



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

SEPTEMBER 2024

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Calvary Messenger
September 2024

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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Thoughts on Grace

Jason Miller, Concord, AR

Grace has its origin with God—nowhere else.

Grace grows as my love for God's Word grows.

Grace is not freedom to do what I want to do
but the power to do what I ought to do.

Growing in grace and growing in the knowledge of our
Lord and Savior Jesus Christ go hand-in-hand.

Grace is not just forgiveness of sin but a change of master.

Grace is free, but it cost a lot.

Grace makes heaven possible. The choice is up to me.

Grace is infinite and vast but believable.

God would love to give me more grace, but my pride is in the way.

God doesn't give me grace for others. Each must get his own.

I don't get grace for tomorrow—just for today.

Grace is not for the self-sufficient but for the weak.

*“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:
for my strength is made perfect in weakness...”*

II CORINTHIANS 12:9a



Is It Real?

Several decades ago in an era of pursuing four-legged creatures for their meat, I was standing at the corner of a woods. I was watching along the small space between trees and the standing corn in the adjoining field for a deer heading into the corn to feed. As happenstance would have it, this was also the afternoon when the farmer decided to begin harvesting the corn. I could hear the combine come along the fence row as he made his first round. I stepped back across the fence and stood next to a fence post that had had a previous life as a railroad tie. As the noise of the combine increased, I noticed a wide-eyed deer mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus* or white-footed mouse, peering out of a vertical slit in the fence post as wide as its body. The noise of the machine became louder and louder and soon there were four mice, stacked on top of each other, anxiously looking to see what this noise might be. But they could not see what was causing the noise since they were looking away from the combine. I imagined that to a mouse, this may have sounded as

threatening as the roar of a tornado to humans. The combine passed on with the noise of the engine and threshing equipment lessening. But then all at once as the back end of the combine passed, the chopped up corncobs came flying at me and the fencepost holding the terrified mice. They decided that this was the end of their world and jumped out and scattered along with the corncobs. This visual memory is still clear in my mind despite the passing decades, and I have often wished for a photo of that sight. Of course, there were no cameras on phones at that time, and I was not carrying my trusty 35mm camera.

My wish to have a photo of that memorable sight recently seemed to be a possibility with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI). Could I describe this image well enough to give direction to create a real-like “photo” of that mental image? But would that be real?

The recent availability of AI brings with it a host of difficulties and challenges. The point of this discourse is not about whether it is okay to use AI or not but rather that

it is increasingly difficult to know the sources of information and difficult to know if what we read or see is real.

There have always been alterations or adjustments to things that are real in the things we see, read, and hear. Photos have been “photo-shopped” digitally, but photos have been touched up long before digital photography. And before photography was invented, there were artists who enhanced their subjects as they sketched and painted. Indeed, the written word has often been adjusted and manipulated to describe and explain events and subjects according to the author’s viewpoint, whether or not it corresponded to reality. How can we be sure that things are real?

The old adage, “seeing is believing,” was not trustworthy long before AI and Photoshop came along. In Joshua 9 we read about the Gibeonites who decided to deceive rather than attack the children of Israel. The things that they presented to Joshua were all real. *“And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, they did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and*

all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy” (Joshua 8:3-5). All those items were real, but they were not according to the reality of their trip. The items were not old because of a very long journey. The words they spoke to Joshua were not true. They didn’t correspond to reality. Instead of being inhabitants from a far-distant country, the children of Israel soon discovered *“that they were their neighbours, and that they dwelt among them”* (Joshua 9:16). Why was seeing not sufficient to know the truth? Why was hearing their seemingly sincere words not enough to ascertain that they were true?

When King Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat to go to battle with him against Ramothgilead (I Kings 22), the king of Judah wisely asked Ahab to enquire of the Lord. After 400 prophets unanimously said, *“Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king,”* Jehoshaphat asked, *“Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?”* There was one, Micaiah, but the king of Israel hated him because he didn’t *“prophesy good concerning [him], but evil.”* After a rebuke from King Jehoshaphat, Micaiah was brought forth and informed by the one bringing him that all the other prophets spoke what was “good” according to King Ahab. At King

Ahab's inquiry whether they should go to battle or not, Micaiah obliged him and said, "*Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.*"

What follows has always been hard for me to believe. "*And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?*" Micaiah does just that and prophesies that Israel will be scattered as sheep without a shepherd. King Ahab required of him to tell him only what was of the Lord, but then chose to reject it even though it was real and true. He banished the true prophet to prison with only water and bread until he comes back in peace.

So, how can we tell if something is real or if the words given to us as from the Lord are true? Let's look at these two biblical examples and see how these tragedies could have been averted.

Joshua and the men of Israel took what they saw and forgot the most important thing. They did not ask the Lord. "*And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD*" (Joshua 9:14). Despite the original suspicion and hesitation of the children of Israel, the close inspection of the moldy bread and old shoes and garments,

which looked real, kept them from seeking counsel of the Lord and discovering what was true and corresponded to reality.

King Ahab's encounter with the real and unreal sheds light on a human tendency. We often ask counsel of people whom we believe will agree with us. We also often choose to believe what we desire to hear and do. The king of Israel had asked "*counsel at the mouth of the LORD.*" However, he didn't like what he heard, so he chose to believe what was not real and followed his desire.

Today, there are things much more important to ascertain as truth than photos or news. There are phone calls that seek to deceive us and can lead us to costly consequences. There are many other types of scams that are, by themselves, nearly impossible to know if they are real or not. And more importantly, there are voices coming to us that are similar to the original scam to our original parents, Adam and Eve, that will lead us to eternal death. What may be purported to be the Word of the Lord, could, in fact, be the voice of popular opinion like what Ahab chose to hear and believe. So, how can we be sure that what we believe is real and true?

The lessons from these few biblical accounts would help us in many cases.

- Ask counsel of the Lord.
- Know the Word and character of our heavenly Father well enough to recognize when the purported “Word of the Lord” is out of character of the complete Word of God and His Person.
- Remember that desire naturally trumps truth.
- Don’t make a hasty decision by yourself.
- Talk with others who may disagree with your opinion.
- Don’t be fooled by the deceptive “victuals” at hand that are presented

to deceive.

- If it is too good to be true, it probably is.
- Our belief must be in the right place. Our belief gains strength and confidence as our knowledge of God increases.

