



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

NOVEMBER 2023

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Calvary Messenger

November 2023

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.

Calvary Publications, Inc., is a non-profit organization, incorporated in the State of Ohio, for the purpose of sponsoring, publishing, and distributing Christian literature. The board is elected, one member annually, by the ministers of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches, at their annual spring meeting.

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Material for *Calvary Messenger*, marriages, births, ordinations, obituaries, and general articles—send to the *Editor*. Other material—mail to their respective *Editors*.

Subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, etc.—mail to **Circulation Manager**.

When you move, please notify the Circulation Manager one month in advance, giving your old and new address in full, so that your mailing label can be properly corrected and your credit be kept in order.

This periodical is digitally available at calvarymessenger.org.

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Calvary Messenger (USPS 767-160) is published monthly by Calvary Publications. Subscription rates are: 1 year (U.S.) \$13.50, 3 years (U.S.) \$39.00. For congregations using the every-home-plan, \$12.00 per year to individual addresses. With a renewal at \$13.50 for 1 year, you may use a 1-year gift subscription free. Second class postage at Sugar creek, Ohio. Postmaster: Send address changes to Calvary Publications, Inc., 6681 Lake Rd, Hicksville, OH 43526.

In Everything Give Thanks

For all that God in mercy sends—
For health and children, home and friends;
For comfort in the time of need,
For every kindly word and deed,
For happy talks and holy thoughts;
For guidance in our daily walk—
In everything give thanks!

For beauty in this world of ours,
For verdant grass and lovely flowers,
For song of birds, for hum of bees,
For the refreshing summer breeze,
For hill and plain, for streams and wood,
For the great ocean's mighty flood—
In everything give thanks!

For the sweet sleep which comes with night,
For the returning morning's light,
For the bright sun that shines on high,
For the stars glittering in the sky—
For these and everything we see,
O Lord, our hearts we lift to Thee;
In everything give thanks!

Author Unknown 

Oh, I Like That Song!

“Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful” (Psalm 33:1 NKJV).

It was Sunday afternoon, and it was our turn to sing at the local nursing home. Our original group had already been diminished to eight adults and one pre-toddler. As we approached the entrance, we saw two notices on the doorway. One said, “Face masks Required.” The other said, “We have Covid in the building.” Ugh! After some discussion among us, one couple, with a variety of health issues, decided against taking the risk with Covid. Another couple, who previously had found it difficult to sing with a face mask, graciously decided to give it a try. We entered the meeting room and found several dozen people waiting expectantly. Their faces lit up and their eyes were immediately drawn to the bright-eyed, blue-eyed youngster being held by his daddy.

When we began our singing with a well-known gospel song, I saw her. This happy, elderly lady energetically began singing with us. At the end of the song she said something like, “Oh, I like that song!” During our second song, “I’ll Fly Away,” she again heartily joined in and became quite animated.

And this continued for all of our songs! She obviously knew most of these songs and commented that she hadn’t heard these songs for a long time! Her cheery participation, despite having quite a few teeth missing, lifted our spirits despite trying to sing through our masks. Various other people sang with us as well.

After several songs, the bright-eyed youngster became teary-eyed and began to cry. Our responsive audience appreciated that as well, commenting that he is also helping us sing. We finished our time with this group of shut-ins with prayer and a round of handshakes and blessings. Almost all of our audience thanked us for coming. It’s debatable which group’s spirits were lifted more, theirs or ours! We were glad that we didn’t turn around at the door when we were met with the face mask and Covid notices.

So, what makes some people gracious and happy in their later years and others scowlers and grumpy? Had this grateful and cheery group lived a stress-free life? Were their younger years filled with everything they needed with a large supporting family? We don’t know, but that is very unlikely. What makes such a difference? Let’s look at several possibilities.

They sang the songs. I don’t know if this particular lady was the pianist at the

church where she attended (we have met several in the past who were), but she had sung the songs! I suspect that she was an energetic participant in her younger years because she knew these songs by memory. And it is hard to believe that she doesn't personally know Whom these songs are written about.

Paul gives us some instructions on how to exercise a life of gratitude. *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Ephesians 5:18-20). If you think you can't even carry a tune in a bucket, sing anyway and you will make a melody in your heart. You can read the psalms and the songs we sing out loud to yourself in private. The key is *“giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* God will be glorified and Jesus will notice!

They were grateful for the blessings that came their way. Jesus healed a lot of people during His three years of ministry. There were many who were grateful for the healing they received. But some of them forgot Who healed them. The Gospel of Luke records the healing of the ten lepers. *“And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men*

that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices, and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’” (Luke 17:11-13). So Jesus turned to them and told them to go to the priest and have him check them for leprosy. During their act of faith, they were healed. *“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and **with a loud voice glorified God**, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger’”* (Luke 17:15-18). Out of these ten men who were quarantined because of their leprosy, only one returned to worship and thank his Healer! According to Jesus calling him *“stranger,”* it appears that the other nine were sons of Abraham or Jews.

Jesus seemed disappointed that none of the sons of Abraham or people of God had returned to give glory to God. Even today, while the people of God or *“little Christs”* have all the reasons in the world to be grateful people, there is a disappointing proportion of Christians who are ungrateful or at least fail to express their gratefulness for the good things that come their way and in that way give glory to God. It is beautiful when we do.

*“Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous! For praise **from the upright** is beautiful”* (Psalm 33:1 NKJV).

There are many earthly things to be grateful about. Maybe a good response

to the many complaints we hear about what is wrong in our world and this country (and there are those things) would be to remind people that we're not living in Ukraine in the middle of a war. When people complain about taxes, we can express gratitude that we have many nice roads, and road construction, while many people in many countries are still driving on unsafe roads and bridges if they can call them roads and bridges. Despite the seemingly malfunctioning government, we can express our gratitude for the relative safety and protection we enjoy. (I don't think this is the same as the Pharisee who was thankful that he wasn't like the publican he encountered.) We are the recipients of unnumbered physical and

financial blessings that many people in the world find it worth crossing our borders illegally to experience. If still in doubt, take a trip! A trip to Haiti is not advisable at this point, but you could volunteer to work in Ukraine for several weeks with the ongoing relief work. We are richly blessed, and we do not deserve what we enjoy any more than other people in this world!

"Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107:8).

"Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful" (Psalm 147:1 NKJV).

Thank you, God!

-AY 

I Saw a Beautiful Thing



Crummy and Serene

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

We sat next to a large window in a foyer swarming with people busily catching up with each other. She wore black, accenting her large dark eyes which glistened with tears unshed. Her toddler, rosy-cheeked from a recent nap, perched on her lap, happily enjoying a snack. The crumbs fell from his hands onto her dress, stark against the black. Satiated, he soon wandered off, toddling through the crowd of adults. Her eyes followed him, aware, but restful in her mothering, and our conversation continued unbroken. The crumbs lay on her lap as we talked of what lay on her heart.

I admired this woman's serenity. Blessed is the woman who attends to the state of her heart and not only her appearance.

That, my friends, is a lovely thing. 

Announcement

Faithful Men's Seminar

November 11, 2023

Passionate Purity | Preserving Sexual Health

Sexual health describes a view of sexuality that matches what God intended from the beginning of humanity. Sexuality that is healthy is operating as God designed. Unhealthy is anything else. To preserve sexual health means to preserve God's intended purpose and use of sexuality. But how can we preserve something if we don't understand what it is? In this seminar, faithful men will gain a renewed understanding of the big picture of what sexuality was intended to be. They will be reminded of how sexuality became sick long ago and ways available to restore it today. For those men who are fathers, they can learn how to prepare the next generation of Jesus followers to thrive in a sexually-captivated world.

The Maker's Design for Sexuality – David Martin, Plain City, OH

Why Is Porn A Problem? – Tom Johnson, Plain City, OH

Fighting Porn – Ben Waldner, Plain City, OH

Developing A Next-Gen Mentality for Sexuality –

Dave Snyder, Plain City, OH

Location: Deeper Life Ministries, 5123 Converse Huff RD, Plain City, OH

For more information or to register, please contact Deeper Life Ministries:

(614) 873-1199 or info@dmlmohio.org.

thanks

Give thanks for each new morning with its light,
For rest and shelter of the night.
For health and food,
For love and friends,
For everything Thy goodness sends.

– RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Social Media and the Power of Words

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

In this year, I have attended several Conservative Mennonite lay conferences and ministers' meetings. One of these featured a speaker, whom I had not heard of previously. His name is John Perfect, from VA, who spoke on the topic I have now used as the title to this article. The "bullet" one-liners are quotes by him, with the following sentences being some of my commentary.

- Social media (SM) creates an illusion of friendship without a real relationship.

The closest and most endearing of all relationships was established at the creation and recognized in all of time, known and acknowledged as marriage between one man and one woman. All of society is based primarily on the institution of the home. This is the base where communication is learned and practiced, influencing all other talking for good or ill.

- The primary principle of conversation is the personal

communication between two people where both are free to express themselves.

Modern social media allowed in the home in childhood and youth has bombarded and tried to offset that ideal and has succeeded among us all too often. The one does not and may not dominate the conversation, or else it is not free.

- We are designed to be influenced by the words and actions of others.

We know about peer pressure for every age group, which can also work for the good and betterment of society. By the use of SM, words and ideas are spoken, at times, that one would not use were it published as an article with one's name attached to it.

- We outsource our sanity to other people, being influenced by SM.

By it, people can be largely unrecognized, as one standing in a crowd and making himself heard without due accountability. The spirit of the age is the general source, being both the origin of its expression in part, with the other part becoming

a source for its expression to others. By that, the spirit of the age receives a measure of respect from those given to it. Thus, SM expands. Unfortunately, from the midst of its adherents, people take targeted crack shots at the opinions of certain other people. It ends up as a free-for-all, without needing to establish any biblical truth. One's sanity is presumed by the free-swinging allowance of SM.

- When one goes off the approved path, no one needs to call him to account for his opinions.

The free-swinging nature of communication, with no one present, becomes a ping-pong of personal opinions, with some slap-downs to gain a point over any would-be opponents. The wits of adherents are guided more by being clever than by being wise.

- We drift in the direction of our greatest weaknesses. SM makes it easier than ever to find people who share those weaknesses.

- With SM, your expression projects you out there with no one responsible to call you down.

- By comparison, I [Brother John] am trusting God to guide my preparation, and you all may test my words as I speak on my prepared topic, having utilized prayer and study.

His message was based on texts from God's Word and was officially sanctioned by the program committee, by the moderator of this meeting, and by the other speakers present that day who spoke from that same platform. We all could test it with any others in attendance. The presence of us all was a primary way in which the Gospel of old has been established and promoted. SM has none of these important checks and balances.

- From its origin, SM was designed to be a medium of one to many, often with no accountability to anyone.

- Typically, it is a generic message.

Generic products spawn more of the same. Standardization is not seen by them as being either necessary or important. SM provides a clever follow-up to the selfie photo craze, wherein it generates verbal selfies! These verbal selfies provide for some self-gratification as well as self-praise. It should be identified for what it is—a modern expression of the self-life.

The Gospel message is one, a singular body of truth, not truths. SM consists of truths, wanting to be heard as a new set of ideas, usually in conflict with its various claimants. It is aided by the generally accepted several basic ways of interpretation. The allegorical interpretation easily

allows for a generic message.

- SM robs relational energy from the God-designed way of the one-to-one arrangement for the deepest and the best soul-satisfying communication.

Communication with chosen words and inflection of voice generates energy with the grace of wholesome interchange, having both feeding and healing qualities. Talking with people is by far better than the SM feature of talking at people.

- SM is an easy outlet called, “the lone voice of one to many,” a trendy sort of communication which is basically about the person himself, not others.

- The “lone voice of one to many” looks for people to agree, and is annoyed when they do not agree with him.

The allegorical interpretation is basically philosophical, according to Webster, which is why people who use it often do not agree with others who also use it within the perimeter of its wide allowance. The allegorical interpretation can be and is used on many Bible subjects, which is one major reason that many church bodies do not agree, not only in practice, but more importantly, in doctrine in the first place. The same can be true among the very members in our own conservative Anabaptist

churches, or even in one given individual congregation. Therefore, SM proliferates among us, even regarding salvation, non-resistance, non-conformity, politics, sports, music, entertainment, stewardship, self-denial, and the unthinkable doctrine of end-time judgment and whether unbelievers who are cast into hell should remain there forever.

- We are meant to share face-to-face, to give and receive, which is routinely assumed throughout the whole Bible.

The Bible message is personalized, clearly being a message from above, brought down to mortal man, from God Himself. This principle is meant to keep intact the promotion of the Gospel as a standard message. SM refutes that by its very nature and its autocratic dominant use.

- SM lobs opinions out there without expecting returns to affirm or oppose, or caring what happens.

Philosophers love to keep issues in foment and agitation. Philosophical thinking is not generally given much room in our churches for congregational address. Individual philosophical “thinkers” find SM to be a wide-open forum for their “innocent” questions and suggestions. Their talk on this level introduces and opens the door to the

next lower level of the promotion and affirmation of their “new thoughts.”

- SM loves to have a personal itch scratched by someone else without having a relationship with them.

- SM is putting out text messages, not caring that it fosters a withering relationship. It certainly is seldom an enduring growing relationship.

- SM is a veneer-type communication, causing a supposed relationship, but not a real one. Outsourcing our sanity (Webster: soundness of mind; mental health, sound judgment) does not sponsor meaningful relationships, or improve them.

- People who talk one-on-one are much more apt to care about the other person’s interests and feelings.

- Colossians 4:6, “*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*”

Two things stand out in this Bible verse, this word being from God.

1. The “what” in this verse is speech “with grace,” choosing appropriately what to say.

2. Speech “with salt” is the how of meaningful conversation. Both the “what” and “how” of this text would cancel out much of this modern, worldly, and decimating social media.

The Bottom Line causes us to be

both sad and sorry to say that some of our people are more deeply involved than we might suppose in the time-consuming and spiritual-withering onslaught of social media. It occurs to me that it may or already is so by some, causing a confusion as to what actually constitutes our most needy doctrine—the timeless doctrine of salvation. In I Corinthians 15:33-34, Paul took on their unbelief and wrong conclusions about the resurrection of Christ, saying, “*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.*”

We are at a place of risk to our faith in regard to the inroads that already have plied and plowed into our midst. In tandem with Paul’s defense of the resurrection of Christ in I Corinthians 15, we also will herewith raise the same alarm: “*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.*” These eight words bear heavily on this weighty subject of social media. Jesus Christ has called us to be His witnesses of Holy Spirit certified truth, the everlasting words of salvation to everyone who repents and believes. Repentance is still a cost too great for some to “pay.” Do not come up short. 

A Tribute to Mothers

Anya Hursh, Krivoshientsi, Ukraine

The war affects everyone. The soldiers on the battlefield. The thousands of children who have left their homes and schools. The common laborers, many of whom are now without a job. The elderly, the vulnerable, the weak. The youth whose dreams and futures have become shattered. And the mothers.

Perhaps it is the mothers who have been affected most of all. The lines of care have deepened across the faces of many mothers in the past year. Clouds of prayers have ascended from the lips of mothers, interceding for their children.

A mother's instinct is to love and care for her children. A mother longs to protect her children from the evil and danger of this world. But in a time of war, safety, protection, and care feel like an illusion.

I think of the many brave mothers across the country. Mothers who have spent nights in their cellars, trying to keep their children safe from the bombs and missiles. Mothers who have left everything familiar and crossed the borders to other countries for the sake of their children. Mothers who have nearly starved while trying to feed their

children. Young, single mothers who have chosen to give birth to their children even though an abortion may have seemed like an easier way to try to forget the nightmare of abuse they experienced at the hands of soldiers.

I remember one mother I met in the east. Because she was a nurse, she was unable to leave the country. So she stayed in her village with her two young children. Part of the apartment building had been destroyed by a bomb, and all around them were signs of destruction. But the children's faces reflected the smile and hope of their mother.

I remember the mother in Lyman who came through the food line with her children. Her son's head was hanging. He was ashamed to be asking for a bowl of food. The mother had tears in her eyes as she held out her plate for food. "It's not supposed to be this way. I never thought we would become beggars," she said.

The sister serving the soup replied, "Things could be different. If I would be in need and you would have the opportunity to help, you would." The women smiled through their tears, both brave mothers.

On a recent trip to the east, I visited with a mother of four young children. Yana and her husband and children had left the country when the war began. Their city was near the front line, and with young children—the baby born as a refugee—it did indeed seem best to leave. I had met her husband several times before. He often traveled back to his home area in Ukraine to help with church work. This time he brought his family with him.

