



Calvary MESSENGER

“ . . . God forbid that I should glory, save in
the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”
Galatians 6:14

NOVEMBER 2019

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Calvary Messenger

November 2019

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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Come in, O come!

Come in, O come! the door stands open now;
I knew Thy voice; Lord Jesus, it was Thou.
The sun has set long since the storms begin;
'Tis time for Thee, my Savior, O come in!

Alas, ill-ordered shows the dreary room;
The household stuff lies heaped amidst the gloom,
The table empty stands, the couch undressed;
Ah, what a welcome for th' Eternal Guest!

Yet welcome, and tonight; this doleful scene
Is e'en itself my cause to hail Thee in;
This dark confusion e'en at once demands
Thine own bright presence, Lord, and ord'ring hands.

I seek no more to alter things, or mend,
Before the coming of so great a Friend;
All were at best unseemly; and 'twere ill
Beyond all else to keep Thee waiting still.

Come, not to find, but make this troubled heart
A dwelling worthy of Thee as Thou art;
To chase the gloom, the terror, and the sin:
Come, all Thyself, yea come, Lord Jesus, in!

Handley Carr Glyn Moule (1841-1920)

Public Domain

[Can be sung to the tune of "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart"]



Walls and Gates

“Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought” (Isaiah 60:11).

During the past week we have been driving along narrow, curvy roads through the picturesque country of Ireland. It is a land of cows and sheep, green hills and mountains, rocky shorelines and lighthouses, cathedrals and castles, hedges, and **walls**.

Walls are ubiquitous in this country. Some of these walls, in the form of hedges, are even visible from the air as they crisscross fields and hills. Along the narrow roads are stone walls. There are low walls that you can see over. There are tall walls that completely hide the view from the roadway. In the coastal areas are stone walls, intricately laid up with stones removed from the local property to expose the thin layer of soil for tillage.

Many things are hidden behind the walls. Often there are only glimpses of houses and barns as we drive

along. Contrasting the typical, open front yard of the U.S., every property seems to be surrounded with walls. Why are there so many walls? What is the purpose of all these walls?

In eras gone by, walls protected property and possessions from foreigners and marauders. Why risk the loss of possessions to open displays of property and possessions? Even today walls keep belongings inside and intruders outside.

There are many references to walls in the Bible. The strength of a city depended on the quality of its walls. The Psalmist asked God to build walls. “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem” (Psalms 51:18). While walls are intended to keep violence on the outside, they bring no promise of peace within their boundaries. Psalm 122:7 is a prayer for peace, “Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.” When David was fleeing from King Saul, his men protected the shepherds of Nabal and were like a wall to them. “They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with

them keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 25:16). The breaking down of the walls is a sign of judgment from God, “And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down” (Isaiah 5:5).

As important as walls were in the past, and we still live in walled houses, walls do not offer the same protection from searching eyes anymore. Satellites continually pass over us, and we can readily find aerial photos of walled properties that clearly show what is meant to be hidden. But while man’s ability to observe from the air is recent, God has never been hindered by walls. He can easily observe all that is within the “walls” of our hearts and minds. “And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts” (Matthew 9:4)?

Although walls are very important, they are useless unless they also include a door or a gate. **Gates** give us the privilege to be selective in entry. Gates are closed in time of danger but when open allow free passage. Let’s explore the importance of open gates.

As Christians, open gates should show our generosity. We are called to be good stewards of what God has given us, so we should realize that the

blessings from God are not our own. May we hold them with open hands and be generous with the poor and needy, both near and far. God taught His people how to share with the stranger and the poor in Leviticus 19:10, “And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.” Today, obeying this command to not glean our vineyards may be fulfilled in very different ways, but God still desires us to care for the needy.


Open gates are contrasted with locked gates and privacy signs. Do we portray a welcome to people approaching our person, our homes, and our churches? Do we trust God enough to be vulnerable as we relate with those we meet? Seekers should easily recognize our openness to show God’s love to them wherever we go. May we not depend on “greeters” to welcome visitors in our places of worship regardless of their appearance.

Honesty and transparency are also signs of open gates. While we need not wear our feelings on our proverbial sleeves, faithful Christians do not have anything to hide. One rich blessing of honesty is the freedom from needing to remember “alternate facts” that are meant to

cover up our mistakes and sins. King David expressed the proper response when we realize we have tried to cover up and hide our sins. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

May God grant us the wisdom to have the proper walls in our lives

and to know both when to close and open our gates. Truly, the Prince of Peace will protect us as we seek to live our lives in the Kingdom of God in our present day. “Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought” (Isaiah 60:11).

-AY 

Announcement

2020 Annual Beachy Ministers’ Meetings

April 7-9, 2020

Hosted by:

Mt. Olive Mennonite Church, Montgomery, IN

Lighthouse of Faith Fellowship, Huntsville, AR

Shady Lawn Mennonite Church, Mountain View, AR

Still Waters Mennonite Church, Georgetown, OH

(To be held at Antioch Christian Church, 3007 East US Highway 50, Washington, IN 47501)

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CASP WORK IN KANSAS

Lord willing, we will be having a CASP project in Hutchinson, Kansas in January and February of 2020.

The young men going in January should arrive there Saturday, January 4, and leave February 1. The young men going in February should arrive there Saturday, February 1, and leave February 29.


Jeff, at Interfaith, said he has plenty of work to do—almost double from other years, so we would be delighted to have enough young men to fill both months.

There are plans to frame two duplex-type houses, roughly 30' x 60', with a fire wall in the middle. We will be using Menards kits for the project. Also, there was flooding in the area that we will be working with as well.

We will need eight young men in January and eight young men in February.

If you are interested in going, call or email Elmer Stoltzfus at 614-306-0913 or elmerbonita89@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

–Elmer Stoltzfus, for CASP 

the bottom line

Raise a Psalm of Thanksgiving

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

There are times when we look back over our lives and take stock of where we are relative to where we began. When we consider the variables of experiences in the past, we are made

to think about God. God, Who made everything from nothing, merely spoke the word, and it came to be. We are nothing of ourselves but “something” by the creative power of God. To be sure, we are merely

“something” to the point of being nearly “nothing”, since we have nothing of ourselves.

The Bible says, “All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity” (Isaiah 40:17), and “they that war against thee shall be as nothing” (Isaiah 41:12), and “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing” (Daniel 4:35). We are a little “something” as an individual, and are taught to say, “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreath; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity” (Psalm 39:4,5). We are taught to think of how weak we are rather than how strong we might seem to be, and yet God, as our Creator and Redeemer, places a high value on all those who are His.

Reflecting a bit on our lives, whether young or old, should evoke thanksgiving to God for the least of His mercies and the full measure of His grace. If God would say that He will not give us one more thing until we have thanked Him for everything we already have been given, and then we would be told to write it down in a list, you know what would happen? That is correct; we could not

remember everything that has been given to us, nor would we have the capacity to know all the benefits of life given to us personally. We would be stuck; we would be finished; we could not continue to exist on such a proposition from God were He to do so.

What I will propose is that someone in every family who reads this message would take a piece of paper in this month of Thanksgiving, writing on the top, “Our Psalm of Thanksgiving.” Make as many verses as you wish using the pattern of the Psalms in the Bible. You could do it verse by verse, using numbers, and writing as many as you desire. In the book of Psalms, Psalm 117 has two verses, and that could be enough to qualify as a psalm from you as an individual or as a family. Psalm 119 has 176 verses, and if you are so inclined or primed, you could wax very eloquent and write 177 verses or more to outdo that work in that Psalm!

You could write an original psalm that no one has ever written, or you could simply choose a Psalm from the 150 in the book of Psalms and paraphrase it according to your inspiration. While I was a teacher at Calvary Bible School, I taught the Psalms class a number of times. One homework assignment was for each

of them to write a psalm of their own. You should have heard their groans! I was sure I was not their favorite teacher in that moment. But guess what; they handed in some excellent work and said they were okay with doing it again! (Probably because it was easier or took less of their time than some other assignments!)