I have not pursued the AI option of a make-believe photo of the four wide-eyed mice peering from the fence post. I decided to be satisfied with the image in my mind, but even that may not quite be real anymore. It may have been enhanced by time.

–AY 



Notice

There were several anomalies in the August 2024 issue of *Calvary Messenger*. This included a listing in the index for an article that was not included in the August issue. You will find that article, “Sisters, Stitches, and Sewing,” in this issue. I apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

Thank you,
Aaron Yoder, *Editor*

the bottom line

The Religious Ban

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

The preacher most emphatically said the deceased is secure in God. It is interesting to me that the official doctrine of a church can preach against being assured of one’s

salvation for the living but could, on the other hand, be so sure of it for the dead at the funeral.

It is possible that some people are saved from sin and secured in Christ and do not know that gracious

fact by God. They have confessed their sins and have recognized the condemning fact of being a sinner both by nature and by choice. But for “fear of the scribes and Pharisees, and being put out of the synagogue, they did not confess Christ” as their Saviour (John 9:22 paraphrased). In this passage, the parents of the son, who was blind at birth, were protective of their Jewish status. That status was represented most fully by being accepted in the weekly sabbath meeting at “church,” their local synagogue. The claimed ignorance by the parents was an accepted shield for the unexpected crisis.

We have noted in numerous instances where adult church members try to claim either ignorance or weakness as a verbal defense against failures (sin) as a human self-justification for their own protection.

The excesses of practicing the church fellowship ban are not difficult to document in our time. It often is done in the spirit of a jealous and forced inclusion to keep members from leaving an exclusive group. Muslims also are particularly strong in this matter. It is known to put family members at risk of being murdered by their own siblings if one should convert to Christianity. While we were in

Jerusalem with missionaries, they met a believer in strict female Muslim garb who immediately shared much joy together in Christ. Our friends told us she is at risk of being killed by her own husband if he learned of her saving faith in Jesus. Extreme? Yes. An isolated case? No.

The Hindu people of India have a caste system that puts their own in social tiers based on one’s birth. These groups become exclusive of each other in various ways. But then we have met various Anabaptist-related people of various denominations who claim to be the one and only true church of Christ, or insinuate as much by their church practices. Some of these require other Anabaptists, who request membership, to be rebaptized even though they were previously baptized upon their personal confession of Jesus Christ being their Savior.

Another unusual and one-of-a-kind situation turned up in our community recently. An Old Order Amish church member left his church and joined an Old Order Mennonite church. Both of these local church groups place the strict ban of shunning in eating and doing business with members who leave their church and seek membership at another conservative Anabaptist church. This Amish man was placed under the strict ban though joining

the Old Order Mennonites who also do the same to any member who leaves their church. It was not known that this ever happened previously. In essence, both of these churches have that policy and in practice it is implying that they are the only true church. (I learned of this happening after I had an inspiration to write this article, which is to say, this was not my reason to write).

What does the Bible say? The most candid verse on this subject is given in I Corinthians 5:11 with specifics, *“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if a man that is a [church] brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”* In Paul’s day, there was only one church; one could not simply go to another church. It might be a surprise to some of us that this passage was written in the context of participating in the Lord’s Supper, or the church’s communion. It is possible, perhaps likely, that these house churches in apostolic times celebrated the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s Day. The ban placed on them was possibly to not share in their weekly communion.

This Holy Communion created an integral bond of a communal tie to Christ, celebrated by all those who were washed from their sins by

the blood of Christ and who were bonded in His Word into one body of profession and fellowship. The sharing in communion was a visual and mental remembrance of Jesus Christ and was central to their faith and discipleship in Him. This chapter of I Corinthians 5 deals with one of their own in fornication and was known as such by the church. The Corinthian brothers apparently gloried in this situation. Paul said it is sin, it is like a leaven, and it needs to be purged out. And besides, very importantly, he should actually and officially be removed from church fellowship. That immediately is clearly declaring that this scriptural ban is not to be applied to those who are saved, and who exhibit godly fruit accordingly.

In this discussion leading up to this, the Bible says, *“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump [bread in the making] as ye are unleavened.”* The new lump is the new body of this church, ready with no leaven for the making of Christ’s bread in them as a covenanted people in Christ. This is signified in the communion. Paul continues, *“For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore, let us keep the feast [communion], not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (verses 7, 8).

Leaven in the Bible is routinely in reference to sin and the unwanted infiltration of sin, wickedness, and contention in its various forms. In the church, those in such sins need to be removed by counsel and admonition as Jesus also stipulated in Matthew 18.

The central premise for a biblically approved ban is only in regard to a church member being in known sin who upon being addressed and invited to repent, refuses to renounce his sin. The church member's sin should be confessed to the gathered church. If that church member confesses his sin, he should be forgiven, and not have the ban applied. If he refuses to repent and confess, the ban (short for banished) could be responsibly applied at various levels.

- Banned from speaking any word to the gathered assembly except to make a confession for his part in his sin(s).

- Restricted from holding an office in the church and its related institutions, and resigning from any office he holds.

- In some cases having his membership reduced to being on a proving basis but still being accepted to share in the communion.

- Banned from participation in communion when no progress toward repentance is being made.

- In some cases excommunication

would be warranted.

Any one of these might suffice alone, or in some cases it might be wise and necessary to consider applying several options relative to the past history of the case or in regard to its seeming seriousness at the present time.

In some of our churches, one's membership being revoked is the most serious action taken against any member, even if he is not repenting of fornication and immorality. Some church leaders claim to be incapable, maybe as a cloak for being unwilling, to lead out in disciplinarian needs in the church. Their reaction to former excesses causes them to choose to see no semblance of any ban applied in the church.

Some of our churches have, or had in the past, certain members who have sadly failed in abiding by their covenant with the church. These sad situations include abuse against minors at various levels or failures that include fornication or adultery, but not being limited to that only. There have been cases of being a drunkard, or a railer (strong, unwarranted accusations), or being an extortioner.

A railer is one who speaks reproachfully, or intends to vilify (Strong's), or to speak bitterly or reproachfully (Webster). This has

been done, at times, in some of our churches, against the pastors. We denounce it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and call it a sin that needs equal repentance to the church, especially if it was done in the church in an assembly. The pastors are NOT in a position to defend themselves, or even to “share their side of the story.” They should not need to do so. Leadership from elsewhere should be invited to come and restore order in the church.