“As a mother with young children, which is harder,” I asked one evening as we worked together in the church kitchen in Slavyansk, “staying in Germany where you feel safe, or coming back here where...” I paused, trying to pick my words carefully. I wanted to say where it is so dangerous, where you don’t have a steady income, and where you never know where the next missile will fall.

Before I had a chance to finish my sentence, Yana said, “Or being here in such a great service?” Her attitude of counting it a privilege to be here challenged me.

“I was scared to come back,” she admitted. “It was hard seeing my husband go back when it seemed so dangerous. But he always returned with his eyes shining. He tried to tell me how God is working, how the needs are so great, and how he feels

needed here, but I didn’t understand. He persuaded me to come with him just once.

“And now I’ve come, and I don’t think I want to go back to Germany. It is hard being here without an income. I worry about the safety of our children. But I see how God is answering prayer. Our church house is overflowing with unbelievers. I never dreamed I would see the day when our church house is so full of people who are earnestly seeking.”

Her testimony and trust inspired me. The next day, they stopped by the church house to load some aid. I chatted for a few moments with her oldest child, a lad of eight years. He was wearing an adult-sized bulletproof vest. “Where are you going?” I wondered.

His smile stretched across his face, but there was a soberness in his eyes. “We’re taking food to some people who are hungry, and it’s kind of dangerous, so I’m wearing a vest.”

On another trip east, part of our group joined another group taking food and medicine to villages nearer the front line. As one of the brothers in the other group pulled on a bulletproof vest, he said, “It’s up to the rest of you whether or not you want to wear vests, but I have a wife and two little girls at home.” I thought of his wife, a young mother, and of the countless women

like her who care for their children and pray for their husbands who are serving near the front.

The village head invited my mom to join a group of ladies, all mothers of many children, for a special time of honor and celebration. Every mother was presented with a bouquet of flowers and a personalized certificate, blessing them in their calling as mothers. The gathering held a note of sadness, because 36 of the mothers from our region have lost their sons on the battlefield. Many of them wonder if they will be next.

I think of the mother in the west, a believer who raised her sons to love and serve God. When her sons, ages 18 and 20, were called to the army, they explained their position that as believers they cannot fight. Their village is fiercely patriotic and interpreted their nonresistance as disloyalty. Recently both boys were shot—not by the army officials of either army—but by their own villagers.

There are thousands of weeping mothers scattered across this country. Many have already lost their sons. Others are praying fervently that their sons would return home alive and that God would protect their children.

“It’s only by my mother’s prayers that I am still alive today,” one soldier said. His mother, a conservative

Christian, did her best to teach her children about Christ. But her sons chose to follow their father’s footsteps. All of the rest of the men from this son’s group were killed, but he survived miraculously. “It’s only because of Mama’s prayers.” This brave mother prays, not only for her son’s protection, but most of all for his salvation.

The other evening, I was walking home from prayer meeting when I met Tanya, one of my refugee friends, who was out on a walk with her young son. As we walked together, she told me how she longs to go home. “My house is still standing, but I can’t go back even if I want to.” Earlier her house had been occupied by Russian soldiers who trashed it. Now Ukrainian soldiers are living in it, but they also have little respect for personal property. “They’ve moved my stuff wherever they want. My freezer is gone. My couch has been ruined, and everything is a mess.” Her dark eyes filled with tears. “I told my neighbor to please ask the soldiers to move out because I want to come home, but he laughed and said, ‘That would be ridiculous. You can’t tell soldiers what to do.’ All day long, I just feel like crying, but I am determined to keep myself pulled together. I don’t want to make it harder for my children.” Dusk was

falling as I gave her a hug, and we parted ways. I felt a twinge of guilt as I entered my own cozy little house and thought of her, a widow with two young children, living as refugees with no place to call their own.

Being a mother in time of war is hard. I think about this when some of my students come for English class. Arina, Artem, and Eliah are all living in the village with their grandparents. Their mothers, who live and work in the cities, sent them here when the war began because the villages are safer than the city. How hard it must be to be separated from their children! Some of my other students have mothers who are trying to bravely parent alone because their husbands have been called to fight.

I think of my own dear mother. One of the things that stands out to me is her unselfishness. She has spent years investing in her children. She loves them and longs to protect them. But every week she unselfishly allows her youth/adult children to travel to the eastern part of Ukraine where the needs—and the dangers—are great.

It's not easy for her, but she commits them to God and covers them in prayer. She has to work extra hard at home on the farm to help with the chores and responsibilities they usually fill. She does it unselfishly, all the while interceding for her children.

When they return home from their trips, she listens eagerly to their stories. She cares for them and makes home a comfortable and happy place to be. She cares, not just about her children's safety, but also about their hearts.

She is not on the front lines risking her life to bullets and bombs, but the role she plays in God's kingdom is great. It takes great courage to risk heartbreak and loss by allowing the ones she loves to enter danger for the sake of lost souls. She battles her fears and trusts God, cheering us on and supporting us in our callings. I feel humbled and deeply blessed to be one of her daughters.

Many are called heroes today. The soldiers who give their lives for their country. The volunteers who give up work to serve others when it may cost them their lives. The rescue workers. The medics. Perhaps, the greatest heroes are the mothers.

May God bless the mothers in a special way today, not just in Ukraine, but all across the world, who are making a difference in eternity by investing in the lives of their children and equipping them to serve in God's kingdom. 

May 2023

redeeming.grace.ua@gmail.com

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marriages

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

Byler-Eschleman

Bro. Matthias Dale, son of Freeman and Mary Byler, West Farmington, OH, and Sis. Brenda Joy, daughter of Glendon and Edith Eshleman, Keysville, GA, July 1, 2023, at United First Methodist for Hephzibah Mennonite Church by Duane Shirk.

Graber-Goble

Bro. Darlynn Ray, son of Waneda and the late Ronnie Graber, Amboy, IN, and Sis. Mary Esther, daughter of Chris and Lisa Goble, Culver, IN, August 12, 2023, at Bethany Fellowship Church by Arlin Beachy.

Herschberger-Beachy

Bro. Lamar, son of Gary and LeAnna Hershberger, Kokomo, IN, and Sis. Rebecca, daughter of Melvin and Beth Ann Beachy, Arthur, IL, August 12, 2023, at Bethany Fellowship Church by Darlton Bontrager.

Hertzler-Schlabach

Bro. Drew, son of Andrew and Sally Hertzler, Winchester, OH, and Sis. Rebekah, daughter of Vern and Irene Schlabach, Plummer, ID, September 9, 2023, at an outdoor venue in Princeton, ID, by Marcus Yoder.

Hostetler-Miller

Bro. Lamar, son of Glen and Laura Hostetler, Arthur, IL, and Sis. Fannie Mae, daughter of David and the late Lydia Mae Miller, Sullivan, IL, July 15, 2023, at Sunnyside Church for Trinity Christian Fellowship by Wilbur Gingerich.

Miller-Gingerich

Bro. James, son of Marlin and LouElla Miller, Arthur, IL, and Sis. Kathy, daughter of Richard and Pauline Gingerich, Arcola, IL, May 13, 2023, at the Richard Gingerich residence for Trinity Christian Fellowship by Wilbur Gingerich.

Miller-Yoder

Bro. Todd, son of Dave and Lois Miller, Georgetown, OH, and Sis. Wanda, daughter of Lyndon and Martha Yoder, Winchester, OH, August 26, 2023, at Sardinia Church of Christ for Still Waters Mennonite Church by Marcus Yoder.

Stoltzfus-Miller

Bro. Jerry, son of Aaron and Anna Stoltzfus, Gap, PA, and Sis. Shannon, daughter of Paul L. and Miriam Miller, Sugarcreek, OH, August 19, 2023, at Maranatha Fellowship by Paul L. Miller.



Stoltzfus-Weaver

Bro. Jamin, son of Mark and Linda Stoltzfus, Honeybrook, PA, and Sis. Marisa, daughter of Lawayne and Ruth Weaver, Blackville, SC, September 9, 2023, at Barnwell First Baptist for Calvary Fellowship Mennonite Church by Ken Kanagy.

Weaver-Yoder

Bro. Anson, son of LaWayne and Ruth Weaver, Blackville, SC, and Sis. Jessica, daughter of Elmer and Rosanna Yoder, Montezuma, GA, July 8, 2023, at Montezuma Mennonite Church by Morris Yoder.

