



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

JANUARY 2023

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Calvary Messenger

January 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.**

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I Need a Servant's Heart

I want to be a servant, Lord,
But it lieth in me not
To love and give, and others serve,
In the manner that You taught.

So give me a servant's heart, I ask,
For my own is filled with pride.
I need a heart where selfishness
Has e'er been crucified.

A heart that knows no difference
Between rich and poor and fine,
But a heart that serves and loves to serve,
A heart, oh Lord, like Thine.

Michelle Richard Kropf
1956-2017



Watch Therefore

On August 16, 2022, an approximately 70-meter asteroid entered Earth's atmosphere. At 2:02:10 P.M. EDT, the space rock exploded eight miles over Winston-Salem, NC, with the energy of 10 megatons of TNT. The airburst virtually leveled the city and surrounding area. Casualties were in the thousands.¹

Well, not really.

Last month I looked at the recent successful experiment to nudge an asteroid from a possible earth-bound trajectory. The thesis of that discussion was that while we should do what we can to avoid dangerous situations, trusting our Heavenly Father for protection and grace trumps any paranoia over life's innate dangerous events.

In the last few weeks, the results of the fourth Planetary Defense Tabletop Exercise, run by NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office, were published in *Scientific American*. The report showed that

humanity is not yet ready to meet this threat. Here are three quotes of the results that will be the object lesson for this discussion.

- First, a few days, a few weeks, or even, likely, a few months would be too late to detect a destructive space rock headed to Earth for a deep impact.² (The Double Action Redirection Test (DART) took five years of planning and execution to happen.)

- Second, people have become so distrustful of authority, whether it's from the political class or the media, that an announcement of a killer asteroid on the way would not be believed by a significant number of people.²

- How could government authorities convince the public that the threat of an asteroid strike is real? The exercise noted that NASA has a lot of credibility concerning space issues. Perhaps part of a solution would be to assign the space agency the lead in disseminating information

1. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/nasa-asteroid-threat-practice-drill-shows-were-not-ready/>

2. <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/3732798-nasa-war-games-an-asteroid-impact-disaster-and-it-goes-badly/>

about the impending catastrophe.²

While we are again looking at the danger to Earth and its inhabitants should an asteroid collide with our planet, that is not my preoccupation. There is another earthbound event that is not only a possibility, it is a certainty. There is nothing mankind can do to stop this event. This is the Second Coming of the Son of God. What are we doing to prepare ourselves and those around us for this event? I would like to suggest several spiritual lessons we can learn from the three bulleted items above.

- First, we will not have even a day's notice of the Second Coming. *"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh"* (Matthew 25:13).

"The key to mankind's preparation for hazardous asteroids is the formation of the Near-Earth Object Surveyor space telescope (NEO Surveyor). This is a 50-centimeter (nearly 20 inch) diameter telescope that operates in two heat-sensing infrared wavelengths. After launch, NEO Surveyor will carry out a five-year baseline survey to find at least two-thirds of the near-Earth objects (NEO) larger than 140 meters (460 feet). These are the objects large enough to cause major regional damage in the event of an Earth

impact."³

Knowing about Christ's return will not make us spiritually prepared. We need to prepare today.

- Second, people have become distrustful of forecasters and doomsayers, especially those of the Christian faith. *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (II Peter 3:3-4).

Professing Christians have brought some of this distrust upon themselves. There were many groups in the 1700 and 1800s that depended too much on spiritual manifestations that in retrospect were not of the Spirit of God. While the terms fake news and misinformation may seem to be recently coined, these things are not new. Man seeks to know or pretend to know the future and is capable of conjuring theories and fantasies from his own imagination that sound remarkably convincing. One way to protect ourselves from such deception is to be familiar with the truth—the truth of God's Word.

- This recent experiment concluded

3. <https://www.jpl.nasa.gov/missions/near-earth-object-surveyor>

that since NASA is a reputable organization, it should take “the lead in disseminating information about the impending catastrophe.” Who is trustworthy to let the world know about the Second Coming?

“Widespread public ignorance on space issues has already been documented.⁴ But it is alarming that a certain percentage of people would not believe an announcement of an imminent asteroid impact. Some people would refuse to evacuate from a strike zone no matter what authorities tell them — meaning they would die if an asteroid destroyed their communities.”⁵

For too many people today, their knowledge of the “end of the world” is connected to the earth being overrun with extra-terrestrial aliens, running out of space and food, or a nuclear apocalypse. The apostle Peter tells us that not all ignorance is lack of knowledge. It is common to most of us to refuse to believe something just because we may be uncomfortable with the outcome. *“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old,*

4. <https://www.inmarsat.com/en/insights/corporate/2022/value-of-space.html>

5. <https://thehill.com/opinion/technology/3732798-nasa-war-games-an-asteroid-impact-disaster-and-it-goes-badly/>

and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Peter 3:5-7).

Shouldn’t the Church of Jesus Christ be the “reputable organization” that takes the lead in teaching and preparing mankind for this “end-of-world” event? Or maybe it should be each believer’s responsibility? While it can be tempting to focus on the way that Jesus will return to earth, is it maybe as important or more important that we understand and teach about the God Who keeps the heavens and the earth in store by His faithful Word? Consider Peter’s admonition for us in relation to the Second Coming.

11 *“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,*

12 *Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?*

13 *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth*

righteousness.

14 *Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

15 *And account that the long suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

16 *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

17 *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.*

18 *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (II Peter 3:11-18).*

Will NASA see the approaching King of Kings and Lord of Lords? According to Jesus’ words, not in enough time to give the world a warning. That’s our job each day until He returns. “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*”

-AY 

the bottom line

Working on the Foundation of Life

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

My wife and I both provide taxi service. Yesterday, an Amish man said, “Aaron, what do you see as the main problem among our people?” I did not have a ready answer. In this past while, Amish men have asked me for some vital information or opinions. Numerous ones request my comments about specific issues, such as the strict ban and shunning, the book of Tobias in the Apocrypha,

soul-sleeping, the second coming of Christ, politics, big businesses among the Amish, deacon duties (how we do it and as I see it), how to address sexual abuse and child abuse. “A lot of people are being excommunicated,” one man said. “Why?” I asked. “Because they won’t stop going to the Bible study meetings.”

Now about that foundation. After we continued on for some miles, I gave him some ideas. Even now, I

cannot fully state the periphery of issues that are trying to crowd in and surround the ideas of what may be the main problems among the Amish or maybe even those of our own church.

Life, as given by God, was not intended to be complex. Some people say that all you need to do is to willingly believe. Other church people say that all one needs to do is rightfully obey. There you have one of the basic differences between the liberals and the conservatives, which also contributes to this subject of foundations and sturdy structures for Christian living. All of us wish to have a justifiable platform upon which to stand.

Sin will take you from the simple to the complex, whereas righteousness will carry you from the complex toward the simple. A component of counseling is about trying to unpack the complex which had accumulated into undesirable baggage. Some speakers and writers take simple, believable truth and make it complex, like low, thick clouds when we wish for a sunny day. The most ambiguous of them are unequivocal and enigmatic (dictionary use intended!). How? By using a dual system of interpretation that is hard to follow. There are some listeners who applaud because “he goes so deep in the Scriptures.” Others say,

“I don’t know what I believe, but whatever Brother Bartholomew believes, that is what I believe.”

Much counseling needs to be pursued in our time. We say that those needs are increased when we lose foundational perspectives in life. To gain perspective, first off, one needs to say, “Where are you? What is your standing in life, and also your understanding about life?” The Lord God communed with Adam in the garden prior to sinning. After Adam sinned, the very first recorded words God said were, “Where art thou?” That is what the Lord says to you. “Where are you?” Sin will mess up a right perspective of life.