Extortioners have been present in some churches for several generations. Luther’s German uses the clearer word of “robber” for an extortioner. Unpaid bills that are overdue (past the next 30-day grace period) are a cloaked way of being a robber. We know of some very large bills of which church members show no remorse or responsibility. Our credit system has allowed for purchases in good faith for payment on next month’s statement, or at the least, to make some monthly payments.

In some cases, certain bishops and deacons have claimed being without recourse to require payment by members of their church. Are these still members in the church and receiving communion twice a year? Yes. Really? Yes! Paul says, “*with such an one no not to eat.*” We think that is in reference to communion


in this context. Being set back from communion every Sunday would have had a much greater stigma and effect than our biannual communion.

It is possible that if some errant church members of today had been involved in some of their errors when they applied for membership, we could not have accepted them as members. But now, being in the church, some of us seem to be at a loss to know how to proceed, or just somehow have a lack of resolution. We are at times caught or trapped in a “contextual Christianity,” administrating along the lines of either a traditional past, or a cultural present, or some newly innovated future-focused procedure, having succumbed to a debilitation context of religious life in this area.

The Bottom Line to this article could likely be best served by asking me and any other interested or concerned brethren a few questions. Since there are only a few church members over the years who have failed in one or several of the biblical standards given in I Corinthians 5:11, is our current congregational practice adequate enough? Are any of these six sins too infrequent among us, so that no change in our approach is needed? Or does the configuration of our plural pastor team change too frequently, with the occasional

addition of a newly ordained man, to adopt a specific policy? Is our current practice well enough in line with Bible principles to not need any change? Do we just hope, with time, these errant things will somehow take care of themselves?

Our churches are best served by our autonomous administrations.

This is not a call for change in that area, but much rather, a topic for our considerations. Well may I enjoin unto you all the heartbeat of this same apostle Paul who wrote our chosen text, who also wrote in I Corinthians 14:33, "*For God is not the author of confusion, but of PEACE, as in all churches of the saints.*" 

My Baptismal Testimony


Liam Wilson, Catlett, VA

“**A**ll have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” But God sent His Son to earth to die on a cross for the sins of the world and to rise again. In doing so He was victorious over death and gave us eternal life if we accept His love, grace, and saving power and turn our lives over to Him. Then He can work in us and make us an image of Himself.

Satan has set many snares, traps, and stumbling blocks in this world, and the only way we can live a pure and holy life is with Christ’s help. We need to confess our sins, open our hearts, and *surrender fully* to God, letting Him have control over every area of our life.

If I try to run things by myself and think that I know what I’m doing, my life will not turn out right. I need Christ to live in me and guide me

through life so that I can glorify God in everything I do. Realizing that I cannot live an upright and holy life without being *fully surrendered* to God is why I accepted Christ’s love and saving power and want to be baptized and become a member of the church which is Christ’s Body. I want to be a part of a group of believers that follows Jesus and help to build up the church and further God’s Kingdom. I want to help show God’s love to the people around us and be a witness for Christ and what He did in saving me from my sins. I also need other believers’ help and guidance in my walk with Christ so that I can shine Christ’s light in this dark world of sin.

This was Liam’s testimony given before his baptism. 

To Be Educated

Carolyn Caines

If I learn my ABCs, can read 600 words per minute, and can write with perfect penmanship, but have not been taught how to communicate with the Designer of all language,

I have not been educated.

If I can deliver an eloquent speech and persuade with my stunning logic, but have not been instructed in God's wisdom,

I have not been educated.

If I have read Shakespeare and John Locke and can discuss their writings with keen insight, but have not read the greatest of books—the Bible—and have no knowledge of its personal importance,

I have not been educated.

If I have memorized addition facts, multiplication tables, and chemical formulas, but have never been disciplined to hide God's Word in my heart,

I have not been educated.

If I can explain the law of gravity and Einstein's Theory of Relativity, but have never been instructed in the unchangeable laws of the One Who

orders our universe,

I have not been educated.

If I can classify animals by their family, genus, and species, and can write a lengthy scientific paper that wins an award, but have not been introduced to the Maker's purpose for all creation,

I have not been educated.

If I can recite the Gettysburg Address and the Preamble to the Constitution, but have not learned about the hand of God in the history of our country,

I have not been educated.

If I can play the piano, the violin, six other instruments, and can write music that moves listeners to tears, but have not been taught to listen to the Director of the universe and worship Him,

I have not been educated.

If I can run cross-country races, star in basketball, and do 100 push-ups without stopping, but have never been shown how to bend my spirit to do God's will,

I have not been educated.

If I can identify a Picasso, describe


the style of da Vinci, and even paint a portrait that gains acclaim, but have not learned that all harmony and beauty comes from a relationship with God,

I have not been educated.

If I graduate with perfect grades and am accepted at the finest university with a full scholarship, but have not been guided into a career of God's choosing for me,

I have not been educated.

However, if one day I see the world as God sees it, and come to know Him, Whom to know is life eternal, and glorify God by fulfilling His purpose for me,

then, I have been educated! 

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Sisters, Stitches, and Sewings

Lydia Nissley, Catlett, VA

Many knots of bright yarn,
Little rows of thread.
Make one hundred thousand
Covers for a bed.

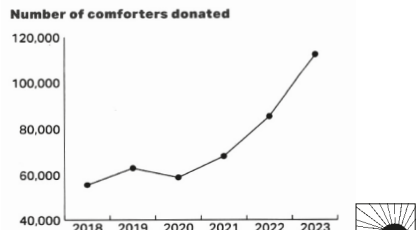
Divers countries with needs,
Not sufficient heat.
Ukraine, Syria, Yemen,
Challenges to meet.

Attend monthly sewings,
Coming with a smile.
Blessing, knotting, piecing,
Adding to the pile.

Spread the word, and be there
Giving even more,
Make one hundred thousand
In twenty twenty-four.

There were over 100,000 comforters made and donated to C.A.M. in 2023. The goal of 100,000 comforters was reached. Let's continue making more. Because of Jesus!

C.A.M. has a small booklet with pictures and words entitled *The Warm Gift of a COMFORTER*. Be sure to look through it. Here is their graph of the amount of comforters donated. There was a total of 112,022 comforters and 321,757 kits made in 2023.