Here is my psalm.

O Lord, my Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth and beyond, in the heaven of heavens.

Thou hast purposed me even before Thou hadst laid the foundations of the earth.

Thy power was displayed at Mount St. Helens when upon the great swelling thereof,

Thou hast made known by what power and design Thou didst create the earth,

And by earthquakes in divers places Thou hast caused great tsunamis to roll,

That by Thy mighty works great desolations are seen by the children of men.

Whereas by Thy love and care, the tender petals of the morning flowers open anew,

And even greater than these is the most tender of all, even the birth of a newborn babe.

By these, O Lord, Thou dost show upon the earth both the fury and

desolation of hell,

And the loveliness and peace of heaven in a miniature of illustrative display.

And then I think upon the life that Thou hast ordered and ordained for me,

The family and the church to live and to grow, and to flourish in them with peace and grace,

The larger community and the nation, to work and to contribute by profit withal,

That in the midst of these things, great and small, Thou hast prospered the earth with Thy goodness.


Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my hands to acknowledge Thy great favor toward me,

And to extol Thy great name, Thou Most High God, for Thy mercies toward us all.

May the generations to come be instant to love and serve Thee all their days,

And join the saints through all the earth in an unceasing benediction of praise to Thee,

Both now and forever. Amen and amen!

The Bottom Line is that in every circumstance and in every day of our lives, God is worthy to be praised for His marvelous work. He is worthy for us to do a little work for Him and write a psalm of thanksgiving. 

Singing with Understanding

Joshua Good, Halifax, VA

In Part 1 of this article (*see the October issue*), we noted the significance of sincere worship. Worship that honors God must be from the heart. Therefore, a heart in tune with God is at the core of spiritual singing. But of equal importance is a mind that is actively engaged.

The Bible makes it clear that God-honoring worship requires using our head. Jesus said that “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). The Apostle Paul echoed this when he wrote, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

The songs we sing contain many expressions of faith and commitment, and we should develop a conscious understanding of their meanings. But I wonder if too often we sing without the understanding.

Hopefully we’re not like the little boy who came home from Sunday school and informed his mother that they sang a song about a bear. “Its name was Gladly,” the boy said. When the mother asked what song it was, the boy answered, “Gladly, the

Cross-Eyed Bear!”

And did you hear of the youngster who thought that the Christmas song said, “While shepherds washed their socks by night,” or the lady who earnestly sang, “Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way. I am the potter, Thou art the clay?”

We chuckle at these extreme cases, yet we can make similar mistakes by not putting sufficient thought into what we’re singing. Knowledgeable singing involves looking carefully at the text. Sometimes we are unconscious of what we sing and may even sing from memory what we’ve never understood!

God is worthy of our best, including the use of our intellect. It is vital that we put forth an honest effort to understand the meaning and importance of the words. When singing, we should ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What does this song mean?
2. What story is it telling?
3. What is the lesson for me?

Song leaders, you play a crucial role in this. As worship leader, you have a special opportunity to help the congregation sing with understanding. What a privilege! It is fitting to make a few short comments

that clue the congregation into the meaning of the text. While this requires some homework, it results in worship that is more meaningful to the worshippers and more pleasing to God.

To illustrate what it means to sing with understanding, let's take a closer look at three familiar songs.

In the hymn "Nearer, My God, to Thee," we find Jacob on a journey. Hymnwriter Sarah Adams includes these concepts taken from the Bible story: wanderer, darkness, stone pillow, dreams, steps to Heaven, angels, waking thoughts, Bethel, and nearness to God.

The song's theme is discovered in the words of Jacob when he awoke, and in fearful wonder exclaimed, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not" (Genesis 28:16). As we sing with understanding, we express our yearning to know God intimately and experience His nearness, and we are reminded that difficulties often draw us closer to Him.

The second stanza of "Come, Thou Fount" begins with this interesting statement: "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by Thy help I'm come." What is an Ebenezer? Have you ever raised one? This expression is taken from 1 Samuel 7:12. Samuel had called the people together for a time of confession and worship, and when the Philistines heard about it, they rallied to attack.

While offering the sacrifice, Samuel cried out to the Lord for deliverance. God answered with a "great thunder" that scared the Philistines so badly they panicked and were routed by the Israelites. In grateful response, Samuel set up a stone marker and called the place Ebenezer, saying, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."

The writer of this hymn, Robert Robinson, takes this scene and transfers its message to us. We sing of God's great faithfulness to us in our desperate times of need. Truly, God's "streams of mercy . . . call for songs of loudest praise"! When we sing with understanding, we renew our commitment to Him as we conclude, "Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above."

"In the Hour of Trial," penned by James Montgomery, tells of the dark night of Jesus' trial and Peter's denial. But this song is really not about Peter; it's about you and me.

*In the hour of trial, Jesus, pray for me;
Lest by base denial I depart from Thee;
When Thou seest me waver, with a
look recall,
Nor for fear or favor suffer me to fall.*

As we sing these words with understanding, we picture the pleading look Jesus gave Peter and remember that it is possible for us to commit that same cruel offense today.

John Wesley listed some practical pointers for singing, closing with this challenge: "Above all sing spiritually.

Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound but offered to God continually. So shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve here, and reward you when He cometh in

the clouds of heaven.”

As we continue to sing, let us resolve to deepen our loyalty to Christ through the commitments we make in the songs we sing.

[Reprinted from Life Lines, May-June 2019 issue. This is Part 2 of a two-part article. Part 1 in the October issue was entitled “Singing with the Spirit.” Used by permission.]



The Potter and the Clay Part II

Jeremiah 18:1-6

Daniel Lehigh, Hanover, PA

Continued from last month. Part I talked about how the potter gathers the clay, cleans the clay, and finally, shapes the clay into a vessel of his choice. –AY

4. Drying the container

After the vessel is shaped and separated, the potter places it on the shelf for drying. The process slows to a halt at this stage. Before, there was lots of activity: digging, beating, probing, cleaning, forming, and spinning. Now there is rest. The unfired vessel will collapse if it is filled with water. It will break if it is handled roughly. The drying and resting are very important. The vessel will break and be useless if it is fired before it is properly dried.

This is an example of what often happens in our lives. Sometimes we experience periods of dryness in

our spiritual lives. We seem to be on God’s shelf, out of His service. God can use these times to prepare us for greater service. It is important that we rest and see what God is teaching us. It is important that we keep pursuing communion with God, even in the dry times. If we persist, we will break through into glorious fellowship with Him.

God can use these dry times in our lives to build maturity into us. He can teach us valuable lessons that will increase our usefulness to Him. Let’s be patient when God places us on the drying shelf. Let’s look forward to the many wonderful blessings which are

being prepared for us in the eternal world.

5. Firing the container

When the vessel has dried sufficiently, the potter places it in the kiln for the firing process. The temperature must be incredibly hot, approximately 2,000° Fahrenheit (1,100° Celsius) for the furnace to do its job. As it is heated, the vessel experiences changes in its molecular structure which make it useful and watertight. The vessel would dissolve if water were put into it before the firing. But after the firing, it will hold water for years. The vessel that was soft and easily marred becomes hard and durable. The fire that burned it caused it to become a useful vessel.

My wife and I had a soup bowl for approximately forty years. It developed a crazed cracking on the inside. We thought it was defective and took it back to the manufacturer. The representative explained that the bottom surface does not receive the coating of glazing that seals the surface of the piece. If the piece is allowed to stand in water for a length of time, it will absorb the moisture through its unglazed bottom surface. The moisture will migrate into the clay and eventually will cause crazing as it is heated and cooled during ordinary use.

As I thought of that, I thought about our spiritual lives. All of us have one or more areas where we

have to battle with Satan. He knows exactly what our vulnerable areas are. He is an expert at tempting us in those areas. It is so important that we recognize those areas and avoid the temptation. It is important that we be accountable to someone in those areas and not give Satan a foothold. Like the clay piece, the damage will not happen all at once. It will be a slow process of letting down our guard here or making a small compromise there. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Satan will steal our spirituality until we are cold and indifferent to God. We need to carefully guard our thoughts and our deeds in order to be certain Satan is not taking advantage of us.