Adam didn’t know where he was, despite having eaten of the fruit that Satan promised would give him knowledge, specifically of good and evil. Before, he only knew what was good. Now he only had a carnal focus on what was evil. Ever since, rebellion, unbelief, and disobedience come naturally. Adam was lost, and he was forced to go out.

Once Esther and I were in Holmes County, OH, that wonderfully-celebrated place to be. We were planning to go to the friends of our friends. It was late, raining hard, windy, and agonizingly dark. Because we were somewhere out in those hills, our GPS wasn’t working. We called

to their house to get help. They said, "Where are you?" We gave the forlorn and distressing answer, "We don't know!" It was the grief of being lost in the suppressing darkness of night, far from home. LOST!

Recently, we were at our neighbor's daughter's wedding. The Amish preacher said we all were born into a heritage and into a faith. In reality, both of those things are only partially true. Faith is a personal choice about what our Creator says about how life is to be lived and pursued. Rather, we all (every person in the world) are born into a tradition and a frame of reference. It is the composition of culture. Our culture has a huge bearing on our choices. Those choices can arise as supreme to establish our own foundation. Some people plant their feet deeply and firmly in that culture, while others react to it at various levels. How we justify our choices gives a strong and irresistible force to where we stand.

Muslims, Catholics, Atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Israelis, Americans, Communists, Amish, and Mennonites all are implicated in this culture thing, or in their own singular perspective. Our view of life can be unclear and confusing because of the added multiplicity of life (double math intended), which at times ends up as a divided

subtraction!

I told my Amish passenger that every time we say "yes" to God, we step up one step higher. Conversely, when we say "no" to God and what is right, we step down one step lower. But whenever we sometimes say "yes" and sometimes say "no," we thrust ourselves into a state of confusion! It causes a serious mix-up as in a desert with wind-blown patches of quicksand, or in a wilderness of grievous briars, thistles, and dense vines.

Perspective is gained by where we are currently. Where we are in our position on Bible principles and ethics cannot rightly be denied. People who are in the wrong tend to deny it, whereas achievers and successful people are inclined to glory in it, and become proud and inflated by their smarts. However we wish to do it, we should recognize where we are in a realistic, justifiable evaluation. That is our present status. If we cannot justify our present status, we must change for what we suppose is better.

We also should reckon with our past, our personal history, and the unique story of our lives so far. It is the part of wisdom to acknowledge our past, not in the shame of past sins which are forgiven, nor in pride for our successes. That all is in our

past which we cannot change, but we can have our slate cleaned when our failings are confessed and forgiven.

Then we also need to be willing to look into the future. Our future is in God's hands. His will will be carried out in our lives to the extent that we yield to Him. His promises and prophecies (every prophecy is a promise) should be believed on with trust, patience, and confidence in God. Of these three, past, present, and future, the church is weakest in looking through God's lens of prophecy about the future.

We are the product of our past, but only in part. We are now what we want to be, but only in part. We also, in part, are becoming what we wish and strive and aspire to be in our future, both near term and long range. The Amish preacher was partially right; we were born into a heritage. The assumption was that we all were given a good heritage that must be maintained. That is not correct for all people. However, every single one of us can work and make good choices today that will help shape a good heritage for our children as well as possibly influence succeeding generations.

Originally and ideally, God called Abraham as a family, and organized this large family group into being His people, living in a communal

relationship. By contrast, the Gentiles sought to live their lives with a strong focus on "me" as an individual. Living in these modern times as the people of God is threatened when people insist, or even demand, individuality over the interests or desires of brotherhood in the church. Good perspective is lost to the extent that any individual makes compulsive demands for his supposed rights.

The Amish live much more as a communal people than do the Mennonites, whether conservative or liberal. Yet even with that cohesive strength in their midst, they are beset at times with relational, moral, and business failures, despite their commendable communal foundation. Then, we must say, for us who claim a more Biblical base, we also have the same issues to deal with, at times, which can usually be traced to a Gentile-leaning individualism.

The Bottom Line is that any true foundation must be by aligning ourselves with God's Word, which has been given as THE TRUTH. When one is out of that alignment, it will cause premature wear on our hearts and minds even as it does on the tires of a vehicle. Wheels extremely out of alignment also cause a serious side pull to our car and annoying vibrations to the steering mechanism.



Bearing Precious Seed

Daniel Miller, serving in the Middle East

[This message was preached at REACH in Lancaster, PA, March 2022.]

In 1904, a girl from England named Hilda Hamlin emigrated to the state of Maine. She was only 15 years old. In time she studied, got married, and settled there. But there was one thing about England that she could not forget. It was the tall pink, blue, and purple flowers known as lupines. And so, she ordered some seeds from her homeland, planted them on her property, and enjoyed them in her new home country. But this wasn't all that Hilda did. As her lupines flowered and produced seeds of their own, she would cut the stalks, shake out their seeds, and save them. Then Hilda, who never drove a car, would fill her pockets with the lupine seeds, and as she walked from place to place, to the post office and beyond, she would strew her lupine seeds along the roadways. This began in the 1950s. I'm told that even today if you drive along many of the country roads in the summertime, you can see beautiful displays of pink, blue, and purple lupines. And Hilda became the inspiration for a well-

loved children's book that you may be familiar with, *Miss Rumphius*, by Barbara Cooney.

There is another famous seed sower in the history of the United States. So many stories have been told about him that it's almost impossible to completely separate fact from fiction. But what we do know is that John Chapman, popularly known as Johnny Appleseed, spent years of his life traveling from place to place, planting apple seeds and introducing apple trees to large sections of the American frontier. Like Hilda Hamlin, he was sowing seeds in an attempt to make the world a better place.

This theme of an individual, or a sower, planting seeds in an attempt to improve his or her environment, dominates not just American history but the entire pages of human history. And it is not only a historical idea, it's a biblical idea as well.

The message I have for each of you is very simple. I could give it to you in three words and sit down. It

is simply this: **never give up**. But let me elaborate a bit more.

For a little more than four years now, I have lived with my family in the Middle East. I have always loved gardening, but in a country that has an extreme scarcity of water, and in a city that is largely made up of tile, stone, and concrete, gardening is a bit difficult. However, when we moved to our current apartment, I was excited that there were actually a couple small plots of dirt where I could dig down, sow some seeds, and have a little garden. And I've done some planting in it. But my gardening attempts have been fairly unsuccessful for several reasons.

There is too much shade. The soil isn't very good quality. I don't water enough. The neighbor children mess with my plants or pull them out.

But there is one reason that is more significant than all the others. Because I've had all these problems, I've gotten discouraged about the garden. It doesn't seem like it's worth spending time, energy, and money on a garden that really isn't going to produce much of anything and will get ruined in the end. And since I'm discouraged about it, I don't put a lot of energy into it! And the garden shows that.

On the level of my garden, this is no big deal. Getting discouraged

about the garden and giving up on it has no big consequences. But there is another type of planting that I am called to do and that you are called to do that we dare not give up on.

Our theme verses tell us that this kind of gardening is going to be difficult too. It's going to be a struggle. It's going to bring tears. But it's going to be worth it!

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5-6). These verses come from a psalm sung by the Jews who had returned from captivity. They reference the pain and sorrow that they had experienced and the joy they were now experiencing. They saw the tragedies of previous years as seeds they had tearfully sown and the joy that they were now experiencing as the product of those seeds. They compared the tragedies of life that we all experience to the task of planting seeds. Both are difficult. But both are motivated by hope—hope of better days ahead and hope of a joyful harvest.

Throughout the Bible there is this common theme of seeds being sown or planted. One of the best known parables in the Bible is about a farmer who plants seeds. It is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The

parable is rich in meaning. Let's look briefly at this story.

“Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased, and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred” (Mark 4:2-8 NKJV).