Yoder-Yoder

Bro. Michael, son of Jonathan and Shanah Yoder, Elida, OH, and Sis. Maranatha, daughter of Jonathan and Connie Yoder, Montezuma, GA, June 24, 2023, at Montezuma Mennonite Church by Morris Yoder. 

cradle roll

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

Beiler, Jamien and Rachel (Lee), Mount Pleasant, PA, third child and son, Timothy Brian, August 3, 2023.

Beiler, Larry Roy and Karla (Mullet), Gap, PA, fifth child, third daughter, Sophia Ryanne, August 18, 2023.

Eicher, Willis and Stacy (Hochstedler), Altamont, KS, second child, first son, Rhett Payden, September 13, 2023.

Herschberger, Darrell and Wanda (Hostetler), Arthur, IL, fourth child, third daughter, Kimberly Faith, September 5, 2023.

Hershberger, Gabriel and Dina (Yoder), Oskaloosa, KS, second child, first son, Isaiah Quinn, September 7, 2023.

Hochstedler, Carlin and Savannah (Wray), Kokomo, IN, first child and son, Damian Luke, August 13, 2023.

Hochstedler, Kendrick and Malinda (Miller), Kokomo, IN, first child and daughter, Aria Kate, August 1, 2023.

Kanagy, Jeffrey and Rachel (Shank), Blackville, SC, sixth child, fifth daughter, Clarita Dawn, August 24, 2023.

Kaufman, Wes and Sara (Coblentz), Baltic, OH, third child, first son, John Michael, September 20, 2023.

Kropf, Mark and Kenya (Blosser), Itasca, TX, sixth child, fourth daughter, Tamara Braelyn, April 25, 2023.

Mast, Milton and Marcena (Overholt), Auburn, KY, first child and daughter, Skye Brielle, August 31, 2023.

Miller, Jared and Charlene (Stoltzfoos), Gap, PA, fourth child and son, Ashton Grant, August 30, 2023.

Miller, Jon and Emilene (Yoder), Hiddenite, NC, fifth child, second son (one son in heaven), Connor Alex, September 5, 2023.

Miller, Kristen and Rhonda (Brenneman), Danville, AL, eighth child, third daughter, Jennica Ruth, August 10, 2023.

Miller, Philip and Sherilyn (Beachy), Paint Lick, KY, third child, second son, Seth Andrew, April 26, 2023.

Sharp, Joe Jr. and Carol (Horst), Belleville, NY, second child and son, Hosea Joel, September 11, 2023.

Stoll, Marlin and Marietta (Miller), Paint Lick, KY, eighth child, second daughter, Melody June, May 19, 2023.

Stoltzfus, Duane and Gina (Stoltzfus), Gap, PA, second child and daughter, Naomi Anne, August 8, 2023.

Stoltzfus, Floyd and Sarita (Gingerich), Greenfield, OH, second and third children, first daughter, second son, Geneva Rose and Jethro David, August 18, 2023.

Stoltzfus, Jesse and Cheryl (Weaver), Killbuck, OH, second child and son, Lincoln Bo, June 15, 2023.

Stoltzfus, Michael and Anita (Beiler), Managua, Nicaragua, fourth child, first daughter, Elianna Chantay (twin sons in heaven), August 7, 2023.

Troyer, Nathanael and Karen (Yoder), Covington, TX, fourth child, second son, Eric Andre, May 31, 2023.

Troyer, Shane and Maria (Beachy), Sugarcreek, OH, first child and daughter, Sydney Shanae, August 29, 2023.

Wagler, Randall and Melissa (Miller), Altamont, KS, second child, first son, Malachai Jake, September 3, 2023.

Weaver, Darren and Jasmine (Slade), Blackville, SC, first child and son, Casey James, August 18, 2023.

Weaver, Daryn and Jeanie (Graber), Peru, IN, fifth child, fourth daughter, Jirah Faith, May 31, 2023.

Yoder, Doug and Tammy (Headings), Arlington, KS, first child and son, Lane Douglas, May 31, 2023.

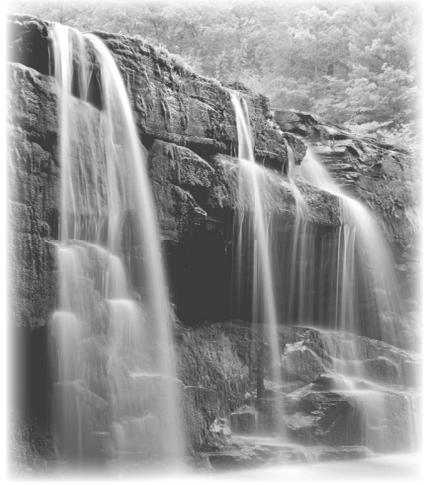
Yoder, James and Kyra (King), Mt. Pleasant, TN, first child and daughter, Olivia Bridgett, August 30, 2023.

Yoder, Morris and Beth (Martin), Montezuma, GA, sixth child, fifth son, Ian Rigel, July 10, 2023. 

ordination

May the grace of God be upon our brother as he ministers faithfully. Let us pray for him.

Bro. David Miller, 30, (wife, Grace Shank), Waynesboro, VA, was ordained minister for Pilgrim Christian Fellowship, Stuarts Draft, VA, on September 10, 2023. The charge was given by Jonathan Miller, assisted by Simon Schrock and Wayne Yoder. Robert Schrock and Wesley Sensenig shared the lot. 



observations

Several years ago our church formed small groups comprised of five or six households. Among the stated objectives, we desired to facilitate interactions between demographics that we might tend to avoid in larger crowds, particularly between various age groups. We also thought that these monthly meetings would provide increased opportunity to spend time in each other's homes. We've called these groups REACH groups. REACH is an acronym that stands for RELATING in ways that EDIFY through shared ACTIVITIES that strengthen the CONGREGATION and offer HOPE to others.

The activities often include a meal

together, combined with some type of recreational activity, work project, social interaction, or service focus. We've had show-and-tell events, Bible quizzes, landscaping work, reports of a recent trip, yard games, hot dog roasts, roadside highway trash pickup, etc.

Of course, one accompanying danger is that this type of activity could promote cliques and rogue ideas. That will largely depend on the relational maturity of the participants. Our congregation also expressed some concern that we not add something else to our already busy schedule. So, the REACH activity replaces one of our midweek meetings. The households take turns

planning and hosting the events. We feel as if the net effect has been encouraging and favorable for our congregation. However, the benefit tends to be higher the more that is invested by the planners/hosts and those attending. These events are a highlight of the monthly rhythm of congregational life for me.

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At our REACH activity several months ago, the planners assigned me to read aloud two chapters from a book titled *The Noticer* by Andy Andrews. I wasn't familiar with the title or the author. But one brother in our REACH group indicated to someone else that I sort of fell down a "rabbit hole" as a result of this exposure. This wouldn't be an entirely inaccurate characterization of my response. Come to find out, Andy Andrews has written a couple dozen books. I ended up borrowing various titles by this author, including *The Noticer*, *The Heart Mender*, *The Little Things*, *The Traveler's Gift*, and *The Final Summit*. I was fascinated by the work of Andy Andrews and found it both instructive and engaging, due to being quite thought-provoking without being too dense. He also tends to weave characters from his books into the narrative of other books in a way that connect some of these books.

Andy comes across as one who espouses Christian virtues and ideals without being explicitly evangelistic in his appeal. One of the common themes of his writings is the importance of forgiveness. In his book, *The Heart Mender*, Andrews relates a true story that involves himself. That's probably my favorite book of his so far. I don't believe that I'd likely recommend any literature 100%, outside of the inspired Scriptures. However, I do feel as if Andy Andrews qualifies as being enjoyable, worthwhile, and inspirational, but that is my assessment with which you're perfectly free to disagree. As with all non-scripture literature, we need to eat the meat and spit out the bones.

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Doug Knipp from Ashland, Kentucky, is a franchise owner for Kentucky Fried Chicken, with stores in Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia. A sign on the door of his stores has generated considerable interest. Most of the publicity has been quite favorable, but some have taken exception to the message on the sign. The sign reads, "All Uniformed Police Officers Eat Free Every Day All Day."

