... many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” In their minds, Jesus called them to cannibalism, when in reality, He called them to reject the idolatry of their sacrificial rituals, and to accept Him into their hearts. It was a message simple fishermen could understand, but overeducated theologians and priests found difficult. This vision of human sacrifice and consumption gave the early Christians a false reputation as a cult involved in human sacrifice. The ancient pagans believed in the occult power and life found in blood. This belief, whereby physically drinking blood, in an attempt to gain or preserve immortality, rears its ugly head even today in the form of Vampire romance books and movies. If you combine this with modern film making techniques, fantasy becomes reality . . . at least an alternate reality.

Fantasy stories often offer ready and willing participants an escape from reality. “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad...” (Ps 32:11) As Christians, we are called to a daily walk with our super-natural God. While we do this with a glad heart, we are often led through periods of adversity. By leaning on Him and His vision for us, we draw closer to him. Fantasy readers and watchers are passive

outside observers to fantastical, often super-natural creations, of someone else's imagination. They are simply going along for the ride. God, if mentioned at all, is abstract and remote ("The Force" (*Star Wars*), "Alone" (*Lord of the Rings*), no God mentioned (*Star Trek*)), and values few if any personal commitments. So it is easy to see which path is wide and which is narrow. Our super-natural God inspires action, vision and commitment. Super-natural fantasies inspire passivity, anonymity, and a disappointment with reality. Sad is the life that feels empty without fantasy.

The Missing Ingredient

Going back to the "message behind the message:" Why does it sometimes feel like our Faith is running, if not on empty, then on "low"? What is the missing "fuel" needed to feed the fire? I believe that if our vision of how we plan to build His kingdom is weak, our fuel will be weak—like having water or "old gas" in our tanks and fuel lines. How do we get things running again?

It could be that we need to drain out all the old fuel through repentance, and allow God to make us ready for His good work. (2 Tim 2:21) I still marvel at the energy of our youth groups, eager to serve the Lord. Speaking for myself (and for my

generation, if we're truly honest), we have been too disengaged with the next generation:

Do we *lead* the youth in discussing works of fiction, in the form of book clubs or topical studies, to better help them have a ready answer when they encounter the world head-on. (Being in the world, but not of the world, does not mean we have to be ignorant of the world).

Do we teach them how to evangelize? (Do we know how to evangelize?) Consider leading a course—see Ray Comfort's series: www.livingwaters.com. I remember one of our youth groups in Kansas, being led by the Spirit, went out to evangelize at the mall. All found it exhilarating, but the experience was not repeated for lack of leadership.

How much are we a part of their lives after 16 years old? Discipleship does not end on the doorstep of the Youth Group. Stay engaged: play, pray, laugh and learn together.

If you (older generation) don't recognize many of the works I mentioned in this article, ask your youth if they do recognize them. If they know, then further engagement and interaction may be needed. Your youth's world view is being formed by the source of that media.

Youth: it is your job to seek leadership from the older generation.

Perhaps they don't seem like they want to be involved. More likely, they just need an invitation.

It could also be that we need to change fuels. Paul says, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (2 Tim 2:19-21) If our fuel stifles the Spirit—change it! If our fuel dishonors the prophets (our Godly heritage)—change it! If our fuel follows the latest unproven whims, fancies and theories of the world—change it!

Focus on tried and true (proven) works of fantasy and fiction: Start with Pilgrim's Progress.

If there is a strong desire to "venture into the unknown," please only consider doing so with a "hoary head" (Ps 16:31) or two for guidance.

We don't need the "full experience" to discuss it. If a story or movie is obviously unbiblical, rough story lines are not enough to seed great discussions, and provide ready answers. (1 Peter 3:15) In other words, you don't need to roll around in the sewer to know it stinks.

There is no doubt that if we hunger and thirst after (God's) vision of righteousness, our tanks will be filled, and we will be blessed (Mat 5:6).

Conclusions

So should we avoid fantasy stories at every cost? NO! Sheri was right to

point out that Christians can enjoy fantasy stories if used with wisdom and discernment. In this regard, we should all be *philosophers*: From the Greek, philo = "love of"; and sophie = "wisdom." We are lovers of wisdom. Likewise, to be *sophisticated*, using a plain, root word definition is: "to be molded by wisdom."

Why then is one common definition of "sophisticated" negative and pejorative: "corrupted, deluded by sophistry"? It is because if we do not seek **Godly** wisdom, with focused intent and discernment, we corrupt ourselves, and are merely deluded into arrogantly thinking we are wise.

Let us seek to be the "*Faithful Generation*"—not afraid of thinking, not ashamed of reason, but also not afraid or ashamed of putting thinking and reason in their rightful place.

First and foremost, let us faithfully seek the Good Book, and the True Author of all.

"Be warned, my son, ... Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body." (Ecclesiastes 12:12)

The writings in Thinking Generation are original compositions that seek to be of benefit to Anabaptist young people serving God in the 21st century. Submit your comments to gideoniyutzy@gmail.com.



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A hypocrite is not himself on Sunday.

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No man's character is better than his word.

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You can't make the rain fall, but you can wash your windows.

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Have you felt a nudge from God lately?

• • • • •

Jesus can remodel your house into a home.

• • • • •

Carry your honors and rewards humbly.

• • • • •

God is not satisfied with those who are satisfied with themselves.

• • • • •

Jesus can change the foulest sinner into the finest saint.

• • • • •

Kindness is like snow—it beautifies everything it covers.

• • • • •

Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored,
than that on which it is poured.

• • • • •

If kindness is contagious, as some say, let's start an epidemic.

• • • • •

It takes careful honesty to know whether one is tired or just lazy.

• • • • •

Life is like a bank; you get out of it what you put in—with interest.