The story Jesus is telling is about a farmer who went out to plant. The picture we have is of a man reaching into his bag, getting a handful of seeds and broadcasting them across the ground. Agricultural land in Jesus' time and in many places today in the Middle East is on a hillside where the land has been developed into terraces, stair steps of flat land divided by stone walls.

And the land that this farmer worked on sounds similar to the small garden plot that I have. There were a

lot of obstacles! There were thorns, rocks, birds, bad soil, and a scorching sun. The farmer would have had every reason to be discouraged and give up—stop planting any seeds. But there was also some good soil—soil that actually reproduced, soil where seeds could germinate and become productive plants.

This was a story that Jesus told, but it was not *just* a story. This story communicated important truth, not only for His hearers but for everyone who would enter His kingdom. No wonder His first word of advice in verse three, was “Listen!” Let's continue reading now as He explains the parable.

“And He said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who

hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4:13-16 NKJV).

The Seed

The first thing to consider as we look at the interpretation of this story is the question, “What is the seed?” Matthew calls it the “*word of the kingdom*.” Mark calls it simply “*the word*,” and Luke calls it “*the word of God*.”

We have a tendency to think of the Word of God solely as the written word, the Bible, but we know that Jesus is also the Word of God, so I think in the context of this story, it is fair to say that this Word is anything that emanates from God Himself and is an expression of Who He is, just like our words come from us, and express who we are.

This seed of the Word can take many different formats:

- printed words of Scripture
- spoken words that express truth about God
- words of encouragement that point us to the God of hope
- the Word of God in action, people

acting in ways that reveal what God is like.

These seeds have the potential to grow, reproduce, and bring forth productive fruit. The ability of a natural seed to multiply is amazing.

One of my uncles passed away recently at 94 years of age. He was a prolific gardener and loved to work with plants. At his memorial service, his son shared how his father would often say, “God is such a giver. You plant one corn seed and you get back 150-200 seeds in return.”

That is incredibly true. And then when you consider what happens when you plant those 150-200 seeds, it’s more amazing.

And if that is the case with natural seeds, how much more with the seed of God’s Word—in print, in word, in action. This “precious seed” has the potential to heal marriages, transform lives, release captives, and end wars! There are no limits to the power of this seed!

The Sower

Secondly, we consider the sower. The sower is anyone who sows this word, anyone who represents and expresses the heart of God, either by word or action, to the society (the soil) around him. And as students of the Bible, we know that this is the calling of every child of God. No one

can escape. We are all called to be Hilda Hamlins, filling our pockets with these seeds and freely sowing them as we walk through life.

And it's to us sowers that my heart is crying out today. I'm afraid that too often we spend so much time trying to get the details of time and place correct. We wrestle with what techniques we should use to spread the seed. We spend months and years of time trying to create the ideal environment in which to sow or the correct administrative structure with which to operate. And we do all kinds of reading and take all kinds of training about how to sow. None of this is wrong and much of it can be helpful. But in the middle of all that, God is saying, "Do it! The world is your field. The minute you jump out of your bed or step out your front door, or drive into town, there are places to be sowing seeds. Get busy! You don't have to have all the details of time and place correct."

In a city not far from where we live there is a hospital that has been in operation for 57 years. It was started by two single women who had a vision to reach out to local Bedouin people by ministering to their medical and spiritual needs. If you visit this hospital today, you will see a sprawling campus filled with Christian believers working

to meet the needs of the Bedouins. This hospital has received favor in the country, even from the highest levels of government because of the genuine love, compassion, and care that the poor receive.

But things weren't always this way. In 1965, two single women with medical training who had lived in the Middle East and had a heart for Bedouins were touring the United States. They shared their dream for a medical ministry among the Bedouins with friends and supporters. But they encountered opposition to their idea. How could two single women go into the Arab world and begin something like this?

Then one day they were visiting in the home of a trusted friend. "What do you want to do?" he asked them. One of the ladies explained their dream, and he quietly reached for his Bible, and these are the verses he read. "*He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good*" (Ecclesiastes 11:4-6).

Then he closed his Bible, and with a smile said, “If you’re so convinced that this is what God wants you to do, what are you doing sitting in my living room? Just get up and do it.” So, with only 50 dollars between them, those two ladies returned to the Middle East, and they watched what God did.

The passage from Ecclesiastes that this man shared is instructive for all of us as sowers. The gardener who focuses only on the obstacles—too many clouds, too much wind—will not plant anything and consequently will not harvest anything.

But the person who embraces his limited knowledge and rests in the sovereignty of God is free to pour his life and his soul and everything he has into the task he has been given. *He acknowledges that there is so much he does not know.* He can’t even explain the wind that daily caresses his face, or how he was formed in his mother’s womb. *And likewise, he has no idea which of the seeds that he hurls into the wind is going to sprout.*

Will it be:

- the truths from Scripture that he shares with his children in the morning?
- the counsel that he gives to a struggling young person?
- the sympathetic ear he gives to someone going through tragedy?

- the smile and respectful words he gives to a grumpy salesperson at the store?

The wise sower doesn’t know, and he is OK with that. He is at rest, because he believes in the power of the seed and the power of the One who gave the seed. He doesn’t know “*which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.*” He just liberally hurls seeds in the morning of life, in the afternoon of life, and in the evening of life. This is our calling, brothers and sisters!

The Soil

The seeds that we throw out into the world are going to land somewhere. The four kinds of soil recorded in the story are four kinds of human hearts that our seeds will land upon. And all of us who have spent time sowing seeds can likely find names to match with the different types of soil.

- Some hear the word and allow Satan to snatch it away before they’ve even had time to process what it means.

- Others accept the word, but opposition or problems quickly keep it from producing.

- And then there are those who are intrigued by the message, who want to hear from God, but they are just too busy and too encumbered with earthly stuff and activity, and those

temporal things preoccupy them and choke out the seeds that reach them.

•Finally, there is the good soil—open hearts, ready, waiting, and cultivated. A verse from the Bible, a word of encouragement, a new truth, an act of selflessness, when those things reach *that* heart, they bring forth fruit. Lives become transformed, and new seeds are formed and scattered. There is a harvest, a multiplication, as these individuals sow their own seeds. How exciting!!

But now some questions. Is that harvest guaranteed? Did Jesus intend for His story to express a mathematical fact? Are we guaranteed that 75%

of the soil that we sow on will be unproductive, while 25% will be productive? Do we have a biblical promise that if we sow the Word of God, we are going to *see it* bearing fruit in the lives of the people we minister to? And if we aren't seeing a harvest, are we doing something wrong? Do we need to change our methodology? Do we need to find other soils? My answer to that is "no!"

The true measure of our effectiveness as sowers is not the visible harvest that results but our obedience to God's command to sow His word.



(To be continued)

STORMS make oaks
take deeper **root**.

-GEORGE SANTAYANA



marriages

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

Byler-Miller

Bro. Nathan, son of the late Jonas and Olive Byler, Paris, TN, and Sis. Keturah, daughter of Moses and Mary Miller, Crossville, TN, on October 15, 2022, at Bethlehem Baptist Church for Mt. Moriah Mennonite Church by John Ray Miller.

Mast-Schrock

Bro. Morgan, son of Mervin and Marianna Mast, Utica, OH, and Sis. Rosita, daughter of Eli and Elva Schrock, Freeport, OH, on August 13, 2022, at Antrim Mennonite Church by Jason D. Miller.

cradle roll

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

Beachy, John and Clara Mae (Yoder), Auburn, KY, fifth child, second daughter, Grace Moriah, November 17, 2022.

Beachy, Kendall and Jeanette (Bender), Winfield, PA, fifth child, fourth daughter, Hazel Autumn, November 22, 2022.