The positive feedback is largely self-explanatory. Those who find this sign troublesome seem to feel as if

this type of position gives support for repressive and heavy-handed law enforcement. Some also feel as if it would be better if this offer would be expanded to include first responders, fire fighters, and other public servants and not just limited to uniformed law enforcement personnel.

I really wish that everyone could say with unreserved enthusiasm that they've never had any negative experiences with law enforcement. But despite all the good that law enforcement does, there are inevitably a few persons who misuse the position. This sad reality seems to exert an outsized influence on people's perception toward law enforcement. This is particularly true for those who don't have the benefit of a Christian perspective on authority, servanthood, and the legitimacy and importance of civil order and structure.

The Scripture gives us some unqualified orientation regarding the believer's posture toward rulers, which include law enforcement. ***“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same”*** (Romans 13:3).

• • • • •

In September of this year Brenda and I were privileged to attend

the annual Parents Appreciation Weekend at Faith Mission Home since our son, Chadwin, is currently serving there. I was asked to share some thoughts under the title, “Life Lessons Learned from Service.” One of those who was there gave me some hearty encouragement to share a synopsis of those thoughts in this column. After giving it some thought, I decided to take him up on the idea.

The home I grew up in was exemplary in some ways, ordinary in some ways, and possibly less than ideal in other ways. Most of us could likely use this description accurately in describing our upbringing. One of the ways that I believe my childhood experience was exemplary was that my parents demonstrated the importance of service to others by the choices they made and the priorities they lived out. For example, my mother served as a young, single, Amish lady at Brook Lane Mental Hospital. I grew up thinking that it was normal that our lives revolve around a priority of service to others. An outward focus is one of the touchstones that shape and order the priorities and rhythms of life. These priorities were strengthened by extended family members and those in the home church community.

Another key component that I observed before I even had words for

what I saw was that not all legitimate work involves sweat and physical toil. The most valuable contributions in life are not necessarily measured in monetary terms.

When we talk about priorities that shape our lives, there are a variety of ways this can be helpfully described. I'm choosing to think of this as the priority of faithfulness. Faithfulness as a priority is often helpfully understood as not being limited to choosing faithfulness over wrong choices though that certainly enters in here. But rather, we are talking about choosing a priority of faithfulness over other legitimate priorities when they are in conflict. For instance, the priority of personal faithfulness vs. pragmatism or expediency, personal faithfulness vs. results, or personal faithfulness vs. concern regarding the faithfulness and failures of others. The list goes on and on. Our response to the priorities of faithfulness and serving others wherever God calls us will profoundly shape the course that our lives will take.

Another area where personal faithfulness becomes practical in ways that seem a bit uncomfortable and somewhat counter-intuitive is in the area of personal faithfulness to group loyalties vs. personal faithfulness to my personal

perspective. I'm guessing most of us can readily think of examples when our "enlightened insights" felt squelched by the perspective of the church group we're a part of. I certainly feel that and have felt that.

Most of my church experience is in settings in which we all have the freedom to demonstrate personal faithfulness by not taking all the liberties that fall within the parameters of group expectations. However, there are some liberties that I believe would be legitimate, but I don't exercise them because they fall outside the parameters of group expectations. It is in that context that I make these comments.

In times past, I have not always done this, and when I've done this, I've done it imperfectly. However, one thing that has influenced me greatly is this: when my personal insights and perspectives place me at odds with those I'm walking with, I've chosen to walk with the group. This obviously has limits—it's a principle rather than a law. But I've found this one principle more useful than comfortable. How does it strike you?

When opportunities to serve arise, sometimes we ask, "Why me?" or "Why should I say yes?" Those questions are fair. But maybe better questions to start with might be, "Why not me?" and "Why should I

say no?” At the least, we should give the second set of questions equal consideration to our more natural responses.

In the context of group sensibilities, I would also propose that it’s important that these opportunities for service can be blessed by those we are walking with. The blessing from the group is strengthened if the opportunity comes through the

church or group of churches we belong to.

Last but not least, let’s not define “Christian Service” too narrowly. Service can involve voluntary service, vocational choices, and the ways that we interact with our family, our brothers in the faith, and our friends and neighbors. Is my life characterized by a priority of service?

–RJM 

My Trust in Jesus

Simon Schrock, Catlett, VA

In the August issue we began a series of letters that Simon has written in response to challenges he received to give up his faith and belief in God. They are addressed to “Athie,” Simon’s pen name for atheists. AY

Dear Athie,
It’s been some years now that I asked you the questions, “Who do you say Jesus is? Was He Who He said He is? Or was He one of the world’s biggest liars?” I really would like to hear where you find yourself on these questions.

You responded that you have concluded *“that while the character Jesus may have existed, the stories of his greatness and supposed miracles are easily the evolution of a legend*

and not at all conclusive that he was the demi-god that we were taught to believe as Christians. So I believe that if he ever existed, he was simply an influential man among the Jews whose fame evolved into legendary and miraculous proportions without any solid evidence for the same. Thus, I do not believe that Jesus, as a supernatural being, ever existed.”

I’ve read your stated belief about Jesus numerous times. You suggested He could be just a legend like Santa Claus. Reaffirming my faith in Jesus makes it clear we are on a totally different walk of life. Santa Claus is a folklore, a legend. I know of no children who made life-long changes for the better by being good.

There are huge reasons I cannot put my faith in the idea that Jesus' fame evolved into "*legendary and miraculous proportions without any solid evidence*," similar to Santa Claus. One of those reasons is that I have seen solid evidences with my own eyes. Lou had a religion but not a fellowship with the living Jesus. That all changed after he spotted a Good News Bible at K-Mart and by impulse made the purchase. Even though he had religion, he began reading in the book of John. There he read a verse that became a real life-changer for him.

In a letter he wrote, "I have favorite verses, but my all-time favorite is Jesus' comment," *"I assure you, most solemnly tell you, the person whose ears are open to My words—who listens to my message—and believes and trusts in and clings to and relies on Him who sent Me, has [possesses now] eternal life. And he does not come into judgment—does not incur sentence of judgment, nor will come under condemnation—but has already passed over out of death unto eternal life"* (John 5:24 The Amplified Bible). In the autumn years of life he was diagnosed to have COPD. He wrote that he was on hospice care, "and the lungs are greatly diminished—and continue to diminish—and medical treatment cannot cure, nor even

slow the process. I am limited to one room, my study, wherein are all my books, and in this room I sleep in a La-Z-Boy chair, and bathe, eat, and study God's word daily."

I visited Lou in this little room in what he described as his being in the terminal "waiting on my boarding pass and my flight home to God." Therefore, I believe such a testimony came from having a relationship with the living Jesus and could not be possible through a man whose "*fame evolved into legendary and miraculous proportions with no solid evidence for the same*." Lou's testimony is evidence to me.

Another testimony that bolsters my faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ came from Roger. "August 2010, I was arrested for burglary and was shot in the leg and lower back three times. I was arraigned on the charges, tried, and sentenced to 10 years in a New York State prison." While in prison he was invited to an evening chapel service. "I figured I tried everything else in life, drugs, women, crime, nothing worked for me, so why not give this church thing a try and see what it is all about." There he heard a "great message" and responded to the altar call to place his faith in the good news of the Gospel of Jesus. "From that day forward I have been on fire for God and His Word and have

served Him faithfully ever since.” He has been out of prison over three years and is a law-abiding citizen with a good paying job helping other former inmates adjust back to life after prison. We regularly chat by phone. Such a dramatic change in his life is living evidence to me that the Gospel of Jesus is not just a legend.

On my shelf of books I read are powerful testimonies of persons who put their faith and trust in confessing that Jesus rose from the dead and is Lord. The late Pablo Yoder wrote in *Unconditional Surrender* how Pete Lewis was reading the Bible for himself during a long evening in Colorado and faced a decision. Would he stand on what the Bible said and yield himself to God in unconditional surrender, or would the cost prove too high? He chose surrender. From little up he was taught religion, but now he experienced a real change of life. In another book, *Chosen from the Worst*, Pablo wrote about Omar hiding from the law, haunted by his crimes (including murder), and desperate for help. Omar finally found God’s marvelous grace. Today he is a dramatically changed man in the kingdom of God. Then there is Dean Taylor who wrote his testimony of change in the book, *A Change of Allegiance*.

For me, such testimonies affirm

the truth of II Corinthians 5:17, “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” I wrote these testimonies the day our daughter took Polly to the doctor. I planned to continue writing the next morning about the changed lives of Jim, Merv, James, Tim, John, and others whose lives were turned around from “old things” and “*all things are become new*” through faith in Jesus Christ.