Younger and Wiser

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

We were in the sunny sewing room, my daughter and I, when I got out my new toy: pieces for another scrap quilt. This one was to be constructed with diagonals sewn across the corners of nine-inch blocks—a marvelous way to use a lot of scraps! She asked if I'd completed the corduroy comforter top I'd begun earlier. Reluctantly, I acknowledged that it was still stalled for lack of certainty how to complete the project. In the most gentle and gracious voice, my teenager wondered why I'd start yet another!

Her words helped me gather up myself and focus my energies more wisely. She did not mention that I had worked to develop in her the quality which I so clearly was lacking! Her words appealed to my sense of right. She did not use force to require that I acknowledge my foolishness! I paused in uncomfortable gratitude.

I conclude that when others hold up a mirror so that I may see myself as I am, it is a gift to be accepted. How reassuring to be loved and kindly called to take the high road! I soon got over my discomfort, finished the corduroy comforter, and blessed my daughter. A beautiful exchange—binding us together as friends in which the older learned from the younger.



Wouldn't that be *lovely* in church too? 

marriages

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

Gentile-Miller

Bro. Caleb, son of Alan and Evonne Gentile, Pulaski, TN, and Sis. Emily, daughter of Dave and Laura Miller, Russellville, KY, on March 23, 2024, at Providence Mennonite Fellowship by Jason Miller.


Overholt-Yoder

Bro. Jaylin, son of Nate and Rose Overholt, Russellville, KY, and Sis. Dianna, daughter of David and Brenda Yoder, Auburn, KY, on June 15, 2024, at Plainview Mennonite Church for Providence Mennonite Fellowship by Jason Miller.

Rohrer-Chupp

Bro. Lindel, son of Ernest and Sharon Rohrer, Grove City, MN, and Sis. Emily, daughter of Mark and the late Freida Chupp, Eden Valley, MN, on June 29, 2024, at Evangelical Free Church for Believer's Fellowship Mennonite Church by Glen Chupp.

Swartzentruber-Kurtz

Bro. Carson, son of Steve and Karen Swartzentruber, Abbeville, SC, and Sis. Alea, daughter of Joe and Dorcas Kurtz, Laurelville, OH, on April 20, 2024, at Emmanuel Mennonite Fellowship by Steve Swartzentruber. 

cradle roll

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

Brenneman, Marcus and Laureen (Peachey), Danville, AL, first child and son, Isaiah Marc, June 5, 2024.

Brenneman, Paul Mark and Irene (Plett), Wooster, OH, fourth child, second daughter, Jemima Pearl, July 8, 2024.

Brenneman, William and Amy (Shetler), Versailles, IN, third child, first daughter, Angela Joy, June 10, 2024.

Chupp, Mike and Rosie (Diller), Grove City, MN, fourth child, second son, Zachary Aaron, May 23, 2024.

Esh, Jake and Emmy (Fisher), Elverson, PA, fifth child, second daughter, Shantae Lyn, July 31, 2024.

Farmwald, Ryan and Lori (Otto), Arthur, IL, second child, first daughter, Lakelyn Brie, June 3, 2024.

Funk, Christopher and Karen (Fisher), Chambersburg, PA, third child, second daughter, Kassandra Elyse, April 13, 2024.

Hoover, David and Caryn (Yoder), Tompkinsville, KY, fourth child, second son, Shawn Patrick, June 20, 2024.

Jantzi, Dean and Heidi (Jantzi), Wellesley, ON, fourth child, third son, Kadrick Scott, July 15, 2024.

Kauffman, Linfred and Rose (Yoder), Hartselle, AL, fifth child, second son, Travis Lin (stillborn), joined his brother in heaven on March 16, 2024.

Lapp, John and Jolene (Stoltzfus), Free Union, VA, fifth child, second daughter, Damaris Eden, July 9, 2024.

Martin, Cleason and Rose (Huber), Pembroke, KY, third child, second son, Oakley Miles, June 10, 2024.

Miller, Danny and Katrina (Smucker), Russellville, KY, second child and daughter, Maeve Eloise, May 16, 2024.

Miller, James and Kathy (Gingerich), Charleston, IL, first child and daughter, Eliana Lou, May 29, 2024.

Miller, Jethro and Sherri (Hershberger), Melvern, KS, fourth child and son, Sterling Zane, May 16, 2024.

Miller, Matthew and Emily (Yoder), Free Union, VA, first child and daughter, Alaina Brielle, July 10, 2024.

Miller, Nate and Sharon (Lengacher), Franklin, KY, first child and daughter, Addalyn Lanae, January 5, 2024.

Peachey, Brian and Rebekah (Peachey), Earlysville, VA, second child, first son, Liam Raphael, July 18, 2024.

Stauffer, Bradley and Shirley (Martin), Hillsboro, OH, second child and son, Benjamin Leo, June 29, 2024.

Swartzentruber, Derrick and Ruth (Bucher), Abbeville, SC, first child and son, Hans Christian, July 15, 2024.

Swartzentruber, Kendall and Tina (Graber), Abbeville, SC, fourth child, third son, Stefan Emmanuel, January 10, 2024.

Swartzentruber, Tyler and Larissa (Overholt), Abbeville, SC, second child, first son, Bentley Ray, February 3, 2024.

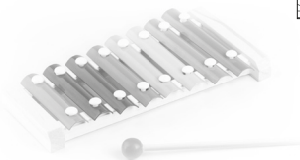
Wagler, Jeffery and Kristin (Wagler), Odon, IN, sixth child, third daughter, Cadence Hope, May 14, 2024.

Wagler, Travis and Lorinda (Zimmerman), Abbeville, SC, twins, first daughter and third son, Skylar Bree and Fletcher Reid, June 14, 2024.

Yoder, DJ and Hannah (Detweiler), Auburn, KY, second child, first son, Colter Lee, July 5, 2024.

Yoder, Richard and Mary (Stoltzfus), Abbeville, SC, fourth child, third son, Tate Bentley, May 2, 2024.

Yoder, Virgil and Edna (Kauffman), Casa Grande, AZ, second child, first daughter, Dakota Sage, June 13, 2024.



ordinations

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

Bro. Clifford Gingerich, 36, (wife, Leanna Hostetler), Arthur, IL, was ordained minister for Trinity Christian Fellowship on July 21, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Roman Miller. The charge was given by Wilbur Gingerich, assisted by Roman Miller and Matthew Bontrager. Steven Helmuth, Ryan Farmwald, Kyle Diener, Larry Yoder, and Jason Beachy shared the lot.