Never allow yourself to engage in a small or seemingly harmless behavior that you know is sinful. Satan only needs a tiny crack in our Christian armor to get a foothold in our lives. The pores in the bottom of that pot are microscopic in size, but they are enough for the moisture to do its damage. We need to guard diligently the doors and windows of our minds so Satan doesn't enter.

Some of us are in God's furnace today. Our lives are filled with trial and heartache. We wonder if God still loves and cares for us. But, dear one, do not lose heart. God, the Master Potter, is perfecting and refining you into a beautiful vessel for His service. He knows how much

heartache you can stand. He will not give you more than you can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Allow Him to wrap His arms of comfort around you. Lean on the everlasting arms of His mercy and allow Him to make you a vessel fit for His use.

There are some very comforting words for the weary in Isaiah chapter 40: “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

6. Using the container

After the vessel is fired, it is ready for use. The potter who makes the vessel as he sees fit determines the use of the vessel. From the same lump of clay, He can make a porcelain vase for a king’s palace, or a garbage pot. Sometimes we aren’t satisfied with how God made us, or the place He puts us for service. We need to gladly accept His will for our lives. Never argue with Him, and always serve Him wherever He puts you.

Paul says in Romans 9:20, “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” Of course the answer is no. How ungrateful it is for us to complain to a sovereign God about His will. How unseemly for the creature to complain to the Creator about how he or she was created.

The clay that yields to the

potter’s touch brings happiness and satisfaction to the potter. But the clay that will not yield to the potter’s wishes is a constant source of frustration and irritation to him.

The vessel that is finished and useful is a source of joy to the potter. Just so, those who yield to God and allow Him to cleanse the impurities from their lives and gladly surrender to His will for their lives, will be a source of joy and pleasure to the Master Potter.

As we live our lives for our blessed Master, let’s determine to be yielded clay in His hands. Let’s allow Him to find us, clean out all the impurities from our lives, and shape us into a vessel He can use. Let’s not complain when we find ourselves in God’s furnace. Rather, let’s allow the fire to do its work and then go forth to serve Him as beautiful vessels fit for the Master’s use.

God, the Master Potter, is longing for each of us to yield to Him so He can shape us into beautiful vessels to be used in His kingdom. Will you continue to resist His will, causing pain and heartache to both Him and you? Or will you surrender your will to His desires and be a useful vessel for Him? The choice is yours!

[Used by permission of Bible Helps, PO Box 391, Hanover, PA, 17331. Reprinted from Booklet No. 429.]



The Shepherd's Heart

"Thanksgiving is a Time for God and Family"

Ronald J. Border, Minerva, OH

It is a truth that thanksgiving for God and family can never be limited to one day. The spirit of thanksgiving should consume our thoughts and devotions every day.

Our hearts are stirred continually in humble thanks for all God has done for us. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name" (Psalm 100:4). "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15). "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57). "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place" (II Corinthians 2:14). "... 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). "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving" (Psalm 69:30). "Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms" (Psalm 95:2). "Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving. . ." (Psalm 147:7). "Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 7:12).

We can never offer too many thanks to our God. In addition to the gift of salvation, He has provided us with a rich heritage in our families. Our families provide us a place of loving nurture and Christian example. Even as we sit together and thank God for His many blessings, we remember the love we share together as a caring family unit. We learn the lessons of life under the guidance of God's Word. As we pray and sing and meditate, we are bound to God and to each other through times of sickness and health. We learn respect and fairness in play and duty and diligence in work. God's love causes

us to reach out in ministry to the needs of others. Family life makes us more selfless.

What is our attitude when we sit down to the Thanksgiving meal? First of all, we thank God for Who He is! Then, we thank Him for His blessings to His children. It would be good to think about how we can help others.

marriages

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

Garber-Overholt

Bro. Lyndon, son of Harlan and Linda Garber, Deer Lodge, TN, (presently serving in Ukraine), and Sis. Abigail, daughter of Lawrence and Beth Anne Overholt, Lyndon, KS, on August 9, 2019, at Lyndon Amish Mennonite Church by Lawrence Overholt.

Stoltzfus-King

Bro. Kevin, son of J. Ivan and Ruth Ann Stoltzfus, Narvon, PA, and Sis. Kaitlyn, daughter of Mahlon and Elsie King, New Holland, PA, on March 9, 2019, at Conestoga Mennonite Church for West Haven Church by Lee Stoltzfus.

Wagler-Brubaker

Bro. Jay, son of Gerry and Susie Wagler, Stratford, ON, and Sis. Emily, daughter of Raymond and Julia Brubaker, Lamonte, MO, on August 16, 2019, at

Being a blessing to others helps us to “flesh out” the spirit of thanksgiving in our own minds.

Thanks be to God for His many mercies unto the children of men!

[Reprinted with permission of Ronald Border. Article #426 from The Shepherd's Heart series.]



Lamonte Christian Church for Lamonte Mennonite Church by Steve Strite.

Yoder-Eash

Bro. Austin, son of Troy and Matilda Yoder, Montezuma, GA, and Sis. Shari, daughter of Jerry and Vera Eash, Auburn, KY, on August 31, 2019, at Plainview Mennonite Church by Luke Troyer.

Yoder-Fehr

Bro. Derrek, son of Stephen and Michelle Yoder, Milford, NE, and Sis. Rebecca, daughter of Junior and Sharon Fehr, Mountville, SC, on July 13, 2019, at Rock Bridge Church for Cold Spring Mennonite Church by Merl Beiler.



cradle roll

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

Beachy, Marcus and Angie (Miller), Kalona, IA, first child and daughter, Alyssa Lainey, February 21, 2019.

Bender, Javan and Melody (Petersheim), Abbeville, SC, fourth child, third son, Branson Cole, September 3, 2019.

Beiler, Jalin and Rosetta (Stoltzfus), Bridgeton, NJ, first child and daughter, Kenzie Elizabeth, August 25, 2019.

Gerber, Collin and Becky (Ropp), Gadshill, ON, fifth child, third daughter, Leanna Faith, April 21, 2019.

Gerber, John and Tanya (Jantzi), Millbank, ON, sixth child, fourth daughter, Katerina Mary, May 26, 2019.

Gingerich, Caleb and Melanie (Kauffman), Leesburg, OH, first child and daughter, Elana Rachele, August 10, 2019.

Graber, Weston and Esther (Zook), Amboy, IN, sixth child, second daughter, Karis Sofia, July 15, 2019.

Heatwole, Jared and Sara (Yoder), Williamsville, VA, fourth child, first daughter, Kelly Ruth, September 13, 2019.

Hostetler, Jason and Donna (Yoder), Danville, AL, fourth child, third daughter, Lindsey Grace, August 29, 2019.

Kauffman, Lin and Rose (Yoder), Falkville, AL, third child, second daughter, Kristi Brooke, August 21, 2019 (one son in heaven).

Keim, Darrell and Lanora (Troyer), Milroy, IN, fourth child, third daughter, Brielle Faith, August 16, 2019.

Mast, Nate and Marylou (Jantzi), Monkton, ON, third child, second daughter, Kenzie Dawn, September 19, 2019.

Miller, Dale and Myra (Hershberger), Uniontown, OH, sixth child, fourth son, Garrett Quinn, August 28, 2019.

Miller, Leander and Emma Marie (Overholt), Kalona, IA, eighth child, fifth son, Denver Wynn, November 27, 2018.

Nisly, Wayne and Sharon (Brenneman), Hartselle, AL, eleventh child, ninth son, Timothy Allen, May 27, 2019.

Overholt, Benny and Beth (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, fourth child and son, Candor Zayne, May 21, 2019.

Raber, Owen and Carol (Miller), Russellville, OH, third child, second son, Tyler James, September 2, 2019.