The next morning I woke up a little early, got my coffee, and went to my recliner. Before getting back to writing where I left off, I followed my routine to “*seek first the kingdom of God*” by reading from what you call my holy book, the Bible. Then something unusual, strange, and exciting happened to me. Instead of stating half a dozen reasons why I believe Jesus Christ is Who He said He was, the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God, I’ll tell you what happened to me. Instead of opening my “holy book” first, by mistake I read from *Soli Deo Gloria*, the daily walk through Romans. The verse for today was Romans 15:13. “*Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*” That verse and the appropriate devotional comments just bolstered

my faith in believing that Jesus is the Son of God. I changed my mind on what to write further.

Then I read my “holy book,” starting with Daniel chapter six. It was about Daniel’s faith in his God and being delivered from a den of hungry lions. The New Testament reading was I John one. John was a fisherman called to leave the fisherman’s net and follow Jesus. He left fishing and became one of Christ’s apostles. He heard His teachings, saw Him perform miraculous healing and other miracles. He witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus on a high mountain where he saw Moses and Elijah. There he heard a voice say, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” John followed Jesus all the way to the cross, where Jesus told John, “*Behold thy mother.*” He watched Him suffer and die. After the resurrection he had a fish breakfast with Jesus. He watched Jesus ascending to heaven. Years later John wrote this testimony, “*That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked** upon, and our hands have **handled**, of the Word of life; (For the life was **manifested**, and we have **seen** it,*

*and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was **manifested** unto us;) That which we have **seen** and **heard declare** we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Then in another devotional were some convincing comments on I Corinthians 15: 10. “*His grace which was bestowed on me was not in vain.*”*

So after all this, I gladly leave my trust in this promise in my Bible, “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*” (Romans 10:9). The beauty of God’s love is that He gave us the freedom to choose what we believe about Him. You chose to believe that “Jesus as a supernatural being” never “existed.” These testimonies boosted my previous choice in believing that He is not a legend, but the Son of God.

The good news of my God is that He lets each of us believe what we choose. And the sun still rises and shines on both of us.

Your friend in VA,

Simon 

No one learns to make right decisions without being **free** to make wrong ones.

My Thanksgiving Prayer

Alfredo Mullet, Chilton, TX

My gracious Creator, I feel awfully ashamed for complaining about what I do not possess. Realizing that I engender disgrace to Your Name causes me to blush because of my ungratefulness. Although I do not have every materialistic desire, yet I am blessed with more than I really deserve. It is true that I continually struggle and perspire, and to make ends meet I must always conserve. When I notice the success of my family and peers, so often I am tempted to begrudge their affluence.

In these moments I need to attune my eyes and ears to judge my conditions from a much higher Influence. When I do this, I find myself much more receptive to the blessings You have already showered on me. Since I've opened my heart to a heavenly perspective I can now relax and enjoy Your providential annuities. Now this does not mean that I never complain anymore, but rather, I can gauge my life with a clearer awareness. It helps me to not revel in negativity as much as before because I know my greatest blessing is Your godliness.

With this submissive attitude residing within my soul, I accept the fact that the Bible commands thanksgiving. Surely, this knowledge makes it easy to rescind control of whatever I cannot manipulate by irrational worrying. Moreover, I also am more open-minded to understand that a grateful heart is a means to overcome selfishness. For You have designed that as humans with an open hand we receive joy when relieving the wants of the penniless. So, Lord, please forgive me for murmuring excessively of how life's apportioned possessions seem so unfair.

Yes, I do well to remember that the more given to me,
that much more will I deal with added stress and care.
Therefore, I will administrate what is placed at my disposal
with an attitude of faithful joy and sincere thankfulness.
For I recognize that at the reckoning of all things eternal,
I will not pity myself because I was entrusted with less.
This prayer may appear as an effort to stir up positivity,
and that assessment from my fellows perhaps is true.
But when economic struggles tend to test my sanity,
I know of nothing more therapeutic that a man can do! 

mission awareness

Cultivating Good Unit Relationships

Floyd Stoltzfus, Gordonville, PA

(The location, people, and events of this story are fictitious. However, it could be real life. This story appeared in the Calvary Messenger some years ago. -FS)

Ezra and Eunice and their two young children are stationed in the jungles of Peru working among the South American Indians. They are deeply fulfilled in the church-planting endeavor among these needy people working under the Mennonite Foreign Ambassadors. Souls are being saved from the grips of sin, fear, superstitions, and hostility. A small church was planted and nurtured in the faith. The demands of mission life pressed upon Ezra and Eunice daily.

However, the greatest difficulty at

this point was not in relating to the nationals but in communicating with fellow missionaries. John was gifted in linguistics. He spoke the native language fluently and was regarded as more approachable by the native people. His fellow colleagues on the same mission compound took this to mean he was more popular and influential. Feelings of suspicion and jealousy were aroused. Matt was quick to discern and speak against inconsistencies about the other workers, particularly when mission policies were not strictly followed. This caused fears and walls to develop among the missionaries. And then, Mark was endowed with such a loving compassion for souls and invested long days and even until late evening

at his assigned village. His family suffered from his over-extensive labor. Ill feelings and unkind talk spread like thistle seeds among the compound of American missionaries. Several of the wives were not tidy or scheduled and disciplined in housekeeping. Eunice and another mother were the opposite. Some of the missionaries' children were disrespectful and undisciplined and were allowed to run anywhere in the community. As a result, feelings of anger and bitterness were entertained. Sharp conflicts arose. Wholesome communication was broken. Ezra struggled with hurt feelings and inferiority due to the mission administrator correcting him for running ahead of mission policy.

The isolation from relatives, neighbors, and church brethren at home resulted in loneliness. The constant contact with dirt, disease, idolatry, and sin in the raw had a tendency to pull down the morale of Ezra and Eunice. There was a constant battle with discouragement. How could they work through these difficulties? If it were not for the sincere faith and genuine, godly love of the native brethren, they may have packed up their belongings and gone home. Several years slipped by. Unit relationships were like the Pacific Ocean that bordered western Peru—up and down. At times conditions

were calm on the surface, but then there was another upheaval that seemed like a mountain had fallen into the ocean.

There was a bright spot in the near future. It was like a light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. A furlough was scheduled. How Ezra and Eunice longed for this time of spiritual revival, mental renewal, and physical refreshment! They applied for a mission's seminar at a Christian retreat center. The workshop on "Cultivating Good Unit Relationships" caught their attention. They raised their hands for that one. The topic was presented in such an orderly manner. The speaker was full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit. His loving words saturated deeply into their parched spirits. He introduced his topic by asking a question: "Does God live in a unit? Yes. God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There are three distinct individuals in the Godhead, yet we believe in one God. Incomprehensible! From all eternity the Godhead lived in perfect unity and harmony. There were never any disagreements or arguments but always a perfect love and submission in the deepest sense of the word."

A portion of Jesus' high priestly prayer became precious to this struggling missionary couple that

day: “*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me*” (John 17:21).

The main body of the message was divided into three subtopics by asking and answering three basic questions.

1. Why cultivate good unit relationships? Because man naturally is selfish. Selfishness brings real threats to unit life such as pursuing personal plans and projects rather than the goals and policies of the mission organization. Ezra contemplated on this thought. Rather than surrendering his own ideas at the cross of Christ and to the scrutiny of the mission board, he fought to pursue his own goals and ran roughshod over his fellow missionaries’ feelings. It was mission work stuffed with pride and selfish ambitions. Tears ran down his cheeks. He confessed this sin to the Lord.

Another threat to unit life is failure to comply with mission standards, decisions, and policies. This statement also struck Ezra like a dart. He saw himself as the cause for friction in the mission unit in Peru. Failure to overcome personal habits that may be offensive to others also threatens unit life. Differences in personality, home training, age, and

in abilities and gifts can also threaten a good unit life.

It’s also important to cultivate good unit relationships because your personal life (strengths and weaknesses), schedule, and devotional life will be tested and you need each other for support. God’s work will be hindered if there is a breakdown of relationships (John 13:35). Philippians 2:2-4 commands us to be “*likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*”

2. When will there be good unit relationships? When pride is crucified. If there is contention in the family, the church, or in unit life pride is lurking somewhere. The Bible plainly states: “*Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom*” (Proverbs 13:10).