Byler, Sam and Amy (Bontrager), Wellston, OH, first child and daughter, Chantaya Elizabeth, September 14, 2022.

Stoltzfus-Schrock

Bro. Myron, son of Amos and Hannah Stoltzfus, Drasco, AR, and Sis. LaRonda, daughter of Eli and Elva Schrock, Freeport, OH on May 27, 2022, at Rivercrest Farm for Antrim Mennonite Church by Jason D. Miller.

Tobin-Troyer

Bro. Robert Tobin, Sugarcreek, OH, and Sis. Krista Troyer, daughter of Syl and Betty Troyer, Dover, OH, on September 10, 2022, at Messiah A.M. Church by Phil Miller.

Yoder-Derstine

Bro. Jeriah, son of Tim and Wilma Yoder, Uniontown, OH, and Sis. Arianna, daughter of Trevor and Regina Derstine, Culver, OR, on October 28, 2022, at Palisades Mennonite Church by Steve Zehr.



Detweiler, Galen and Claudia (Miller), Fredonia, KY, second child, first son, André Dwayne, November 17, 2022.

Eichorn, Howard and Sharon (Beachy), Georgetown, OH, seventh child, fifth daughter, Janelle Marie, October 21, 2022.

Gentile, Jonathan and Melody (Freeman), Lawrenceburg, TN, first child and son, Beckett Victor, November 10, 2022.

Gingerich, Caleb and Melanie (Kauffman), Leesburg, OH, second child, first son, Matthias Darin, November 2, 2022.

Glick, Omar and Wilma (Blank), Narvon, PA, third child, second son, Jeffrey Anthony, November 15, 2022.

Stoltzfus, Douglas and Kelsey (Martin), Narvon, PA, fourth child and daughter, Shae Victoria, November 28, 2022.

Graber, Will and Joann (Hostetler), Auburn, KY, first child and son, Bowen Dale, November 13, 2022.

Groff, Will and Heidi (Miller), Russellville, KY, fourth child, third son, Kallen Bradley, November 15, 2022.

Hershberger, Ben and Anna (Zook), Owenton, KY, fourth child, third daughter, Monica Ruth, November 10, 2022.

Kauffman, Loren and Jean (Peachey), Reedsville, PA, fourth child (one deceased), second son, Phoenix Samuel, November 5, 2022.

Knepp, Matthew and Joanna (Wagler), Ray, OH, fourth child, second son, Eric Daniel, October 19, 2022.

Knepp, Wilmer and Sarah (Moser), McArthur, OH, first child and daughter, Natasha Maureen, May 3, 2022.

Martin, Troy and Amy (Weaver), Jackson, OH, first child and son, Canaan Hunter, April 5, 2022.

McGrath, Shawn and Veronica (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, second child and daughter, Heather Faye, September 2, 2022.

Miller, Christopher and Jewel (Raber), Beach City, OH, first child and daughter, Adele Raine, November 18, 2022.

Miller, Jason and Allyson (Ballard), Mifflinburg, PA, fourth child, third son, Bennett Cole, November 22, 2022.

Miller, Lavern and Jessica (Eash), Free Union, VA, first child and son, Riley James, November 11, 2022.

Miller, Loren and Bethany (Yoder), Owenton, KY, first child and son, Carter Jace, September 8, 2022.

Schrock, Lyndon and Gina (Mast), Montezuma, GA, fourth child, third son, Bentley Reece, October 14, 2022.

Stauffer, Bradley and Shirley (Martin), Hillsboro, OH, first child and son, Braxton Chase, October 13, 2022.

Weaver, Ryan and Rebecca (Yoder), Montezuma, GA (serving in Nakuru, Kenya), fifth child and daughter, Oaklynn Rayne, October 9, 2022.




Wengerd, Timothy and Andrea (Mast), Whiteville, TN, second child, first son, Waylon Knox, October 7, 2022.

Wingard, LaVern and Carmen (Eash), Montezuma, GA, third child and son, Grayson Myles, November 1, 2022.

Yoder, Lyndon and Vonda (Stoltzfus), Sardinia, OH, first child and daughter, Aniyah Kate, November 3, 2022.

Yoder, Matthew and Heidi (Yoder), Owenton, KY, first child and daughter, Kierra Elizabeth, October 27, 2022.

Zook, Dennis and Sarah (Gingerich), Cambridge, OH, fifth child, fourth son, Micaiah Lynn, October 12, 2022. 

ordinations


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

Bro. Duane Beiler, 30, (wife, Mary Metzler), Mount Pleasant, PA, was called through the church and ordained minister of Trauger Mennonite Church on October 23, 2022. The charge was given by Merv Lapp, assisted by Laban Kauffman and Wes Metzler. The final message was brought by Laban Kauffman.

Bro. Wendall Danner, 40, (wife, Esther Mast), Owenton, KY, was ordained minister at Owenton A.M. Church on October 23, 2022. Preordination messages were given by Titus Troyer. The charge was given by Joshua Yoder, assisted by Gary Raber and Floyd Lengacher. Joseph Mullet shared the lot.

Bro. Elvie Frey, Jr., 33, (wife, Sonya Riehl), Elkhart, IN, was ordained minister at Fair Haven Mennonite Church on November 6, 2022. Preordination messages were given by Dean Miller. The charge was given by Wilbur Yoder.

Bro. Paul Stoltzfus, 41, (wife, Naomi King), Troutville, VA, was called through the church and ordained minister for Fincastle Mennonite on October 23, 2022. Preordination messages were given by Jonathan Martin. The charge was given by Tim Weaver, assisted by Wayne Yoder.

Bro. Loren Yoder, 53, (wife, Mary Ellen Yoder) was ordained bishop for Valley View A.M. Church on October 23, 2022. Preordination messages were brought by Arlen Mast. The charge was given by Eli B. King, Jr., assisted by Daniel Fisher and Arlen Mast. Jesse Zook shared the lot. 

APPRECIATION is thanking, RECOGNITION is seeing,
and ENCOURAGEMENT is bringing hope for the future.

Hostetler, Lovina, 100, of London, OH, passed away peacefully in her home on October 21, 2022. She was born November 22, 1921, in Plain City, OH, to Joe and Alma (Miller) Beachy. She was married October 14, 1943, to Lester Hostetler who is deceased. They were blessed with nearly 65 years of marriage.

Lovina was a faithful member of Canaan Fellowship Church.

Surviving are three sons and two daughters: Vernon Lee, William Edward (Cornelia), Alice (Vernon) Miller, all of London; Naomi (Donnie) Brenneman, Virginia Beach, VA; Lawrence Ray (Sharon), West Jefferson; 21 grandchildren; 76 great-grandchildren; four great-great-grandchildren; a brother, Walter Beachy, Plain City; and a sister, Inez Miller, Sarasota, FL.

She was preceded in death by her parents, six sisters: Alice (age 4), MaLinda (age 1), Emma (Joe) Detweiler, Sue (Ralph) Yutzy, Alma (Dan) Gingerich, Laura; five brothers: Homer, Eli, Noah, Lawrence, Joseph; and two great-grandsons.

The funeral was held October 25, 2022, at Canaan Fellowship Church.

King, David S., 83, of Belleville, PA, passed away October 27, 2022, at his home. He was born on June 26, 1939, in Reedsville, PA, to the late Eli B. and Sarah S. (Yoder) King. On June 13, 1963, he married Martha M. Spicher. She survives

at their home.