Schrock, Robert and LeAnna (Wagler), Stuarts Draft, VA, second child and daughter, Hadassah Ruth, August 29, 2019.

Showalter, Jeremy and Laura (Rohrer), Eagle Rock, VA, seventh child, fourth daughter, Mariah Joy, September 17, 2019.

ordinations

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

Stoll, Robert and Rose (Overholt), Donalds, SC, daughter, Angel, born August 22, 2007, received for adoption, July 18, 2019.

Tulcey, William and Lucy (Schrock), Scotland Halfmoon, Belize, second child and son, Malachi James, Sept. 8, 2019.


Wagler, David and Barbara (Gingerich), Kokomo, IN, sixth child, third daughter, McKinzie Danielle, May 19, 2019.

Wagler, Randall and Emily (Wagler), fourth child, third son, Bennet Mahlon, September 16, 2019.

Weirich, Caleb and Sheryl (Hochstetler), Aroda, VA, fifth child, second son, Shawn Eric, September 28, 2019.

Yoder, Francis and Nelly (Swartzentruber), Auburn, KY, second and third children, twin girls, Analia Grace and Eliana Kate, August 4, 2019.


Yoder, Morris and Beth (Martin), Montezuma, GA, fourth child and son, Jordon Nate, September 4, 2019.

Yoder, Tim and Ruth (Miller), Mifflinburg, PA, sixth child, fourth daughter, Briana Joy, Sept. 8, 2019. 



Bro. Josh Graber, 32, (wife, Allison Beachy), Auburn, KY, was ordained as minister for Providence Mennonite Fellowship on August 25, 2019. Preordination messages were given by Joe Kauffman of Burkesville, KY. The charge was given by Jason Miller assisted by Leroy Kauffman and Luke Troyer. Levi Eicher was also in the lot.

Bro. Michael “Mike” Hostetler, 32, (wife, Melody Yoder) was ordained as minister for Oak Grove Mennonite Church on September 29, 2019. Preordination messages were brought by Duane Weaver and Ken Miller. The charge was given by Lamar Hochstetler assisted by Tim Miller and Ivan Beachy. Michael “Mike” Yoder was also in the lot.

Bro. Arlen Stoltzfus, 30, Morgantown, PA, was ordained as deacon at West Haven A.M. Church on September 8, 2019. Preordination messages were brought by Marvin Fisher. The charge was given by Lee Stoltzfus, assisted by Melvin Beiler and Dave Stoltzfus. Alvin Stoltzfus and Al Stoltzfus shared the lot. 

Graber, Mervin J., 59, passed suddenly from this life into his eternal reward on June 28, 2019, at the St. Francis Hospital ER.

He was a member of Ebenezer Amish Mennonite Church and a beloved bishop of the same.

He was born December 13, 1959, in Ft. Wayne, IN, the son of Henry S. and Susanne (Zehr) Graber.

He owned and operated Graber Construction Co. in Oskaloosa, KS, and had worked as a general contractor for many years.

As a church body, we sorely miss him. He had a love for God and the Bible as well as a love for the brethren, and last, but certainly not least, was his love for his wife and family as he plainly showed us what was important in his life. His life touched many lives in the course of his short journey here on earth.

On February 9, 1980, he married Betty Jean Graber in Hicksville, OH, and to this union were born three sons and two daughters: Jason (Delores) Graber; Justin (Carolyn) Graber, Melvern, KS; Joshua (Allison) Graber, Auburn, KY; Jessica (Philip) Miller, Oskaloosa, KS; Jenna (Robert) Wagler, who along with his wife, Betty, survive.

He is also survived by his parents, Henry and Susanne (Zehr) Graber, of Grabill, IN; six brothers: Melvin, Marlin, Ervin, Willis, Louis, Ernie; and one sister, Rosa Mae Hilty, all of Grabill, IN.

He also left behind 11 grandchildren: Trenton Graber, Kaitlyn Graber, Kyler Graber, Mikayla Graber, and Bryson Graber, Melvern, KS; Kennedy Graber and Patrick Graber of Auburn, KY; Alexis Miller, Aubrie Miller, DeeJon Miller, and Adriel Miller, Oskaloosa, KS.

The funeral was held at Ebenezer Amish Mennonite Church, and those officiating were Jonas Weaver, Kevin Miller, Terry Meyers, David L. Yoder, Gareth Yoder, and Rudy Overholt.

His body was laid to rest at the Ebenezer Amish Mennonite Cemetery.

Jason Graber, Justin Graber, Joshua Graber, Philip Miller, Robert Wagler, and Scott Ribordy served as casket bearers.

Kuepfer, Raymond K., 64, son of the late Amos and Magdalena (Kuepfer) Kuepfer, was born January 26, 1955, in Wellesley Township and peacefully passed on to his eternal reward on July 22, 2019.

He was baptized upon the confession of his faith in Jesus Christ and was a member of the Cedar Grove Amish Mennonite Church.

On March 23, 1976, he married Laura Albrecht. She survives, along with three sons: Jeffrey (Rhoda), Lucknow; Joseph (Sherry), Brussels; and Jonathan (Janine), Millbank; three daughters: Sharon (Shane) Steckly, Wingham; Sara Lynn (Tony) Gingrich, Atwood; Sandra (Stephen) Schmidt, Milverton; and 26

grandchildren.

Also surviving are his siblings: Joseph (Selena); Peter (Laureen); Christy; Mary (Paul) Kuepfer; parents-in-law, Simon and Lydia (Jantzi) Albrecht; brothers and sisters-in-law: Lorne Albrecht, Catherine Kuepfer, Israel (Marion) Albrecht; John (Florence) Albrecht; Mary (Steven) Kuepfer; Lloyd (Kathryn) Albrecht, Beatrice (Larry) Jantzi; Verna Kuepfer; Donna (Chris) Kuepfer, and many nieces and nephews.

Raymond was predeceased by his brothers: LeRoy, Reuben, Seranus, and Danny; sister, Fanny Marie Kuepfer, and sister-in-law, Irene Albrecht.

The funeral was held on July 25 with Larry Ropp and Tim Gerber serving. Burial was in the church cemetery.

Yoder, Amos J., 102, Grove City, MN, died September 11, 2019, at his home. He was born on November 26, 1916, to John A. and Barbara (Yoder) Yoder, in Custer County, OK.

Oklahoma always had a special place in his memories, especially attending Deer Creek School with Native American and Amish children and farming during the Great Depression. Amos was known as a good horseman who could make sharp corners with a horse and plow.

Amos was baptized in September 1935 and became a member of the Old Order Amish church in Custer County.

The Second World War brought huge changes to his life. He registered as a conscientious objector. When the letter came, he rode his horse seven miles to

Weatherford early in the morning, then turned the horse loose to walk home by itself while Amos boarded the bus to report for Civilian Public Service. He was told he would be gone for a matter of months, but it was five years before the war ended, and he was free to go home. During this time he served in a variety of CPS camps in the west where he served as camp cook and worked in soil conservation, forestry, and dairy farming. After CPS, Amos was asked to serve with Mennonite Central Committee in Paraguay. He and five other young men took a freighter to Brazil and went upriver to Paraguay where Russian Mennonite refugees were being resettled. Amos returned to the U.S. and, in an unusual step for an Amish man, attended Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, VA. He received a bachelor's degree in German in 1954. During breaks from college, Amos would visit his college friend, Moses Beachy, in Iowa where he was introduced to Sara Miller, daughter of Adam and Anna Miller. Amos and Sara were married at her parents' home in Kalona, IA, on June 15, 1954. This union was blessed with six children. They were married for over 59 years before Sara passed away in 2013.

In the years following his marriage, Amos earned a master's degree at the State University of Iowa. He also taught school in several states and communities, including two different Hutterite colonies in MT. The family moved to Grove City, MN, in 1972. Amos farmed for a number


of years, then continued raising various animals until well into his nineties. He remained in MN until his death.