Bro. Jerry Yoder, 36, (wife, Franie Yoder), Lyndon, KS, was ordained minister by the voice of the church at Lyndon Amish Mennonite Church on June 23, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Loren Troyer. The charge was given by Lawrence Overholt, assisted by Rudy Overholt and David L. Yoder.

Bro. Leighton Yoder, 60, (wife, Joanna Miller), Kalona, IA, was ordained bishop for the Sharon Bethel Mennonite Church, Kalona, IA, on June 30, 2024. Preordination messages were given by Darlton Bontrager. The charge was given by Delmar Bontrager, assisted by Darlton Bontrager. Lavon Bontrager shared the lot.



obituaries

Gingerich, Elva W., 87, of Arthur, IL, passed away on January 2, 2024, at The Arthur Home, Arthur, IL. He passed away peacefully in the presence of family.

Elva was born on March 21, 1936, in Arthur, IL, to Ervin J. and Sarah J. (Bontrager) Gingerich. He married Sovilla A. Mast on December 8, 1955. Elva and Sovilla were married for 66 years before she passed away on December 31, 2021.

He is survived by three sons and one daughter: Dannie (Laura), Arthur; Mary Gingerich, Steve (Karen), Duane (Tammi), all of Sullivan; daughter-in-law, Eloise (Diener) Gingerich, Arthur; 18

grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren, one sister, Viola (Gingerich) Miller, Ava; two brothers: Ed (Edna), Arthur; and Willard (Wilma), Atwood.

Elva was preceded in death by his parents, one sister, Edna Mae (Gingerich) Schrock, and a son, Glen.

Elva enjoyed many years of raising hogs and crop farming before hauling grain in his later years of employment. For numerous years Elva and Sovilla were involved with cleaning and setup at Calvary Bible School in Calico Rock, AR. They also worked together for several years servicing book racks in IL for Choice Books.

Elva and Sovilla were charter members of Trinity Christian Fellowship. The church was an important part of Elva's life, being involved in getting the title to the property, the building of the new building, and for more than 30 years, he opened the church house in preparation for the Sunday morning service.

The funeral was held on January 8, 2024, at Trinity Christian Fellowship.

Miller, Cora, 93, of Melvern, KS, died on April 13, 2024, at her home. She was born on September 1, 1930, in Thomas, OK, to Jerry and Amanda (Mullett) Yoder. On November 6, 1958, she married Aden J. Miller who preceded her in death on June 28, 2012.

Cora spent her childhood days in Thomas, OK, and her youth days in Garnett, KS. She will be greatly missed for her courage and trust in her Lord despite the trial of aging.

She is survived by two sons and one daughter: Joseph (Hannah), Melvern; Jerry (Sarah), of Andover and Hutchinson respectively; Ruth Miller, Melvern, 16 grandchildren and 34 great-grandchildren. She is also survived by a sister, Miriam (Jerry) Jackson, Adrian, MO, and sister-in-law, Esther Yoder, Garnett.

In addition to her parents and husband, she was preceded in death by a son, Stephen, four brothers: Ben (Fannie Mast), Joseph (Anne Chupp), Ervin (Esther Beachy), Ira (Ida Miller) Yoder; two sisters; Emma (Ora) Yoder, Fannie (Mervin) Yoder; and a stillborn

granddaughter.

The funeral service was held April 17, 2024, at Lyndon Amish Mennonite Church with Lawrence Overholt, Philip Miller, and Jason Miller serving. Interment was at the church cemetery.

Miller, Grace Priscilla, 32, of Waynesboro, VA, died of a rare cancer on May 13, 2024, in Roanoke, VA. She was born in Culpeper, VA, on January 21, 1992.

She is survived by her husband, David Miller, parents, Ray and Marietta Shank, Rochelle; siblings: Conrad (Cindy) Shank, Williamsport, PA; Rachel (Jeffrey) Kanagy, Blackville, SC; Janice (Quentin) Weaver, Rathgormack, Ireland; Katie (Andrew) Lehman, Aroda; Elfrieda (Joey) Miller, Stuarts Draft; Deborah Shank, Miami, FL; Dorcas (Caleb) Clemons, Rochelle; Regina Shank, Aroda; and Judith (Vincent) Troyer, Orange. Grace loved her nieces and nephews: Adalyn, Elliana, Keegan, and Emmeline Shank; Stuart, Heidi, Emily, Gretta, Ginger, and Clarita Kanagy; Annali, Kinza, Charis, and Tobias Weaver; Mariah, Michael, and Hadassah Lehman; Shadrach and Bracken Miller; Robin and Lucia Gingerich; Edmund Martin; and Jacqueline Miller.

Grace loved people so well and was profoundly tuned in to the needs of people around her. Her keen eye for justice moved her to act on behalf of the vulnerable while valuing the dignity of every human as created in the image of God. Grace was a nurturing friend and,

in her own words, just wanted to spread her butterfly wings over the suffering. She always noticed the children—her nieces, nephews, and students were her pride and joy. At family gatherings she was the favorite auntie, singing and playing with the children in the basement, usually slipping them items to make a little party.

Most of all, Grace was led by love for Jesus and His Kingdom, and she offered herself freely to the communities of which she was a part. The church's mission, hope, and vitality captured her imagination and motivated her life. Education, in its varied forms, was a theme of Grace's life, from homeroom teaching third and fourth graders to her recent pursuit of formal education in child psychology. A humble, eager learner, she was energized by the ideas she encountered in theology, sociology,

and history.

Grace found delight in the simple things of life, seeing them as good gifts from God. She loved linen, woodwork, literature, and tea. A steward of God's good world, she tended her pulchritudinous chickens, rabbit, vegetables, lavender, and perennials with great joy.

While Grace struggled with medical anxiety in her final days, she met the ultimate fear, death, with profound peace that passes understanding. Grace was so excited to be with Jesus and went into immortal wholeness with confident faith that Jesus had won the victory on her behalf. Grace truly lived out her name, an unmerited gift to each of us who knew her.

The funeral service was held at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship on May 16, 2024. Interment was in the church cemetery.



PROVERBS 2:6, 10

The Lord grants wisdom:
His every word is a treasure
of knowledge and understanding.
For wisdom and truth will enter
the very center of your being,
filling your life with joy.