Also surviving are his children: David J. (Kathy), New Holland; Lois Ann (Mervin) Peachey, Belleville; Marlene (Dwight) Nisly, Brooklyn, NY; Galen (Beth), Belleville; Timothy (Janice), McVeytown; Myron (Mary Ellen), Greencastle; Marvin (Charlene), Spain; Matthew (Krissy), Queens, NY; 35 grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren; siblings: Alvin, Mifflintown; Amelia Yoder, McVeytown; Jesse (Erma), Hartville, OH; John (Anna Fern), Kalona, IA; Martha King, Belleville; Jake (Joyce), Arlington, KS; Sara King, Belleville; Eli (Mary Jane), Belleville; and brother-in-law, Norman Kauffman, Mayfield, KY.

He was preceded in death by two sisters, Lena King and Mary Kauffman, brother-in-law, Ray Yoder, sister-in-law, Anna Mae King, and three grandsons: Derek King, Jensen King, and Joshua King.

David was a carpenter. He was ordained minister at Valley View Amish Mennonite Church in 1986. He served on the Board of Directors at the Bald Eagle Boys Camp, Penn Valley Christian Retreat Center, MCC, and was administrator at Valley View School for a number of years.

He enjoyed spending time with his family, reading, and had a passion for organizations serving God's Kingdom.

The funeral service was held October 31, 2022, at Valley View Amish

Mennonite Church with Dwight Nisly, Galen King, and Eli King officiating. Burial followed at the Locust Grove Cemetery.

Miller, Linford James, 69, of South Hutchinson, KS, passed peacefully from this life on November 17, 2022, after a five-month struggle with gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Linford was born July 14, 1953, in Hutchinson, KS, to Perry and Judy Miller. Delivered with learning disabilities, he was physically strong and blessed by the nurturing of his devoted parents. He completed eleven years in the Hutchinson special education program. Among his accomplishments was mastery of four-digit multiplication with pencil and paper.

In his youth, Linford was baptized on his confession of faith in Jesus and joined the Center Amish Mennonite Church. One skill he honed was memorizing church members' birthdays, giving him a conversational connection with people. He also roamed the parking lot to memorize the odometer readings of their cars.

Linford helped tend and till his mother's large garden, assisted seasonally in the transplanting of plants at Stutzman's Greenhouse, and loved to stack small square bales on his uncles' hay wagons. In midlife, he cut lumber and shingle

components at Sturdi-Bilt Storage Barns. His one-liners became legendary with his coworkers and all who knew him.

In 1999, realizing his need for a more structured schedule and supervision, his parents placed him at Faith Mission Home, a faith-based residential training program in Virginia for the developmentally disabled. He lived with three other men and their supervisors on a small farm for 16 years. He experienced a good life under the patient and sacrificial tutelage of his Christian mentors. By 2016, due to his declining mobility and verbal communication, Linford needed to find a new home. So, at age 62 he moved to Mennonite Friendship Communities, where the staff compassionately and faithfully served him. Staff members will long remember his big smiles and ready hugs, along with his limited communication punctuated by frequent admonitions to "hurry up" and other catchphrases.

Linford is survived by his three brothers: Gary (Rosanna) and Allen, Hutchinson; Wilbur (Shirley), Columbus, OH; two nieces, seven nephews, 16 grandnieces, and 14 grandnephews.

Preceding him in death were his parents and 14 aunts and uncles.

The funeral service was held November 20, 2022, at Center A.M. Church. Burial followed at the West Center Cemetery.



He who provides for this *life*, but takes no care for *eternity*,
is wise for a moment, but a fool forever. -JOHN TILLOTSON

The days and dates of Thanksgiving week this past November aligned with the days and dates of Thanksgiving week six years prior. Thanksgiving week in 2016 was a memorable one for us for several reasons. On Tuesday of that week we received word that my father was involved in a traffic accident that he didn't survive. Thursday, of course, was Thanksgiving. The day following Thanksgiving, Brenda and I became grandparents for the first time. Dad's funeral was on Sunday following Thanksgiving.

When we noted our grandson's sixth birthday this past Thanksgiving week we took several trips up and down memory lane. We rejoice in God's goodness to us in many ways. We have many good memories of Dad's life. The little fellow who was born between Dad's passing and his funeral is now a healthy six-year-old boy. We still have much, much to be thankful for.

One of the enduring memories of the times surrounding the death of my parents was the way that friends, family, and church came together to lighten the load in varied ways that were kind, helpful, caring, and supportive. The support that we felt

by those who gathered from near and far for the funeral was encouraging indeed.

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During the week prior to Thanksgiving this year, Brenda and I attended the funeral of our friend, Ann Sramek, at a local funeral home. It was probably the most informal funeral we've ever attended. I didn't count but there were around 30 friends and acquaintances who gathered to pay their respects and to honor Ann's memory. I had been asked to offer a prayer and a few words at the end of the service. I ended up being a bit surprised to see my name on the program as the one who was officiating. Ann's son, Jay, began by standing up and telling stories about growing up with his mother in a single-parent home. He spoke fondly of the guidance and support she gave while he was growing up, even though he thought she was quite overbearing at that time. He also expressed gratitude that his mother often prayed for him. Ann had specified that she wished to be cremated. So, there was no burial. After Jay was finished talking, I read some Scripture from Psalms and led in a prayer, after which those who

gathered filed past and met Jay.

Ann and her husband were divorced not many years after they were married. Jay was their only child. Jay was also married for a short time and was also divorced. Ann's funeral was attended by five or six cousins and a few of their descendants. Ann's former husband had passed away a number of years ago. Outside of Ann's son, Jay, who is 57 years old, the youngest relative who attended was close to 70 years old.

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I was struck by how different Ann's funeral was from Dad's funeral. We enjoyed our friendship with Ann. She and her son, Jay, attended our church for several years. We have a few cattle over in Jay's pasture with his cattle. The last years of her life, Jay and Ann had quit attending church regularly. Her advancing age and the variety of complications associated with that, contributed to their decision to stay home more. One of the things that I find most remarkable is the fact that Ann's social circle was relatively small. It doesn't seem as useful to me to speculate as to why her social circle was small as it does to enjoy and cultivate the blessings we experience in that regard.

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I've said it before and it bears repeating. A huge blessing of

belonging to a church family is that we have a space where the joys and sorrows and the important milestones of life are shared. It is beautiful and strengthens those things that are important when baptisms, weddings, funerals, and even births are in varied ways and levels celebrated and supported in the context of the local church. The old adage that says, "Joys are multiplied and sorrows are halved when they are shared" is instructive, if not precisely accurate. I treasure the blessing and care of a church brotherhood and family that share these important milestones and events.

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The Colorado River begins in Colorado and winds its way to the Pacific Ocean through the Grand Canyon in the southeast region of the USA. A series of seven major reservoirs have been built in the Colorado River System. In addition to hydroelectric production, these systems store and distribute the water in that basin. As of November 2022, the seven reservoirs are estimated to be holding 19.3 million acre-feet of water which represents about 33% of their combined capacity. Lake Powell and Lake Mead are the two largest reservoirs in this system. Their storage was reported to be at 25% and 28% respectively during this

November 2022 reporting period.

Over the winter of 40 years ago, in 1982-83, repeated major snow events built an impressive snow pack across vast areas in the upper Colorado River basin. The snows continued later into the spring than normal, and summer temperatures arrived more abruptly than was expected. The resulting run-off created huge concerns about the ability of the river's reservoir system to withstand the onslaught of snowmelt. Those in charge of monitoring inflows and outflows experienced many anxious days as they contemplated the potential implications if the systems in place were to fail in the face of this formidable test. It wasn't perfect, or very pretty, but the system did not fail catastrophically.

Now, 40 years later, the hand-wringing has resumed but for very different reasons. A period of time in which there is an increased demand for water and electricity is happening during an extended period of reduced precipitation that recharges the system. This leaves those in charge trying to juggle the factors of increased demand and reduced supply in a responsible manner. It's not very difficult to understand how tension grows among those affected when competing interests vie for the same dwindling resources.