Amos was known for his curious mind, his love of reading, and his prolific letter-writing. He was fascinated by different cultures and loved talking to strangers and figuring out their national heritage. After Sara's passing, Amos lived with his son, Marcus, and wife, Anna. He spent many hours writing a history of his life. These stories were compiled and published into a book called *A Chirp from the Grass Roots*.

Amos is survived by his six children:

Philip, Newberg, OR; Marcus (Anna), Grove City, MN; Fred (Lorraine), Corn, OK; Rebecca (Rod) Barbo, Chicago, IL; Dorcas (Paul) Smucker, Harrisburg, OR; Margaret (Chad) Koehn, Cheraw, SC; 17 grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; his brother, John Yoder, Jr., and many nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents; five siblings; his wife, and one grandson, Leonard Yoder.

Funeral services were held September 15 at the Paynesville Evangelical Free Church. Burial was in Burr Oak cemetery. 

observations

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has been the president of Equatorial Guinea for about four decades. His son, Teodorín, has a fascination for expensive, collector cars. To wit, he assembled an impressive collection of autos. Because of the dubious source of the funds that were used to acquire these cars, the collection was seized by authorities and was sold at auction in Geneva, Switzerland. The funds are supposed to be directed to alleviate impoverished people in Equatorial Guinea. Twenty-five lots that comprised this collection of Ferraris, Lamborghinis, Rolls Royces, and Bentleys fetched over \$27 million

dollars which exceeded pre-auction estimates of \$18 million. The plum of the collection was considered to be a 2014 Lamborghini Veneno roadster, one of only nine produced, showing 201 odometer miles. The winning bidder paid \$8.4 million dollars for this offering.

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Joy Milne, a former nurse from England, began noticing a distinctive, disagreeable, musky odor on her husband, Les. About 12 years later he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. She didn't connect the odor and the disease until they attended a patient support group event for people with Parkinson's and found

that everyone in the room emitted the same signature odor.

A lot of research has gone into identifying this scent and the unique chemical compounds associated with it. The result is that a swab test has been developed for early Parkinson's detection. I do not know how widely available this test is. But there is hope that earlier detection would offer treatment options before the classic symptoms occur that would lead to more favorable outcomes for the patients.

While Joy Milne isn't the only person with the ability to smell this type of thing, it is very unusual. Her olfactory sense is so acute that she chooses to avoid certain sections of the supermarket. She has also identified odors associated with other diseases. She says that Alzheimer's smells vaguely of vanilla, and cancer has a more earthy odor. The researchers she is working with are trying to identify odors associated with tuberculosis.

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I suppose it shouldn't surprise anybody that as we get older, we have more interest in history. After all, the older we get, the more overlap there is between what we've experienced and history.

Weavertown Church in Lancaster County, PA, was established about 110 years ago. Even though it would

be impossible, it would be very interesting to establish and quantify the contribution to society and the Kingdom of God by those who trace their roots to that congregation. If we could see what God knows, I suppose we would be surprised.

Several weeks ago, my wife, Brenda, and youngest son, Ethan, and I attended a Sunday afternoon celebration of the 150th anniversary of the beginning of Labette Baptist Church just down the road from where we live. This church normally has Sunday School attendance somewhere in the teens. Attendance for the preaching part of the Sunday morning gathering is often about double that of Sunday School. There were times in the history of the congregation where the attendance was more robust. My impressions are that this congregation is relatively typical for rural America in that attendance is small and comprised of mostly adults and elderly people. Permit me a few observations.

When we moved to this area sixteen years ago, the people of this congregation were very welcoming and hospitable. We purchased the home we live in now from members of this church. The pastor invited me to join their local ministers' alliance. During the first couple of years we were here, I attended these meetings with about half a dozen other local

pastors. I don't need to tell you that there were obviously areas we differed on, but I found those meetings an inspiration. We shared with each other community events of mutual interest, some of the needs of our congregations, and prayed for each other and for the community. Three years after we moved, we began meeting at our own church house in the town of Oswego, so I quit attending this particular minister's alliance association. But I still value the relationships that were developed in our first years here. Since then our congregation has hosted various choruses and singing groups at Labette Baptist Church because our facility isn't large enough to accommodate these events. Our neighbors have been super accommodating to us at these times.

The charter members of our congregation all moved from the Center congregation near Hutchinson, Kansas, about 200 miles away. It turns out that the Labette Baptist pastor's wife exchanged letters with an age-mate of hers from Center church many years ago after they had met at a summer Bible camp. The pastor's father-in-law knew another brother from our home church, the late Sam D. Nisly, through their mutual involvement with Gideon's International. Some of you have been involved in an organization called

Rural Bible Crusade, a children's Bible club, that emphasizes scripture memory. I have been told, but could not independently verify, that the pastor of Labette Baptist Church from a by-gone era was instrumental in the beginnings of Rural Bible Crusade while he pastored here locally.

About ten years ago, while working as a travel agent, I helped arrange adoption travel for many people who were adopting children from Liberia. One day I took a call from a friendly lady from near Portland, Oregon. She and her husband were working on adopting five siblings from Liberia, so they asked me to make their travel arrangements. But at the beginning of the conversation she asked, "Is it true that you are from Oswego, Kansas?" I affirmed that it was so, and she was amazed. She went on to fill me in on more details of her childhood. She grew up about 2 miles from our house, was converted and baptized at Labette Baptist Church by the current pastor, and we knew her mother as a neighbor. But by that time, she resided in a local nursing home where our congregation regularly visits and sings. A year or two later, after the family from Oregon had brought their five Liberian children home, they made a trip to Kansas to visit local family and friends in a modified school bus. The family of 12 children,

of which five were biological, two of Haitian origin, and five Liberian were guests in our home for a morning brunch. The parents in this family, Tony and Maurita Clement, were a real inspiration to us in how they wished for God to be glorified with the choices they made in life and particularly as they reached out to others through the gift of adoption. Maurita spoke warmly of her spiritual moorings at Labette Baptist Church.

At the Sunday afternoon anniversary celebration, I started to wonder how far the ripples of influence of Labette Baptist Church reach. Then I wondered about the ripples of effect in other churches I'm more familiar with. We are not able to see into the future with clarity but observing history underscores in helpful ways the importance of a faithful response to current opportunities God has given us here and now. In our little congregation with a scant 16-year history, I note that God's Kingdom has been edified in various domestic contexts and reaching to other continents through the faithfulness of His children who are or were from here at one time. I mention the distant influence, not because it is more important or bigger than the local influence, but simply because it is less visible and perhaps more often forgotten. I find that thought particularly nourishing

amid the humdrum of the "here and now" when things seem more normal than remarkable.

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November has come to be known as election month for those of us living in the United States. Those elected to the office of president are limited to serving for two four-year terms. But it wasn't always that way. In November of 1944 Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to a fourth term as president of the United States. He died in the first year of his fourth term, so he didn't serve to the end of that term.

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Mattel is a company that produces toys for children. Recently they launched a doll that they advertise can be either a boy, a girl, neither, or both. They are calling this the world's first gender-neutral doll. Their marketing slogan says, "A doll line designed to keep labels out and invite everyone in." My memories of the dolls my age group played with is pretty dim. But I can't remember that the gender of the doll made any difference to the children. My hunch is that this innovation—if it can be called that—says much more about certain adults' desire to frame the narrative than the children's gender preference for the dolls they play with. What a confusing reflection of a confused society!

—RJM 

Building the Kingdom in Baltimore

Nathan Zook, Baltimore, MD

Baltimore, Maryland has made national news recently with reports of police brutality, riots, and near-record homicide rates. But for those who worship in Baltimore, it is a city that is beloved.

The Hampden Mennonite congregation in the city of Baltimore consists of three groups of people, each with a different reason for being there. One group moved to Baltimore with a heart for outreach. Another group moved to complete career or educational goals. The third group consists of natives who grew up in Baltimore.

No matter their background, these individuals have chosen to worship and fellowship as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Meanwhile, they seek the peace of Baltimore while modeling citizenship in Jesus' kingdom.