There will be good unit relationships when there is a broken heart (Psalm 51:17). Both Ezra and Eunice were weeping with tears of brokenness and humility when this point was spoken so tenderly.

Unit relationships improve when the fruit of the Spirit is evident (Galatians 5:22, 23). Improper

understanding of ourselves fosters self-love, self-exaltation, and self-pity. But when Spirit fruit is abounding, criticism is less threatening to me, correction is more receivable, and communication is easier. I will prefer others above myself. When there are accomplishments, it doesn't matter who gets the credit if I prefer others above myself. Ezra thought a long time on this one. He was jealous of some of the other missionaries' churches and their spiritual and numerical growth. Then he often found himself in a "self-praise and self-congratulation" attitude when the Lord was blessing their ministry with fruit.

How to maintain good unit relationships? One of the key factors in developing relationships is wholesome and open communication (James 3:13-18).

The unit leader needs to communicate mission goals, policies, community outreach endeavors, daily activities, personal and other unit members' plans for furloughs or vacations. The need for personal and spiritual growth as members of Christ's body must be shared together.

The unit members need to communicate about their personal plans and activities to not interfere with each other's transportation

needs and schedules. Irritations and annoyances can develop among single people of the same gender in unit life where a bedroom and bathroom is shared. Tactful communication can be handled in a godly yet humorous manner to pursue personal goals in respecting each other's feelings of personal cleanliness and keeping the beds and rooms tidy and neat.

The speaker concluded by addressing several points on restoring broken relationships. Happiness is found in good relationships. Relationships are broken primarily through self-centeredness. L. E. Maxwell notes how the problem of self will follow us in all life's endeavors and pursuits. "In our service for Christ, self-confidence and self-esteem; in the slightest suffering, self-saving and self-pity; in the least misunderstanding, self-defense and self-vindication; in our station in life, self-seeking and self-centeredness; in the smallest trials, self-inspection and self-accusation; in the daily routine, self-pleasing and self-choosing; in our education, self-boasting and self-expression; in our desires, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction; in our successes, self-admiration and self-congratulation; in our failures, self-excusing and self-justification; in spiritual attainments, self-righteousness and self-complacency;

in our public ministry, self-reflection and self-glory; in life as a whole, self-love and selfishness. The flesh is an “I” specialist. These are but a few of the multiple forms of the flesh to be discovered and taken to the cross. Although emancipated at the life-center of our redeemed beings through the indwelling and infilling of the Spirit, we are still in a fight, albeit on the victory side. Vast areas of the flesh must yet be crucified. We must become Christ-like.”

When Ezra and Eunice and their family returned to Peru, they read over their notes. “We give and receive in relationships. When we focus on giving, relationships grow and strengthen. When we focus on receiving, our relationships fail. The problem is that some think people, going places, and things are the source of life. These are not the source of life. These are gifts of life. Anytime we expect the gifts of life to

do what only God can do, our cups are drained of energy and fulfillment. When we find the real Source of Life, Jesus Christ, and serve Him with all our hearts, we will have discovered the deepest fulfillment!”

They prayed much about the need to restore broken relationships. Friends at home were praying. In the meantime, God was working in the hearts of the other missionaries in Peru. Ezra and Eunice shared their notes with the fellow missionaries and took the initiative in confessing their selfishness and sin. They took all the responsibility of these broken relationships upon themselves. Each of the missionaries did the same. There was revival, confessions, cleansing, and healing. They poured “oil and wine” in the other person’s cup. They blessed, encouraged, prayed, and forgave again and again, and God blessed their ministry with abundant fruit! 

A Woman After God’s Heart

Now, What Should You Say?

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



Many of you squirm with me as we imagine a youngster at our side

receiving a favor or gift from another. In the picture, maybe we *are* the parent, or maybe we *were* the child.

We desperately hope he'll say *thank you*, panicking lest our reputation as a mother or teacher of manners be judged. We whisper a bit forcefully and not-so-quietly, "Now, what should you say?" If we're lucky, he'll squeak out a thank you as he clutches the gift. Or a tenser scene may follow of an unwilling child, a waiting benefactor, and a stressed parent or teacher who has just backed herself into a tight corner.

Please indulge me in drawing the following comparison. There is a heavenly Parent. We are His "big" little children. We receive many gifts, day after day, and moment by moment. I think He nudges us at times, reminding us about our mountainous debt of gratitude. Sometimes we remember to be thankful before He nudges us. And sometimes I wonder if we miss His whispered reminders while we mindlessly grasp our blessings without even looking up.

One simple way we're prompted to exercise our gratitude muscle is by living in a country that asks us to take one day out of 365 to gratefully acknowledge all we've been given. More than that, the Bible repeatedly reminds us to say thank you. And to *live thankfully*. In Psalm 50 He discloses that the cattle on a thousand hills are His and that if

He were hungry, He would not tell us. He instructs us to bring *words of gratitude* with us when we offer our *sacrifices of thanksgiving*.

In the New Testament, we are commanded to be thankful *in* everything. I hope it's significant that it says *in* and not *for*. While gratitude calls for an attitude, it becomes obvious and real when it is acted out. There are countless ways we can offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

As a nudge, I'll share some random examples. We may say it verbally to the lady cleaning the public bathroom we are privileged to use; to the mailman who delivers our mail; and the minister who *delivers the Word*, as well as our SS teacher and song leader. Thank the store checkout person for *being here*. Thank your son for clearing the table. Your husband or your parents, for their faithfulness. Thank the magazine editor for his toilsome hours, and the school board. Thank the missionary for their unseen labors. Thank your sister for putting up with you. Thank your neighbor for what they bring to the neighborhood. Thank your employee for daily sacrifice.

Go on a gratefulness walk where you only allow yourself to think thoughts of what you're thankful for. Journal your gratefulness. Write notes to thank someone. Give tokens

of gratitude, as in a hostess gift. Donate to a cause out of gratitude. Read books about gratitude. Do a photo album of incidents or items that inspired gratitude. Refrain from or fast from something, then come back to it; it grows gratefulness. One inadvertent example of that is when after a brush with serious illness, birthdays become a precious gift instead of something to complain about.

This may sound pretty far removed and maybe my lens is tainted, but I remember as a young child that it was very rare to hear anyone expressing thanks for the meal they had just eaten. It became extremely meaningful to me when I began to hear husbands and children thank the lady of the house for the food they'd just enjoyed. I suggest that our culture has, in this context, grown the gratitude habit in the past 50 years. Perhaps we've become more thankful persons. Quite possibly we've become more verbally expressive.

Gratitude shapes us. Persons who express gratitude, become more grateful. People who smile, become happier. In contrast, those who moan and regret become more depressed. Gratitude humbles us. Gratitude grows from humility. These two qualities are intertwined, clearing our vision to recognize the good things

being extended to us. By giving thanks, we show that it was not our own efforts that yielded the reward or outcome, but we acknowledge that it was graciously given by another.

Gratitude shapes our concept of God. Read Jonah to see how the seaweeds were still wrapped around his head when he cried out with thanksgiving to his God. Our redemption stories out of hard times rise out of seaweed experiences and we begin to see our Redeemer God in new ways. This is the context when thanksgiving is shaped by sacrifice. Something burns on the altar of sacrifice. Consider the early colonists and their first Thanksgiving after a brutal winter, drought, and so many fresh graves. Sacrifice costs us. It entails suffering and the offering of what we wish to keep.

When I lived in South America, our Russian Mennonite neighbors made much of a day of thanksgiving at the end of harvest in June. Decades earlier these courageous people had left their homeland and migrated to a new continent and hemisphere enduring extreme hardship. They knew what starvation, fruitless labor, and fleeing for their lives looked like. Years later, they still hadn't gotten *over it* in the sense that their act of thanksgiving took on huge significance. They acted out their *Dia*

de la Gracia with a day of feasting, decorating the church house, singing praises, and celebration.

Gratitude also shapes others. I was in my teens when an older minister stopped me one day, and out of the blue thanked me for my smile. Memories of his gratitude still prompt me to smile. One of my former sixth grade students called me 20 years later to thank me for what I'd taught him. That has shaped my concept of sowing and reaping.