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Amish near Ashland, Ohio, have gotten a bit of press recently because of their unwillingness to comply with local laws prescribing minimal lighting on their buggies in order to enhance their visibility and offer increased protection from traffic accidents. It is not likely that we could be exhaustive in a few short comments if we undertook to explain all the reasons for this non-compliance. But some combination of trusting God for our safety, avoiding ostentation and modern gadgetry, and a perceived danger of allowing government officials to shape those practices that they feel are important, are present to a greater or lesser degree in this objection. Indeed, those who are refusing to comply and refusing to pay the fines that result from that non-compliance, state the objection as being rooted in their faith.

Now I suspect that some of you, like me, don't see a bright, clean correlation between faith and buggy lights. The professed intent of these laws is to benefit those riding in the buggies as well as those who share the road with them. But the Amish who are not complying do not feel that this intent constitutes sufficient grounds for them to comply.

We might not agree with the

details of this clash between the Amish and civil authorities. But many of the competing elements between those who implement these laws, those who are designed to be protected by those laws, and those who are asked to comply do seem pretty familiar. Without reflecting unduly on the merit or lack thereof of the stance that our faith cousins in Ashland, Ohio, have taken, let's remind ourselves that not all of our deeply-held preferences are matters of faith.

There are times when we need to obey God rather than man. It is because of this that we can't go to war or participate in military efforts even if we were asked to do so. But real conflicts between how we live our faith and what we are legally required to do in the USA are pretty scarce because of the extensive freedoms we are granted.

At the opposite end of the spectrum some folks capriciously disregard laws simply due to convenience, preference, or rebellion. I seriously doubt that any of us feel this is a responsible and Christ-like way to respond. The difficulty comes with those things that fall somewhere between the extremes of obeying God rather than men and carelessly disobeying because we feel like it. The

discussions in our circles about that space between these two poles often goes something like this.

"We must resist when the government asks something we don't like, because if we don't, we won't have the strength to stand up when actual faith tests come."

The rejoinder might sound something like this, "If we resist those types of things, it actually dilutes our objections when we are compelled to take a stand on faith issues. Furthermore, resisting on non-essential things does not strengthen our response. Instead, it dulls the clarity we need to understand what is important and what isn't."

And thus the discussion goes. May God grant us the clarity and charity, both individually and corporately, to discern whether our manner of relating to this type of thing is rooted in obedience to Christ or in personal preference or whether they spring from more carnal inclinations. The last two or three years, we, as conservative Anabaptist communities, have had quite an opportunity to open the discussion around these themes. Sometimes it is easier to initiate these discussions than it is to bring helpful closure to them.

-RJM 



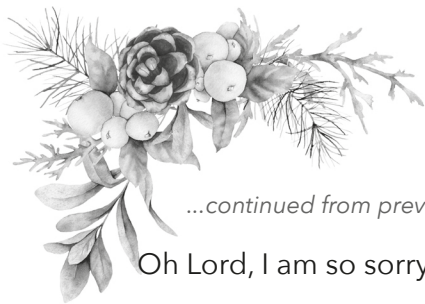
God, I Say I Love You

God, I say I love You:

- but then I justify harshness toward my spouse.
- but then I so insolently exasperate my children.
- but then I excuse dishonor toward my parents.
- but then I rationalize disrespect toward my siblings.
- but then I tolerate my rude behavior and mean speech toward my employer/employee.
- but then I defend insubordination to my spiritual leaders.
- but then I give good reasons to validate some awful gossip of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.
- but then I substantiate my unkind thoughts and contemptible rhetoric toward my civil authorities.
- but then I impudently absolve myself from personal blame for my bitter attitudes toward those who have injured me, refusing to forgive them.
- but then I allow myself to vocally trash anybody whom I perceive is on the wrong side of social, religious, or political issues.

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Oh Lord, I am so sorry for my self-centeredness
that gives me the permission to harbor bitterness.
I sincerely repent from my self-righteous attitude
which I use to exonerate myself for being so rude.
As I scrutinize the depths of my own heart and soul,
I acknowledge my wicked need for wanting control.
Thus, in shame I rescind my drive to climb to the top.
Indeed, if I desire good relationships, this has to stop!
But still, beyond any rift within a human relationship,
I regret the pain of estrangement from Your fellowship.
I am aware of the hypocrisy of professing to love You,
and in the same breath, speaking evil of my fellow too.
I realize Your brilliant design for me to actually love You
is by my responses to those created in Your similitude.
So, when I treat them benignly, I am treating You kindly,
and when I act harshly to them, I am treating You rudely.
Therefore, while I admit I may not have done as perfectly
well as I should have in two thousand twenty-two A.D.;
yet, if I uphold my heart amenable in penitent humility,
then we will see a change in two thousand-twenty-three!

ALFREDO MULLET, CHILTON, TX



Beauty in Suffering

An abridged transcript

Linda Miller, Waynesboro, VA



All of us have suffered to some degree or other. Beauty, as we know it, is often shaped by hard times and suffering. Elisabeth Kubler Ross said, *“the most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss and have found their way out of those depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”* That really is God’s heart, to have His character be formed in us. True beauty comes through hardship.

Can beauty actually come from suffering? How can I keep going when it hurts so much? Sometimes the pain is overwhelming, and we feel like we can’t keep going. But God knows about that. While the dictionary defines beauty as something that especially pleases sight, beauty is not just appearance, but also what people can’t see—our character. That’s really what God is concerned about. As women, we like beautiful things,

and we desire to be beautiful. Peter mentions that we should not be as focused on our outward appearance, but to work on the inner beauty of a meek and quiet spirit.

God created the world in the beginning, and He created it beautiful and for us to enjoy. Then He pronounced, “It is very good.” But when sin entered the world, that beauty was marred. Today we live in a world marred by sin and evil. We encounter the curse on the earth. We have to deal with thorns, thistles, pain, grief, sorrow, and loss. God desires to restore the beauty that was lost. This is why Jesus came to walk with us in our suffering; to redeem that brokenness, to break that power of sin and evil and to restore the beauty that was marred.

How does He accomplish that? Suffering is one of the main ways that He is working to restore that beauty. Suffering is defined as a state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship. Words that describe suffering in Scripture are: trials, persecution, humiliation, tribulation,

affliction, and temptations. We can think of people in Scripture who suffered greatly, specifically Job. It was a test of his faith and not for any sin that he had committed.

There are many kinds of suffering. There is physical suffering where we experience pain or disability, illness, and chronic conditions. There is also emotional and mental pain like trauma, abuse, grief, and loss. There's fear and anxiety, and tension in relationships. There are degrees of suffering. It can range from stubbing your toe to something much more traumatic like an accident which causes injury, or chronic health issues, or the death of a loved one. But in any degree of suffering, God is there. He wants to bring healing and wholeness to whatever pain we suffer.

Everyone suffers. We can't get away from it. But we look forward to a perfect world some day when there will be no suffering. Sometimes it feels like no one else knows how difficult my situation is, but we can be assured that others have suffered very similarly. We all deal with the effects of sin, but just because we live in a sinful world doesn't mean that we are doomed to failure. There is hope because of Jesus. We remember Jesus is the one Who gained power over sin, death, and the devil. That's where our hope lies.

Suffering for the Christian does not last forever. As a Christian, II Corinthians 4 is a reminder of that, "*for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory.*" Can you imagine that this suffering that sometimes feels like it lasts for years and years and years, in comparison to eternity will look like a *moment*? Keeping that in mind can give us courage to keep holding onto God's hand when times are hard. I Peter 5:10 says, "*After you have suffered a little while.*" Notice that time frame—a *little while*. The God of all grace will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and settle you. My painful circumstances will not last one moment longer than God deems necessary to achieve His eternal purposes in my life.