Reuben and Patty Petersheim are representatives of the first group with a heart for urban outreach. They moved to the city in 2007. The

Petersheims issued a vision statement and began seeking other families and single people to join them in Baltimore. Their calling was to start a private Christian school in an urban setting, but they needed others to help them for a church and interact with a wide range of people in their urban setting.

The nonprofit organization, Urban Mennonite Ministries, was established with the goals of starting schools and planting churches in urban settings. UMM carefully researched neighborhoods in Baltimore and settled on the artsy and somewhat quirky middle-class area known as Hampden (with a silent p).

The UMM board offered oversight and advice on the process of starting a school and establishing a church in Baltimore. The school and church were designed as separated organizations that would work closely together. The board consisted of members from five conservative

Anabaptist groups.

For the next two years, Reuben taught at a public high school while continuing to work with UMM to build momentum toward reaching its goals. In the summer of 2009, Michael and Mary Lois Petersheim moved to Baltimore. Along with several others already living and working in Baltimore, the two Petersheim families began holding services one Sunday a month.

The second group in the current congregation consists of people who moved to Baltimore to pursue educational and career goals. Nathan Zook had lived in the Baltimore area for six years as a student and married while living in the city. Later, while living in Washington D.C., the Zooks heard about UMM and began worshipping with the two Petersheim families, delighted to interact with other Mennonites who felt called to live in urban settings. As the congregation expanded, services were held more often.

Hampden Christian School opened in September 2011 with an enrollment of eight students in preschool through grade two. New grades were gradually added. Today (2019) there are fourteen teachers and over sixty-five students from infant through grade eight.

Hampden Mennonite Church

became an established church in the Keystone Mennonite Fellowship in September 2012. Six charter members joined in February 2013. Later more members joined, including two health professionals who are longtime residents of the area and identifying as Mennonites for the first time.

Some of the children in the congregation attend the school and others are homeschooled. Most of these children are representatives of the third group in the congregation, people who did not choose to move to an urban area, but were born to parents living in the city.

Hampden Mennonite Church has remained very involved with the Hampden neighborhood and to urban residents in the greater metropolitan area. Some of the adults are involved in full-time Christian service through UMM while others look for ways to evangelize homeschool families and international students. Whenever possible, church members shop at local businesses and engage with the local community on many levels.

The creation of a church website at hampdenmennonite.org attracts a good bit of interest from people in the surrounding region who are seeking or curious about conservative Mennonite values.

Also, the *Baltimore Sun* printed a very positive, high-profile article on the congregation.

This small congregation has the potential to be a blessing to many nations. Most visitors to the congregation, who live in the Baltimore area, are from other countries and are temporarily engaged in academic endeavors.

The church and school jointly seek to engage with children in the neighborhood who are unchurched and who may not be able to afford the tuition in the school. Sunday school classes were developed using CLP curriculum. In addition, the group has maintained vacation Bible school classes each summer and children's club activities twice a month.

Originally, the church met in the basements and living rooms of members. When attendance was only fifteen, this worked well. Now, regular attendance is approximately fifty. Several years ago, a few teachers noticed a large vacant complex in the neighborhood that consisted of a church built in the late 1800s with a modern addition for a school.

Excitement built within both UMM and Keystone Fellowship, and the two entities prayed for funding. The funds for a down payment poured in, UMM purchased the property, and the church made use of the historic sanctuary. Many of the congregants are choosing to remain involved in Baltimore indefinitely. Rather than short-term missionaries, the various groups in the congregation view themselves as part of the family of God and blessed members of Jesus' kingdom.

Will you pray that the Lord would provide us with opportunities to reach more for Christ? If you know of anyone in the Baltimore/Washington area who is seeking conservative Anabaptist fellowship, please put them in touch with us. If you have congregational or Bible school groups looking for short-term urban outreach opportunities, please have them contact us: faithannathan@yahoo.com.

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Gratitude shouldn't be an occasional incident
BUT A CONTINUOUS ATTITUDE.

Heart of Woman, Heart of God

Laurie Rolan, Marshallville, OH



Laurie Rolan of Marshallville, OH, presented the following at a Mother/Daughter banquet in her congregation. A sister in attendance urged Laurie to share it here with a wider audience. I believe God is honored when we break bread together and pass it around. Thank you, Laurie, for the feast of these truths! –Susan Schlabach

Recently I began exploring the idea that a woman's heart mirrors that of God's heart.

I believe that women have a unique place in God's plan for the world, and He views our role as being just as important, although distinctly different, as any role a man may play.

As women, we sometimes tend to feel marginalized in society and even in our churches. We often don't count our role as being very important. We may ask if what we do makes any difference. Our days are full of endless routine and thankless tasks that don't make us feel like we are contributing much to the Kingdom of God.

In Genesis we see that it wasn't until God created woman that He called creation complete. You might

say we were the "finishing touch" on the creation. After the awe-inspiring sun and moon, He sprinkled the heavens with millions of glittering stars. Then He created beautifully intricate trees and flowers. And there was the fascinating menagerie of animals to roam the earth and man, made in God's own image. Yet, God wasn't done until he'd created something very special—woman. Notice that she was created in a separate event, made from man's own rib, unlike the animals. I'm not sure why God chose to do it that way, but I like to think it was because He was making someone special with a specific purpose to fulfill. Perhaps it was a reminder to us that women are unique.

Now obviously, woman was created

to be the counterpart of man—to be his companion and to help populate the earth—but that isn't the Father's plan for all of us. Yet we are still women with God-given purpose. I'd like to address mothers, wives and daughters—married or not, because we are all women who wonderfully reflect God's image.

Again, in Genesis we see that God's creation wasn't some slap-dash, half-hearted work flung into the universe on a whim. Everything was created with a planned purpose and to live in harmony. Look around to see that God loves beauty and order.

But just how is the heart of a woman similar to the heart of God?

Let's begin with our love of creation. Did you ever wonder where that love of beautiful things comes from? Not just in admiring the handiwork of God but in creating things ourselves. Women love beauty! We are created in God's image, and God is the Master Creator. It makes sense that we seem to have an inborn desire to create. So just as we're drawn to beautiful things, most of us enjoy making nice things whether in the garden, the kitchen, at the sewing machine, or in decorating our homes.

We express this urge for creativity in many ways: a gorgeous flower garden, a picture-perfect pie, or a

handmade quilt. Some of us like to write poetry, stories, or songs. Some are gifted in the area of drawing and painting. The creativity within us doesn't follow careful criteria. Our creative bents are many and varied.

Recently while planning a ladies' tea with my daughters, I thought, "I can use my good china and the lace tablecloth! And we can have flowers on the table, and I'll serve soup and fancy little sandwiches, and..." Do you see what I mean? That's not just planning a meal—that's creativity at work!

Creativity comes wrapped in all sorts of packages. Explore areas you might not have considered before. If you're unsure where your talents lie, ask someone close to you. Often others can spot something we may have missed or dismissed as trivial. If you're already creative in one area, you might want to try another. Some hobbies tend to spill over into new ones; a love of cooking leads to a love of baking that might lead to learning to decorate cakes. Enjoying sewing may lead to quilting, etc.

Creativity is like a muscle—the more you use it the stronger it becomes. Start small and build on it as you go. My first quilt wasn't king-size, and my first attempt at cake decorating wasn't served at a

wedding. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

Maybe you're thinking, "Well, this doesn't apply to me at all. I'm not the creative type." A woman told me she had absolutely no creative ability, and she'd stopped trying a long time ago. I contemplated why she felt that way. Perhaps she received harsh criticism, or her own strict standards made her feel like a failure. In any case, I think it's sad because I believe she's missing a large part of God's plan to bless her.

So, maybe you really don't have an artistic bone in your body, or hobbies don't appeal to you. What about the area of organization? Creating order from chaos is something most of us are good at, and it reminds us of God creating the world.