One more example of gratitude that shaped me follows. In Sunday school we were discussing our conversions and whether we remembered how *heaven came down and glory filled our souls* at the time of our new birth. Many expressed that they can scarcely remember the experience with clarity. One silver-haired grandma who always seemed saintly to me, told us in no uncertain terms that she will never forget the day she found God. She had been overwhelmed with her sense of undoneness and God's sufficiency and she had never lost the wonder. Her testimony of gratitude for her salvation has never left me and has shaped my own appreciation for salvation.

What does ungratefulness look like? It looks like the prelude to becoming fools and guilty of gross sin as stated in Romans 1:21, 22. Read Deuteronomy 8 to see what it means to be grateful and to acknowledge God's liberality with our actions. On the contrary, this chapter also vividly illustrates the opposite. If we have no sense of receiving, we have no sense of gratitude. It is our depravity that thinks we earned or deserved something. For a picture of an entitlement attitude, see Matthew 23, Luke 18:11, and John 12:43. *Entitlement* isn't beautiful. And it robs from our liberal, generous God.

Melody Beattie said: "*Gratitude turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity...it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.*"

So, as we accept countless gifts from others and from our gracious Father, what do we say and how do we live out gratitude? Hopefully we don't tear off the wrapping without looking into His generous face. By the grace of God and the nudging of His people, we've learned what to say.



In every success story, you find someone
has made a *COURAGEOUS* decision. -PETER F. DRUCKER

You Have All of Them?

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

This is a precious account of two women who loved five orphans, and how God saw and heard their prayers. In a restaurant in Uganda, Natasha and Katie were overwhelmed with God's care and provision.

Natasha and her daughter, Carol, were eating lunch at a restaurant in Kampala, Uganda. Natasha wanted to connect more closely with her adopted 16-year-old daughter. While they were enjoying lunch together, Carol kept looking behind her at a group of girls in the restaurant. There was a white lady (a *mzungu*, as white people are called in Africa) with the group of girls.

"Mama," Carol said, "I know those girls from Masese. Years ago when I lived in the slum just outside of Jinga, I used to play with them."

"Let's go over and talk with them," Natasha suggested.

"Oh no, I would rather not," Carol, who is really shy, responded.

Natasha, a friendly extravert, persisted, "Come, I will go with you, and we can greet your old friends."

"My daughter recognized your girls," Natasha commented to the white lady, "from the days she lived in Masese."

The woman, Katie, got out of her seat. She searched Carol's face. "Are you Toddie's daughter?" she wondered.

"Yes, Toddie was my mother," Carol responded.

Katie's mouth fell open, she began to cry and ran over and hugged Carol. "Where are your siblings? The last time I saw all of you was at your mother's funeral. I was so sad that day. Where are the others? Where are your sisters and brothers?"

"We are in the process of adopting all five of that family group," Natasha confided.

"You have all of them?" Katie exclaimed, "You have all of them! Your mother," she shared with Carol, "used to make beads. She was my friend and attended Bible Study. I have been praying that God would send her children a family and that a door of love and care would open for them."

Katie Davis Major was overwhelmed. “Your mother named her youngest daughter Katie after me. I was so honored. I even held little Katie during her mother’s funeral. There is a picture of your mother in my book.”¹

The meeting in the restaurant and getting to know the lady who knew and loved Carol’s mother and her children was overwhelming to Natasha and was such a bright blessing for her daughter, Carol. They could feel God’s love and care

*1. Kisses from Katie, 2011, Katie Davis
Used with permission
<https://strengthtostrength.org>
“The God Who Sees”*

through the meeting with Katie and the girls.

“It was such an incredible moment in my life,” Natasha shared. “God does hear our prayers, and He sees us. He saw the desires of Katie’s heart for the orphan children. He saw our family’s desire to open our hearts and our home, and love children for Jesus.”

In kindness and love God brought the two women, who loved Toddie’s children, together in the restaurant that day. God heard and answered their prayers.

Charlton and Natasha adopted that family group of five orphans. Praise the Lord! They had all of them. 

youth messages

Living in the Now

Josh Kooistra, New Concord, OH

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

I remember from a young age that I was always looking forward to something. When I was very small, it was weekends and upcoming

events. Then as my awareness and grasp of time continued to develop, it was holidays, family gatherings, and birthdays that had my focus. Then there came a point where I began to look forward to milestones. I couldn’t wait till I was 12 and could go to the Intermediate Sunday School class. Once I was in Intermediate, I couldn’t

wait to graduate from school and get a job. Once I did that, I couldn't wait till I was old enough to go to youth, then it was to be able to drive, then it was get my first phone, then it was Bible School, then it was go into service, then it was courtship, and then it was get married, and so on.

As I sit and write this, I reflect back on those years and those milestones. It's been close to a decade since I got married and over seven years since I became a father. Now, almost everything has slowed down. Please don't get me wrong, I'm not calling myself old, but I'd be lying if I said I still feel like I'm 16, 19, or 23. I'm not as fast as I was at 18. I'm now a bit of a liability at activities in which I used to excel. My athleticism is leaving me—or maybe I'm leaving it? Even my metabolism has slowed down!

I mentioned that almost everything has slowed down. However, it feels as if one thing most definitely has not. In fact, most days it feels like it has sped up. That thing is time.

“Yesterday's the past, tomorrow's the future, but today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.” -Bil Keane.

As a result of my reflections on my past, I came to a conclusion which my title and the previous quote implied. We can't speed up time. We need to be present in the moment

and enjoy each and every one of them while they are here. C.S. Lewis said, “The future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of sixty minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is.”

A couple weeks ago, my older siblings and I took a rare road trip back to the town that we visited so many summers while we were growing up. It was the little farming town where my grandparents lived for many years while we were growing up. God had called my dad's aunt home to eternity, and it was one of the last funerals where all of the family would be back “home.” I have a lot of fond memories of that town and those trips to see my grandparents over various holidays. But there came a time, in my mid to late teens and into my early twenties, when I had so much “important” stuff going on that I didn't pay as much attention to my family as I should have. Unfortunately, Elon Musk has not invented a time machine, so I can't go back and capitalize on the opportunities I had when they were available. I don't get those back.

I am so thankful for the life I have lived thus far, and yet I still have regrets for choices that I made. I wish I had spent more time with my grandparents. They are all gone now. I won't see them again on this side

of eternity. I wish I had gone and visited my brother in the children's home more often before his sudden and tragic death. I wish I had stayed in closer contact with my younger brother after I left for service and later as I moved to another state. Maybe if I had done better staying in touch he might not be where he is today. I wish I had taken the time to make the most of the now and the people in my life, and not focus so much on myself and what was around the corner for me.

Now, my challenge is different. I still need to focus on being present, but there is now a danger of wishing for the past and missing out on the now just as much as there was focusing on the future. Take the time, make the time, however you want to phrase it, but ask yourself, "If future me could write me a letter and tell me what he thought of the decision I'm making right now, what would

he say?" We do need to reflect on the past, for we learn through the mistakes and triumphs of not only ourselves but others. Live your life in such a way that you have as few regrets as possible. Spend time with loved ones. The older I get there are more of them that leave this earth for eternity with God. Don't just spend time with them, spend quality time! I doubt anyone staring death in the face has ever thought, "I wish I had spent more time on my phone," or "I wish I had taken a few more selfies."

Life is about relationships. I may have said this before, but it is no less true. "When we leave this earth, we will take absolutely nothing we own with us. The only thing we can hope will enter eternity with us is the people whose lives we have influenced for Jesus Christ." Make every moment count. Don't live in the past, or in the future. Live in the now!



No matter how grouchy you're feeling,
You'll find the **smile** more or less **healing**.
It grows in a wreath
All around the front teeth—
Thus preserving the face from congealing.

-ANTHONY EUWER



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THOUGHT GEMS

A warm smile thaws an icy stare.

• • • • •

God provides the nuts, but He does not crack them.

• • • • •

Gossip is winding up your tongue and letting it go.

• • • • •

Thank you for the food before us, the friends beside us, and the love
between us.

• • • • •

Take a tip from nature—your ears aren't made to shut, but your mouth is!

• • • • •

Thanksgiving isn't just a day. It's a way we can live our lives every day.

-KATRINA MAYER

• • • • •

A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on. -CARL SANDBURG

• • • • •

When you see someone without a smile, give him one of yours.

• • • • •

Smile—it's the second best thing you can do with your lips.

• • • • •

Anger is a wind that blows out the lamp of the mind.

• • • • •

Zeal without knowledge is fanaticism.