Suffering is real. At times we just want to deny that it's there or wish it would go away. But there's no point in minimizing the purpose of God's suffering in whatever we face. It's important that we don't just think, "Well, if I don't think about it, it will go away." It's not a mind thing except that our mind needs to be in conformity to Jesus Christ. Suffering is real; we can't just wish it away. We can expect to suffer.

Why suffering? If God is good, why doesn't He just fix it so that

everything else is good too? We remember that because we live in a fallen world there will always be suffering, pain, and death. We also suffer as a consequence of our sin—the law of sowing and reaping. If we choose to sow to the flesh, we will reap of the flesh.

Suffering also results from others' bad choices. Sometimes we experience the rippling effects from others who are not choosing well, and they cause pain for others due to their bad choices. We may be personally offended by misunderstandings, jealousy, or things done against us. Maybe there's anger, slander, hatred, or even rejection. Those are hard times and can cause us much pain.

Another reason we suffer in this world is for the sake of righteousness, such as persecution for our faith, our belief in following Jesus, and standing for truth. Interestingly, Peter writes a lot about suffering, and it's comforting to see what he has to say. *“Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.”* We shouldn't think it weird that we need to suffer because we follow Jesus. We should be willing to do so. I Peter 4:16 ends that section with, *“yet if any man suffers as a Christian*

let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Matthew 5 says that we are blessed when we are persecuted because we follow Christ. We are to be exceeding glad for great is our reward in heaven. I Peter 2:21 mentions that suffering is our calling. *“For even hereunto were ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.”* So, suffering is going to be here.

What are good responses and what are wrong responses? We may ask what I can do to fix my problems? Sometimes there are things we can do, but other times we simply need to draw close to God and see how He wants to sanctify us through these times of suffering. As a teenager, the serenity prayer spoke to me: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.* The latter was the part of the prayer that stood out to me. There are things I cannot change, but there are things I *can* change, and those I need to take responsibility for. So, possibly in my suffering there are some things I am not doing as God wants me to; I may not be following Him well. In those ways, I need to come to Him in repentance. However, often I need to just embrace the circumstances that God allows

to come and those I can't change. I need wisdom to know the difference. The prayer goes on to say...*living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships as a pathway to peace. Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it, trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will, that I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.*

William Law says this about suffering: *Receive every inward and outward trouble, every disappointment, pain, uneasiness, temptation, darkness, and desolation with both your hands as a true opportunity and a blessed occasion of dying to self and entering into a fuller fellowship with your self-denying, suffering Savior.* God's whole purpose is that we respond with open hands.

Instead of receiving it with open hands, we might resist and resent and seek to escape from this hard situation. Val and Krystal Yoder in *How to Experience Purpose in Life*, say this: *When we resort to anger, denial, rationalization, hardness, and bitterness, we are unable to receive comfort from the Father, God of all comfort.* It really is closing our hearts to grace and enablement to go through hard times. We can choose to have an inward focus on me or an

outward focus on God and what He would like. An inward focus will say, "This is so hard; poor me. How can I ever get through this?" A God-focus is asking God, "What are you trying to teach me through this? How can my suffering be an opportunity to grow and to bless others? How can I become part of the gift You want to give to other people?"

God has a purpose in redeeming our situation; that's why Jesus came. Because He is good, He comes near. Jesus' name, Emmanuel, means "God with us." He's kind and compassionate. He weeps with us and wants to bear our pain. God can bring peace to our hearts in the midst of our suffering and as we trust Him we know that He can bring inexpressible goodness out of this terrible badness. Joseph in the Bible was treated so unjustly, and we wonder how he could keep his faith. But we get to see the end of the picture and how God turned it around and made it come out for good, and even his brothers were changed. It's amazing and encouraging to see God's overall purpose in Joseph's suffering. Joseph never charged God as being unfaithful.

We cannot expect to attain holiness except through suffering, and God is more interested in our holiness than in our immediate happiness. Often, we would wish for Jesus to be that

genie that zaps all our pain away and makes things right. But it wouldn't take any faith and trust in Him if He would always just fix our problems when we ask. That's not His goal. His goal is to form His image in us and to bring holiness to us.

Think about Jesus' example. I especially like the passage in Hebrews 2 where he talks about Jesus needing to suffer. Verse 10 says, "*in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*" Jesus had to endure suffering so that He could bring us to a right relationship with Him, and through that suffering He was able to give His life to go through death but come out victorious through the resurrection. So now He has power over death, and we don't need to fear death anymore. Because Jesus suffered, He can now come into our suffering and comfort us and give us the courage to keep holding onto His hand. We can know that once He has seen that our lives are perfected and sanctified, the suffering will cease, and we can thank Him for being that suffering High Priest.

Some of you may be thinking about the hardships that our family went through. I will share some personal lessons that I learned through our hard times. Our experience was that my husband Ken spent two years in

prison in connection with the Lisa Miller child-custody case. He was charged with aiding and abetting international kidnapping for helping Lisa leave the country with her own daughter. (For more information see our website: miller.case.org.) We are especially thankful even these four years later, when on a Sunday morning, we can go to church together. I remember those times when I needed to go by myself and it's a blessing we never, never want to forget.

Something else I learned, and am still learning, was to humbly accept help. With Ken gone, there was no one to really support us. Our older boys helped, but our church pitched in and designated an amount every month for household expenses and support. That meant so much. There were many, many other close friends who supported us. One couple would send us a monthly check for \$50; we could count on it. Prayer support was huge. We got so much mail and cards from close friends and people we didn't know. Mail time was a highlight. Also, there was the physical presence of friends who came to pray with me specifically. There were meals, boxes of groceries, and men from church who would do "men things" with our sons.

We also learned about gratefulness

in hardship. It would have been easy to say, “This is so hard. What are we going to do?” But if we practiced gratitude, it’s amazing how it affected our attitude. One was that although he was in prison two hours away, he was not dead and gone. We were privileged to be able to visit him weekly, a two-hour drive one way, and we could sit face-to-face for about three hours. It was a blessing to connect with others visiting their families and inmates at the same time, and we would get to minister in that way as well. A real blessing was to be free from any guilt that my husband might have carried. I knew he had stood for truth and that was why he was in prison instead of having done something that deserved a prison term. I felt so grateful that he had a clear conscience and that he was taking opportunities to minister to the men in prison with him. Gratefulness was a big thing, counting our blessings, and trying not to focus so much on things we didn’t have.

Also, I found a greater dependence on God. There were day-to-day decisions that I would have often asked Ken about. However, most days Ken would call and often he would email daily. But this time without Ken at home made me depend more on God. During lonely times I needed

to turn to God, and I found that His grace poured into my life. Our family grew closer. We had young boys at home at the time, ages 13-24. It was a bonding time because they drew together and supported each other. Without a father figure we had to come up with some alternative ways of functioning as a family. The boys stepped up to the plate, and it was a growing experience for them too. We also found that we could be channels for God when we were willing to share with others instead of hoarding all that was poured out on us. There were various ladies I communicated with because they too had a husband in prison, and we encouraged each other.

The funeral of Ken’s mother and the weddings of our two oldest children took place during Ken’s imprisonment. No leaves were granted for him. But Ken celebrated the weddings in prison. They prepared special food, and he was able to talk about what a Christian wedding actually looks like. He was able to call during the wedding and reception and talk to the bride and groom and to some of the guests, so that made it feel like he was connected. He had one of his friends do bead work—making a nice plaque as a wedding gift. While it was a challenge to find joy in our situation,

it was a blessing to experience the outpouring of His grace.