I recently heard a story about an Amish man I'll call Rufus who's about 80 years old. A few details in this story, including his name, have been changed in this telling in order to obscure the identity of those involved. I'm not sure if he'd mind if I told his story, but I didn't get his permission.

Rufus and his young bride purchased a farm and worked hard to pay it off. When he was about 30 years old, he and his wife made a trip to town with their buggy to make the last payment on the farm. This was an exciting time for them. On the way home from making that final payment, the couple discussed plans for the future now that they were out of debt.

The happy discussion was interrupted on that ride home when an inebriated neighbor ran into their buggy from behind. The impact threw both Rufus and his wife out of the buggy and into the ditch. Since that day, Rufus has been paralyzed below his waist. Rufus has worked diligently to provide financially for his family. This included farming and owning a horse-powered sawmill. He's a trusted member of his community.

One of the various ways he served his church community included helping oversee some of their pooled financial resources. His discharge of those duties has been marked by sacrificial integrity. In one instance there was an unexpected reversal of fortune for pooled money in the community. He took personal responsibility to restore the considerable sum that was lost due to the unexpected difficulties. He was a man of modest means for whom almost all of the activities of his daily life included extra effort due to the permanent nature of his injury. For most of his adult life his trips to church in his buggy, while sitting in his wheelchair, were complicated.

A friend who stopped to visit Rufus during his sunset years asked him if it has been difficult for him to forgive his drunken neighbor for what he did those decades ago. Rufus's answer was heavy with emotion. "Yes," he said, "It has been hard. I have to forgive him again and again. But just last Sunday the preacher reminded us that we need to forgive those who wrong us. But if my neighbor would have only talked to us and made some expression to us, I think it

would be easier to forgive.”

Rufus’s faithful wife passed away in recent years. Now the caregiving that his wife provided falls to others. Not only does he have zero motor function from his waist down, he also has no sense of feeling at all where he experiences paralysis. Monitoring him for pressure sores requires never-ending vigilance.

There are a lot of things I’m thinking in this story about grace, forgiveness, and apology. I’m also thinking of how unfair it feels when we see that the results of sin are disproportionately borne by someone totally disconnected from the person who chose wrongly. It was Rufus’s neighbor who tipped the bottle, either literally or figuratively, to the point of impairment. But it was Rufus and his wife who bore the reality of Rufus’s resulting paralysis for the rest of their lives.

I’m also remembering that we don’t always get what we deserve in life. It is a bit easier to identify that disparity when we suffer something we think we didn’t deserve. But it goes the other way too. Sometimes we are treated much better than we deserve. I didn’t hear what consequences this drunk driver experienced for this accident. But whatever it was, he wasn’t the one who was paralyzed.

Sad to say, there have been times

in life I could identify with Rufus in this story, and there have been times when I’ve been like his neighbor. I suppose most of us can think of times when we can identify to a greater or lesser degree with the characters in this story.

• • • • •

One diligent mother learned that her child had been involved in bullying a peer of his. This parent’s tolerance for that type of activity was pretty much nonexistent. Part of the course of action chosen for the little bully was to select a gift for the one he had bullied. He then purchased it with his own money and presented it to the person who experienced his bullying.

It was reported that another young man was bullied by his peers. He developed relational practices that distanced him from his friends and peers. At age 20, one day this summer, he tried to shoot former president Donald Trump and was immediately killed by those tasked with keeping Mr. Trump safe.

It’s not clear what relationship there was between the bullying of Crooks and his attempt to kill Donald Trump. Neither has the final chapter been written for the young lad who purchased a gift and presented it to the one he had been bullying.

However, it is entirely too often that we hear how bullying tends to

reinforce isolation and relational dysfunction. This dysfunction takes various forms but in extreme cases they might harm others like Crooks did. This seems to be something of a common thread in the stories of many of those who wind up committing sensational public killings.

• • • • •

Bullying is a reprehensible, carnal attempt to grasp for power. Those who bully others as young children might not even understand their own motives. Wise parents should be interested in helping their children understand the seriousness of this way of relating. May the ranks of the wise mother in the aforementioned account swell.

• • • • •

Spencer Johnson wrote a parable with important lessons on how we should respond to inevitable change in our lives. This story is recorded in a little book entitled, *Who Moved My Cheese*. One of the questions he suggests we consider when we encounter change is, “What would I do if I wouldn’t fear?” I like this book and would recommend it.

• • • • •

I see the question that Johnson asks as being helpful. But the subject of fear is an interesting subject. We

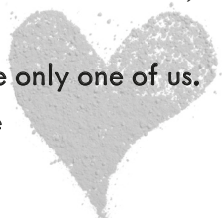
might also do well to ask ourselves what it is that we fear. Many of our fears are tied up in unknown things about the future. Other things are related to present risks and anything we might think we’re helpless against. But the Scripture also reminds us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Jesus said we shouldn’t fear those who can physically harm us but rather the one “*which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”

Maybe a helpful question we should be asking in addition to Johnson’s question is, “What do I fear most?” Sometimes fear keeps us from stepping confidently into the unknown future despite the fact that we know that our all-knowing, all-loving God will accompany us there.

A proper fear of God isn’t the type of fear that creates distance and suspicion. It includes a wholesome element of respect and reverence. The person who fears God can recognize that there are things about God that are not understood or well known. But alongside the unknown aspect of God, there is a trust that is anchored in an experience of the faithfulness of God that undergirds a faith in the unknown and not understood, because God is faithful.

–RJM 

He LOVES each one of us as if there were only one of us.



The Healing Power of Honesty

Theodore Yoder, Red Bluff, CA

Honesty in our hearts and in our relationships is a wonderful healing power.

As Christians, we are honest because honesty comes from God and lies come from Satan. God is honest and Satan is dishonest. It's as simple as that. Because honesty is from God, it makes us free. Dishonesty brings us into bondage. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This timeless principle applies to all areas of life where it is possible to choose between honesty and dishonesty. The truth makes us free. The truth heals.

In so many ways, though we believe this in our heads, we struggle to live it out in our lives. We think that honesty is embarrassing, divisive, disagreeable to others, or painful to ourselves. And so we allow a little fiction in our lives and relationships.