Do you get satisfaction out of re-arranging a drawer or closet? Does it feel good to make a list of tasks to cross off one by one? Do you enjoy putting a nice meal in front of your family? Perhaps your talent lies in the area of hospitality or entertaining guests. Those are all examples of creativity that are vital in running a home.

One word of caution—be careful not to commit yourself to too many projects at once. Because we are accustomed to multi-tasking, it's natural for us to allow ourselves to be pulled in too many directions. When

we do this it can quickly lead to burnout or that nagging feeling that everything was done half-heartedly. Those are self-defeating outcomes that won't encourage you to try again. Instead, pray and ask God how He would have you spend your time. Saying "No" to a project because you want to give your best in all you do is way different than saying "No" because you're afraid to try.

We know that God delights in blessing His people. In fact, He pours them out on us. Why? Because of His great love! Women reflect God in blessing those whom they love. Whether family, friends, or strangers, it makes us happy to bless others.

So we see that a woman's heart also mirrors God's heart in her desire to bless others, and the way we do this is through giving and serving.

You may think, "I'm a wife, I'm a mother, I'm an employee—I really don't have a choice, do I? Serving is all I do!" True, but what is your attitude in those roles? It's not your circumstances that determine your happiness; it's your response to those circumstances.

Ask yourself if you feel honored to serve or just annoyed. Although feeling honored to wipe a nose or change a dirty diaper may be a bit of a stretch, I hope we at least get some

satisfaction out of doing small acts of service that make up our days.

Would we feel better about the whole thing if we renamed our service “acts of loving kindness?” Is there a bigger blessing when we serve with a willing and cheerful heart? II Corinthians 9:7 reminds us that God loves a cheerful giver. If we are doing our duty grudgingly, at least we’re getting it done, but I don’t think God views our efforts in quite the same way as when we do it cheerfully.

In a perfect world, others would thank us every day for all our hard work. Employers would heap praise on us for a job well done (and give us nice raises!), husbands would marvel at the clean socks in their dresser drawer, and children would delight in the nutritious vegetables on their plates.

But, in reality, we perform our routine tasks day after day and maybe feel just a little sorry for ourselves and all the hard work that goes unnoticed. And woe to the person who tracks mud across the floor we just finished mopping!

But if we have the heart of God, we’ll be eager to bless others and serve them with joy. I think that is the way Jesus served others. I believe He received great satisfaction from healing the sick and feeding the

multitudes. Yes, His main purpose was to bring glory to His Father, but because He cared so much about people it brought Him joy to care for them in practical ways.

The problem lies in who or what is the force motivating us. If we try to do it in our own strength, after a while we’ll run out of steam, and it will feel like a duty only. And moreover, the people we’re serving will probably pick up on our attitude and not feel very blessed by our efforts. No one wants to feel like they were someone else’s dreaded duty! If our reason for meeting someone’s needs is simply to avoid feeling guilty, there might be a feeling of relief, but we will certainly miss a blessing.

Reflect on an unexpected favor given to you out of love, not obligation. How did it make you feel? Blessed, right? Don’t we want others to feel blessed by our service to them? When we commit our efforts to God, knowing that He is the Source of our strength and motivation, our attitude changes and we can happily meet the needs of others.

So how can we cultivate this desire to serve and bless? For many women, it comes almost naturally. Others might struggle with it somewhat, but I think it all begins with our own walk with God.

Service requires sacrifice. It may mean the sacrificing of our time, energy, and even financial resources. Sacrifice doesn't come easily and it's not fun! So, if we're going to serve others, we need to build ourselves up first.


We can do that through worship. Attending church, yes, but I refer more to that quiet time when you worship God on your own—your prayer closet.

It can be a struggle to carve out time to sit quietly and wait on God when there are a million things on my to-do list. It's hard to settle my mind and concentrate on the Scripture and truly meditate. Though challenging, I keep trying because it's one of the most effective ways God has of recharging my batteries. It gives God the chance to whisper into my soul the things I need to hear.

What else does worship entail?

Prayer for family, friends, needs around the world, and yes, prayer for ourselves! Did you know that it's okay to pray for yourself? Tell the Father about your struggles to serve with a smile when you feel like pulling your hair out. It's not selfish to ask God for grace to face one more day of the same challenges you've been facing for years. And it's not selfish to ask God to give you joy as well. Don't feel embarrassed if you have to do this several times a day; He already knows all about it.

Journaling can be a great way to record your thoughts and insights as you read your Bible and commune with God. Writing things brings clarity to ideas that were only half-formed. Reading old journals helps you remember how God has worked in your life, and how He's answered your prayers over the years.

(To be concluded) 

A thankful heart

ENJOYS BLESSINGS TWICE—
when they're *received* and
when they're *remembered*.

The Bone Baby

Grant Miller, Sugarcreek, OH

My sister, Gretal, and her husband, Aaron, are missionaries far away in Ghana, a small country in west Africa.

In the village where they live, their neighbors are Muslims who hold to a lot of traditional animistic beliefs, such as making annual sacrifices to appease spirits.

Aaron and Gretal live among the people and compassionately tell the neighbors, “Jesus loves you. If you believe and follow Him, you do not need to fear evil spirits or even death.”

Adeeza is a young woman in the village who was recently married. Everyone called her “Bride”. One day “Bride” fell sick. Aaron and Gretal, who are both nurses, asked some questions and soon realized Adeeza would be having a baby!

Soon after, Gretal and Aaron were pleased to know that God would bless them with another baby as well, their second child. They rejoiced

and knew it would be good for their three-year-old son Noah to have a sibling.

The two ladies happily planned for the addition to their families; the one in a home filled with God’s light, and the other in a home that knew not God.

Adeeza had malaria and bacterial infections several times throughout the pregnancy. Aaron and Gretal often prayed for her and hoped the baby would be born healthy.

More than eight months later with much anticipation, Aaron and Gretal traveled to a hospital several hours away to have their baby. They were gone several weeks. When they returned, they brought with them their dear newborn son, Zed.

When Gretal met her neighbor, Adeeza, she too was holding an infant. It was a baby girl named Obaida. After congratulating one another, Adeeza explained that she’d had twins, a boy and a girl, but after one week, Betito, the boy twin, died,

refusing to nurse.

Gretal wondered if they could have helped to save the little boy twin if they had been at home in their village.

Several days later, Adeeza came to Gretal's door. Baby Obaida was tied on her back. Gretal and Adeeza greeted each other, "How is your house? Is sleep there? How is the child?"

Adeeza untied her baby and sat down. As she did so she removed a large cow bone from the front of her wrap and placed it gently in the cloth on the bench beside her.

Curiously, Gretal asked about the bone and noticed that it was dressed in a baby outfit. Adeeza explained sheepishly that they used the cow bone to represent Betito. If she would not pretend she was still taking care of Betito, the spirit of her dead son would be angry and would cause Obaida to die as well.

She also explained that in their culture when twins are born, the one who is born first is actually the younger one. They believe that in the womb, the older one sends the younger one out first to check if it is safe to be born. In Adeeza's case, Obaida was born first, so she was the younger one.

Because Betito was considered

the older one, he was always bathed and lotioned before Obaida. After he died, the tradition continued. When she bathed and lotioned Obaida, Adeeza made sure to bathe and lotion the cow bone first. When Obaida cried, she would pick up the cow bone and pretend to nurse it, then she'd nurse Obaida.

When it was time to give Obaida her vaccination shots, Adeeza lovingly carried her little girl and the bone baby to the clinic. The nurses at the clinic pretended to give the bone baby vaccination shots before the little girl got her shots.

Gretal wondered how long her friend would carry the bone baby and her real baby. It all seemed so odd and sadly bound by superstition and darkness. Supposedly, the bone will stay in the family at least till Obaida marries. Some keep the bone till the living twin dies.

Aaron had an opportunity to kindly explain to Adeeza that God has more power than any demon or evil spirit. "Trust in Him and you will have nothing to fear. We believe your baby is with Jesus in such a beautiful place. If you could see where your son, Betito, is right now, you would wish to go there too."