How does beauty come from suffering? It comes as we draw close to Christ, as we embrace what He gives, and allow His grace to flow through us. He gives us joy in pain; He gives us hope so we can persevere to the end. Andrew Murray said: *“In times of trouble, say, first, God brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place; in that I will rest. Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child. Then say, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means*

to bestow. And last, say, in His good time He can bring me out again, how and when, He knows. I am here by God’s appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time.” God knows, and in His time He will bring me out.

[Linda’s talk was first given on <https://strengthtostrength.org/sisters/> and is used by permission. All sisters are welcome to join and participate through Zoom/phone. Talks are held on the first Saturday of each month. “Strength to Strength Sisters” hosts women speakers who are supportive of a Christ-centered, Kingdom-focused, Scripture-based way of life, specifically as modeled by the Anabaptist tradition.]



junior messages

A Hen on the Pastor’s Bench

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

Recently, at a mission church in Kenya some unique things showed up in the offering basket. The offering basket was on a small table at the front of the church. The people walk up to place their offering in the basket. The American pastor was surprised to see three eggs in the offering basket.

A native pastor bought the three

precious eggs for 40 shillings (33 cents). Eggs are a very much appreciated food, and cash is often scarce. Someone sacrificed to give those three eggs to the Lord.

One Sunday the pastor glanced at the offering table and was amazed to see a chicken with its head sticking out of a bag on the offering table. During the announcement time, a native pastor offered the chicken for sale, and since no one else wanted to

purchase it, the pastor bought it for 200 shillings. The chickens legs were tied, so it could not run out of church. It was put on the pastor's bench.

Is a chicken a small gift? It is a big one! Kenyans love to eat meat, but it is not readily available with difficult times in Africa. They don't get to eat meat every day. When we visited a Kenyan home in the country, sometimes our host would go outside and quickly butcher a fowl so they had meat to serve. They were truly giving their best. Not much goes to waste. I remember the day when a small girl held a drumstick with what looked like a long noodle wrapped around the bone. Want to guess what that was? It was a chicken intestine, a special delicacy indeed.

When we lived in Africa, a typical church offering was often under 10 dollars unless there were American visitors. The average wage per day in Kenya was three dollars or less. In comparison to what Americans earn, I wonder if they were actually giving more than we do?

Do we give practical and worthwhile

gifts? At Kenyan weddings you would often see a hen, with its legs tied, sitting among the wedding gifts.

In this New Year will we be generous with what we put in the church offering? Will I give of my time to help others? Will I give my talents in the work of the Lord? Do I love and care about people or is my focus solely on myself?

Money may be the easiest thing to give. Giving time can be more costly and meaningful.

Jesus told a story in Mark 12:44 about a poor widow who gave much. He said, *"For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."*

In the New Year of 2023,
What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part.
Yet what can I give Him?
Give my heart.

-Christina Rossetti 

Hope smiles on the threshold of the year

to come, whispering that it will be happier.

-ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

CALVARY MESSENGER



Holy Spirit Guidance

Josh Kooistra, New Concord, OH



You stand on the edge of the calm, still lake and pick up a stone. You heft it in your hand, feeling its weight, and then launch it into the water. There's a splash. The stone is gone from sight and ripples flow from the point of impact—out, out, out, until they fade away. Youth is a time of many decisions. Decisions that often have far-reaching effects. Just as the ripples flowed out from the impact of the rock, the impact of our decisions flows into all aspects of our lives and influences our futures. Knowing what decisions to make is difficult. Since the decisions we make in our youth are important and impactful, it is paramount that we make right decisions. God has a way of helping us make those decisions.

As Christians, we know that God has a plan for our lives. We know this because He tells us in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”* (KJV). Other translations say, *“I know the plans that*

I have for you...” Knowing that God has a plan for our lives and discerning that plan are two different things. God promises to guide us. *“And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not”* (Isaiah 58:11). That promise doesn't mean that it will always be clear. As evidenced in my own life, it seems that God continues to put us in situations that force us to trust Him because the situation doesn't “make sense.” Sometimes we are in a position where we have to make a hard decision and aren't sure what God's will is. We struggle to figure out what He wants us to do. We pray for direction. We wish it would be like Isaiah described in Isaiah 30:21, *“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”* Sadly, it's not that easy.

The apostle John addresses how God reveals His will to us at different

times. *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you”* (John 14:26). *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come”* (John 16:13). God reveals His will to us through the Holy Spirit, Who in turn speaks through the Bible, the church, and other believers who casually interact in our lives.

First and most importantly, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word. It’s amazing that a Book that took over 2000 years (give or take) to write, with contributions from 40 authors, is still alive and relevant in our lives today. I can think of no other book that is that old and has such a diverse authorship that can have such a massive impact in the day-to-day lives of people today. Personal devotions, Bible reading and prayer, and Bible studies are all instrumental in revealing God’s will to us. A friend of mine drove a bus for a discipleship group in Israel. Part of their schedule was awaking early, reading the Bible for an hour, and then praying for an hour. He told me that his life has never been the same.

As was mentioned before, the Word is alive and can speak to us and guide us. *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105).

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the church. When we join ourselves to a body of believers, we make ourselves accountable to them and their leadership. God uses them to speak to us. *“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues”* (I Corinthians 12:28). Sometimes the church asks us to teach school, or consider going into voluntary service. Sometimes others in the church see an area in our lives that needs work or improvement. Sometimes we are asked by others to do something and the church may feel that we aren’t ready yet and tells us “no.” As difficult as it can be to accept at times, we should take great care to question church leadership unless they are outside of clear Bible teaching. I don’t know anyone who enjoys speaking to someone about a need they see in their life. Give them the benefit of the doubt; God may be using them to speak to you. Often, they are fulfilling the office of serving the congregation as well as they know how. God also uses the preaching of

the Word to speak to us. Most times, a message I listen to speaks to a need or situation in my life.

Another way that the Holy Spirit speaks to us is through people. Maybe you are seeking God's will in a relationship or situation, and someone (unsolicited) talks to you about it. Although this may not *always* be God speaking to you, it is an avenue that He uses at times. Recently, our congregation had its tenth anniversary since its beginning. I was astounded at how many of our people testified to having little or no knowledge of the church here when they were seeking a home church, only to have multiple people ask them if they had considered this church? God used other people to push them towards where He wanted them to go. It may be as simple as someone mentioning that they think you'd make a good teacher, mechanic, nurse, etc. There is no way to be 100% sure that those conversations and dropped comments mean it's God's will for you to do or not do something. However, one thing is certain, the Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something that is contrary to the Scripture or dishonoring to godly parents or the standards that we've agreed to submit to in our church as long as we are members there.

Ultimately, we need to stay in tune with the Holy Spirit to recognize Him speaking to us. Prayer is a way of doing this, but is often erroneously viewed as a one-way street. We talk to God but since He doesn't verbally respond, we forget that we are having a conversation with the Creator. We essentially leave a voicemail, say amen, and later complain that God doesn't seem to be answering us. We need to take time to be still and listen for an answer. Remember, in the Bible God often spoke as a still, small voice. *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6). We are fools if we think that we can figure it all out on our own. But if we have open hearts and are willing to hear and accept whatever God is trying to teach us through the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, there is no telling what God can do in and through you.

Take a bit more time *hefting* before throwing that *stone*. Consider how far-reaching the effects or *ripples* will be. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you, so you can have confidence as you rear back, take careful aim, and launch that stone out into the lake.



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Well done is better than well said. -Benjamin Franklin

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• • • • •

Experience—something we would be glad to sell for less than we paid for it.

• • • • •

All our guests bring us happiness—some in coming, some in going.

• • • • •

He who doesn't climb the mountain cannot see the view.

• • • • •

A promise made is a debt unpaid. -William Shakespeare

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A life of ease is a difficult pursuit. -William Cowper

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One thing you can give and still keep is your word.

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Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way.

-BOOKER T. WASHINGTON