What if honesty is embarrassing? There are certain numbers on the scales that I hate seeing. Isn't that why the scales is in the bathroom, so no one else can see those numbers? And why has my driver's license at times published a weight that is, let's say, hardly ever true? The truth is

embarrassing, so I'd rather not see it or say it. But the bitter pill of the reality of my own intemperance, once admitted and swallowed, puts me straight on the road to a much better relationship with the bathroom scales again. It is the same in other areas of life as well. Embarrassing honesty can heal.

What if honesty is divisive? We conservative Christian people value consensus. We see it as a New Testament priority to "speak the same thing." But on the way to "speaking the same thing", subtle pressures to dishonesty arise. When might this happen? It might be at a brothers' meeting or similar situation where the stakes are high and consensus is prized. Here is a hypothetical example.

Brother Brent is uncomfortable with the new proposal he is hearing at brothers' meeting. He told his wife that he wishes it had never been brought up. However, when he is asked for his input, he says, "Well, I don't have a lot to say," and shuts up. Why? He fears that if he says what he is really thinking, he will be labeled as a dangerous liberal (or a

legalistic conservative). Besides, he feels he is in the minority, and some of the fellows who think differently can really speak well. And he doesn't want to "rock the boat." He can tell that the new proposal is going to be adopted, and it is.

Six months later he is heard to say, "I always knew it was a bad idea."

What is the problem with this?

In church, in business, or any other social organization, when there is no honesty, there is instead manipulation and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Call it politics. Covering the politics is a shiny glaze of "unity" and apple pie order. Whenever honesty is sacrificed in order to polish the glaze, unhealthy things happen under the surface. The truth will come out. The Bible says that what is whispered in the ear will be proclaimed from the housetops.

Strife and contention are not the answer. There is a time to speak honestly, and then sometimes there comes a time to be quiet. But we so often get those two turned around!

When I know what my brother thinks, and he knows what I think, we can make decisions based on reality. Trust is built instead of doubt and uncertainty. An honest opinion expressed in love and up front is wholesome; an honest opinion buried alive for a long time tends to stink

of bitterness when it is unearthed. Many "political" problems would be avoided if each party felt certain that every other party would openly say what he or she thought.

Not every thought needs to be shared. But when we are in a brothers' meeting or business meeting similar to the one Brother Brent was in, we have two options: A) honestly share our opinion, or B) be absolutely committed to cheerfully support the group decision. If you know you'll be voicing an opinion later, you had better say it now. Honesty might seem divisive, but the dishonesty of hidden opinions is divisive.

What if honesty is disagreeable? Some cultures value agreeableness a lot more than others. About 20 years ago, a friend of mine spent a few months in Peru. He and his family were living in a rented house in a compound. Next to the compound was a eucalyptus forest, probably planted for later harvest. My friend asked the Peruvian security guard, who kept an eye on the compound, how big he thought the eucalyptus forest was.

"Three thousand hectares [over seven thousand acres]!" the guard guessed, maybe wishing to impress this foreigner.

"Surely not that big!" said my friend.

“Oh, well, maybe it’s...30 hectares [74 acres],” responded the guard. That estimate was as much too small as the other was too big. When my friend suggested maybe it was 300 hectares, the guard was quite willing to say yes, he thought that was right.

We North Americans can learn a lot from a culture that values agreeableness. Yet dishonesty for the sake of agreeableness is still dishonesty. And let’s bring it closer home. Are we tempted to be dishonest in a desire to please? Sometimes we would rather not let someone know what we really think until it becomes absolutely necessary. Then we get into trouble. I’ll share a story of how I failed at this one when my wife and I were dating. At the time, my wife (then my girlfriend) was taking occasional classes with a neighbor who was an herbalist. She loved learning about plants and nature, and was excited to think that she could learn things that would be helpful in healing. She shared this with me on one of our visits. I smiled and said something like, “That does sound interesting.” And everything was fine. I didn’t think too much of it.

Had I been more honest, I would have said something like this, “That does sound interesting. You know, I should tell you that when I was a teenager we got a lot of junk

mail about herbal remedies. They struck me as pretty flaky with lots of outrageous claims. I’ve got a streak of skepticism a mile deep when it comes to herbal remedies. And besides, I was just listening to a lecture by Doctor X, and he listed all the following problems with herbal remedies...”

Why didn’t I say that? Well, the “desire to be agreeable” was about as strong then as it had ever been in my life. I wasn’t going to offend my girlfriend unless I absolutely had to. And the stakes seemed pretty low on this particular subject. I would have said I didn’t feel a need to “argue” about it. And so my girlfriend became my wife without really knowing what I thought about herbal remedies.

Three years later, my wife’s health suddenly and mysteriously crashed. We had no idea what was wrong. Finding an answer became very important to us. It was then, at the worst possible time, that we discovered how really different our perspectives on health treatments were. Oh, the heartache we went through, desperate for answers, but not on the same page about where to find them! We found a way to blend our different perspectives and move forward, though it wasn’t easy. In the process we both learned some things.

I think our story illustrates the importance of honesty at the right time, instead of too late. A little disagreeable honesty while we were courting would have borne good fruit later on by building more reality into our understanding of each other's perspectives. I could defend myself by saying I hadn't meant to be dishonest. I just didn't share all I thought. But the result was that my wife ended up thinking something about me that wasn't true; something that I could have easily set right. That was where the dishonesty came in.

I'm not saying we should blurt out every disagreeable thought. When someone tells you that he's just discovered the earth is flat and supported on the back of a giant turtle, maybe you shouldn't tell him all you're thinking. But you shouldn't leave him with the impression that you agree with him.

What if honesty is painful? Yes, it is painful sometimes. So is having a tooth cavity filled, or having an infected appendix removed, or having a gangrenous leg amputated. Yet all these painful physical measures produce wellness that we could not experience any other way. James 5:16 says, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*" Honest confession of our sins and

faults to those who can pray for us is the divine prescription for spiritual healing. The bitter pain of confession yields the fruit of cleansing and healing to our souls. Victory over sin is sweet!

Dishonesty is far more painful than honesty. By ignoring or covering up sin, we allow it to spread and fester. The Old Testament illustrates this graphically in the lives of Saul and David. What a small sin Saul's seems besides David's. Saul offered a sacrifice too soon. David committed adultery. Saul spared a man's life, and didn't kill all the animals he was supposed to kill. David had an innocent husband killed to cover his crime. Yet whose life ended in peace, and whose ended in a whirlpool of madness and despair? The difference was that David honestly and repentantly confessed his sins, while Saul never said, "This is what I did. It was sin. I am sorry."