Pray for Aaron and Gretal and their small boys in Ghana.



The Black Plague

Shawn Miller, West Lafayette, OH

In October of 1347 a fleet of twelve ships entered the Sicilian port of Messina. People on the docks awaiting the ships were horrified at what met them. Most of the sailors on the ships were dead, and the few surviving ones were covered with black boils that were oozing blood and pus. Authorities immediately ordered the death ships to leave the harbor. However, it was too late for Messina; disease and death had been introduced to the population.

Many ships continued to dock in multiple harbors throughout Europe, not only carrying goods, but also unknowingly carrying this vicious disease called the Black Plague, also known as the Great Plague, the Bubonic Plague, or simply the Plague.

The Black Plague continued to spread throughout Europe over the next years, and millions of people lost their lives. The disease was merciless, killing young and old, rich and poor. It ended up being one of the worst human pandemics in history. It is

difficult to say how many people lost their lives, but statistics indicate that 25-50 percent of the European population was wiped out. Ole J. Benedicto, Professor of History at the University of Oslo, Norway, estimates that 60 percent of the population died.

One person from Florentine during that time period wrote:

“All the citizens did little else except to carry dead bodies to be buried... At every church they dug deep pits down to the water table; and thus, those who were poor who died during the night were bundled up quickly and thrown into the pit. In the morning when a large number of bodies were found in the pit, they took some earth and shoveled it down on top of them; and later others were placed on top of them and then another layer of earth...” (History Today: *The Black Death, the Greatest Catastrophe Ever*).

The cause of the Plague was discovered in the late 1800s. Rodents, such as rats, had been carrying a bacterium called *Yersinia Pestis*.

When the rats died from this disease, hungry fleas that had infested them would jump onto people and pass the awful bacteria to the human population where it could be passed from person to person. Effective antibiotics have been developed since then that today fight against this specific pathogen.

The Black Plague of Today

Today there is also a plague affecting millions of people. This plague has caused much damage and hurt, killing many people spiritually. It has brought low people that were once looked upon as spiritual giants. It is no respecter of persons but will attack whoever it can get its hands on, both young and old. It has caused spiritual death and decay. This plague is called pornography.

There are many horrifying statistics concerning this plague that closely compare to the numbers affected by the Black Plague of the 1300s. The Barna Group is a well-known Christian research organization that has done a landmark study entitled *The Porn Phenomenon*. The numbers are shocking. The study shows that one in three Americans seek out porn at least once a month. The study further reveals that age, gender, and faith practices affect frequent porn use. Seventy-two percent of nonpracticing Christian men, age 13-24, frequently use porn. As Christians, it should come as

no surprise that the world will be heavily involved in this immoral behavior.

However, as we look at practicing Christians, the numbers are alarming. Forty-one percent of practicing Christian men, age 13-24, frequently use porn. Twenty-three percent of practicing Christian men, age 25 and older, also frequently use porn. These chilling statistics reveal Christians are greatly affected by this monstrous evil. But not only are many practicing Christians involved in porn, their view of it is also alarming. One in five of all porn users feel a sense of guilt when they use porn. This seems somewhat understandable when we look at the world. But the study states that only one in three practicing Christians who use porn feel a sense of guilt when using it. This is inexcusable.

These shocking statistics should shake us to our core. Unlike the Black Plague of the 1300s that killed many people physically, this Black Plague of today is killing people spiritually and will have consequences that will endure throughout all eternity.

Proverbs chapter seven is a powerful passage that talks about a young man being seduced by an evil, adulterous woman. Verse 23b says, “he does not know that it will cost him his life.” (ESV) I believe pornography can be applied to the context of this passage. How many

young Christians are being ensnared by the vicious fangs of porn without realizing that someday it will cost them their lives, maybe for eternity? How many young people will stand at God's judgment seat and say, "I never knew this would cost me my life?" Verses 26-27b state, "For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell." (KJV)

Jesus uses equally strong language in the Sermon on the Mount when He addressed adultery. He says to not even look lustfully on a woman. He then states how it is better to be lame or blind and enter heaven than to be physically whole and end in hell. When He addresses this issue of lust, He actually uses our own self-interests to motivate us. Do you want eternal life? Then sever whatever is causing you to sin.

Yes, we all know that pornography is sin, but how can we overcome it? Can we even overcome? 2 Peter 3:1a says, "According as his divine power hath given unto us **all** things that pertain unto life and godliness." God has given us everything we need to overcome. 1 John 1:4b says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." It is, of course, easier said than done. Throwing verses out there is good, but many Christians already know that these verses exist. Following are four basic

thoughts about overcoming these temptations.

Resisting unto Blood

Hebrews 12:4 says, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." None of us have probably ever fought against so great a temptation that we actually shed blood over it. And yet this verse brings out how hard we need to strive against sin. We need to do anything and everything possible to overcome temptation. Overcoming can be very hard work. It will be time consuming. It will take extra effort in fasting, prayer, and accountability with others. How seriously do you want to overcome these sins? Great victories won't be won easily. Yet despite the hard work involved, remember, God will not "allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Accountability

Meeting at least once a week with another brother or brothers from your local church will be a powerful way to overcome this Black Plague of porn. Surround yourself with godly people and be very open and honest about the temptations you are facing. Tell them when you sin. Tell them where you were and what you were doing when the temptations came. Tell them when you have victory. Tell them what you did to

overcome. Being very specific about your weaknesses is humbling and yet very powerful in moving forward. Being vague about your struggles will hinder victory. Merely telling your accountability partner every two weeks that you are struggling with temptations will not help him see clearly into your personal life. It will make it more difficult for him to know exactly how and what to pray for. You need to be specific.

Quarantine Yourself

Although many cities and villages in Europe were affected by the Black Plague, there were a few that escaped the deadly disease. They successfully quarantined the whole village from the disease-ridden parts of the world. They kept track of people who were coming in and out of their towns, even going to the extent of giving people individual health passports. They set up border controls at city gates, harbors, and mountain passes. It took great effort to keep the disease at bay.

Today with the Black Plague of porn encroaching on us, we also need to go to great efforts to quarantine ourselves from this epidemic. Obviously, we are in the world, but we are not of the world. We cannot completely bar ourselves from every evil while we are living here. But there are some basic things we can do.

Jesus recommended amputation.

In the medical world, amputation happens when there are only two options left. Lose your life, or lose your limb. The first thing we need to do is identify the sources of temptation. When that happens, we can do things to deliberately avoid it. For example, if the temptation is coming from a personal electronic device, we can either completely get rid of it or put internet filters on it. I know of a young man who had a Smartphone and deliberately switched to a “dumb” phone because that was his source of temptation. These extreme measures might come at great cost, but if that is what it takes to save your soul it will absolutely be worth it.

Fasting and Prayer

Prayer is powerful. Fasting seems to be even more so. Although fasting can be physically difficult, it gives spiritual power. If you are truly seeking for victory then fasting once a week could be a way of attaining victory. Way too often, we underestimate the power of prayer and fasting. They are key elements to victory.

Is there victory over these temptations? Yes, by the grace of God there is victory. Will it take a lot of work to stay free from this plague? Yes, it will. But the results of this battle against sin will affect us for all eternity. May God strengthen each one who is fighting for victory.



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If Christians praised God more, the world would doubt Him less.

• • • • •

Thanksgiving is good, but “thanksgiving” is better.

• • • • •

He who is not grateful for the good things he has
would not be happy with what he wishes he had.

• • • • •

Joy thrives in the soul of thanksgiving.

• • • • •

Don't grumble because you don't have what you want—
be thankful you don't get what you deserve.

• • • • •

Just think how happy you would be if you lost everything
you now have and then suddenly got it back.

• • • • •

Contentment is not found in having everything—
but in being satisfied with everything we have.

• • • • •

Thanksgiving is memory of the heart.

• • • • •

Appreciation and praise are the lubrication that
makes life more enjoyable to us and others.

• • • • •

God's highest gift should awaken man's deepest gratitude.