Another area where honesty can be painful is when we have been deeply wronged ourselves. Usually when we have been sinned against, our own selfishness tends to magnify the wrong rather than diminish it. But that is not always the case. Sometimes denial is a temptation. The hurt is so great that it seems better to ignore it. Honestly facing the hurt is a first step. Without that honesty, we can't

really forgive. You can't forgive a wrong unless you acknowledge it as a wrong first. Forgiveness is real when the wrong is real; otherwise there is no need for forgiveness.

Ultimately, the call to honesty is the call to live in reality. Temptation says, "Reality isn't safe." Jesus says, "*The truth will set you free.*" Which will we believe?

I'll end with these verses: "*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight*

of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

We speak the truth...in love. Any kind of communication, even "honest" communication, without love, has something wrong with it. But honestly, that is a subject for another article. 

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mission awareness

Grace Press News from Northern Russia

Floyd Stoltzfus, Gordonville, PA

“**B**ut ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me...and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Surely, Jesus sends missionaries to the “uttermost” parts and even beyond those sections. The commission and compassion of Jesus Christ is to take the Gospel to the “uttermost part of the earth.” What is meant by this term

is probably the furthest distance from where Jesus and the disciples were standing just before His ascension, which was the Mount of Olives. Wherever that “uttermost part of the earth” is located, the following letter comes from a long distance from Jerusalem. I believe Grace Press is worthy of support in prayer and finances. They save money on printing literature and shipping costs in Russia.

Here is a note from a newsletter: “Since the Russian-Ukrainian war began in February 2022, it is no longer feasible to mail literature into Russia as we had been doing. But printing within Russia and Belarus continues, and is increasing.”

Below is a thank-you letter they received from a literature recipient.

• • • • •

Peace be with you, dear friends, brothers and sisters:

I thank God with all my heart that 35 years ago I was invited to read the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Subsequently, it changed and transformed my whole life! I recall the text in the holy Scripture: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

Since I turned my heart to God, I have been trying to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth. In the 1990s we were in need of Christian literature, especially New Testaments and Bibles. I remember that in Norilsk our church made copies of the Gospels of Luke and John in the Azerbaijani language. Later, we received Azerbaijani literature from your press and distributed it in our region and beyond. Over time, God is

showing His mercy through your labor.

With God’s help we were able to distribute magazines and many books (including 25 Favorite Stories from the Bible) to the people of the taiga: the Old Believers, the Evenks, the Kers, and the Selkups. We also distributed to minority people groups living on the tundra: the Nenets, Dolgans, Nganasans, Evens, Yakuts, and many people from other ethnic groups. We believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ can change lives today even as it changed me.

In conclusion I share a text from the Holy Scripture: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:58).

*With respect and brotherly love,
Brother Oleg Lubich, evangelist
from Norilsk City from above the Arctic Circle*

• • • • •

“Who are these minority people groups?”

“Before the Russians migrated eastward, these ethnic groups populated much of northern and eastern Russia. The Russian conquest of central and eastern Siberia could be compared to the conquest of the American west by European-background settlers, although the

Russian conquest was earlier.

“Some of these people, especially in the far north, live in tents and are reindeer herders. Others have intermingled with the Russian population, living in villages and cities alongside the Russians. These people groups have their own languages, but most of them also speak Russian. In some cases, their indigenous languages are nearly extinct.

“These people, though far from our part of the world, are not out of God’s sight. Pray that the Gospel light

would shine brightly in the far north.”
(used by permission)

• • • • •

The Apostle John saw a marvelous sight: “*After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands...and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Revelation 7:9,14b). Hallelujah! This is exciting!



A Woman After God’s Heart

Fences, Cultures, and Respect

Elvesta Mast, Winchester, OH



Regular readers of this column may remember that we have been talking about relationships. We’ve addressed building bridges and experiencing healing in our own brokenness before we can share in life-giving connection. The following article addresses yet one more aspect of positive relationship, that of crossing cultural boundaries. The fences depicted in this article will hardly be typical of most of our communities. And yet, the truths

given here can be applied to so many more divides. For example: Kenyan-American, Anabaptist-non Anabaptist, the list continues, varied and formidable. And if you craft more articles that speak to additional chasms that need the grace and all-encompassing love of Jesus—as always, your input is valued! SS

An invisible fence runs through our community. It was built in a distant place

and time. Those who built it went to meet their Creator years ago, and few of their descendants know the story behind the fence. We only know it's there.

My church community first became aware of this fence when another Anabaptist church community moved into our county. Prior to their arrival, our church had been the only Anabaptist presence in the whole county. My community is quite sure that we are Mennonites, and not Amish. After all, we drive vehicles and have church services in English. Since the incoming Other Church doesn't match this code, many from my side of the fence consider them *Amish for all practical purposes*.

On the other side of the fence is a rapidly increasing number of the Other Church who are very certain that they are Mennonite and not Amish. Their ladies wear print dresses. The men don't have beards. They speak Mennonite Dutch instead of the Amish Dutch like my church. All these things are just the tip of the iceberg. Underneath the surface are innumerable little cultural differences like knowing the proper way of serving applesauce. In light of all these things, there is no doubt in the Other Church's mind who the Amish in their county are. It has to be my church. Liberal

Amish? Yes. Wannabe Mennonites? Yes. But, according to their cultural understanding, we are still Amish and don't qualify as true Mennonites.

One morning I received a surprising call from an Other Church lady. She invited me to cross the fence and spend 170 days among them as a tutor for their school. Two terms later, I'm still driving my Honda Civic and have no plans of trading it in for a mustang carriage. Yet, in a way that's hard to explain, they have become my people.

As a tutor I have been given a close up view of their culture. My school board, co-teachers, school parents, and students are all part of the Other Church. Together we have worked, rejoiced, relaxed, laughed, carried stress, lost sleep, despaired, encouraged each other, felt the flesh rising in frustration, taken turns being the sensible one who reminds the others to follow Christ's commands, and taken turns being the one in need of the reminder. In all this giving and taking, they have become a part of me.

Now I find myself in a unique situation. My church people live on one side of the cultural fence and my co-laborers in Christ's vineyard on the other. For me, the hardest part about living on both sides is to hear anyone from either side speaking

in an uncomplimentary way about anybody on the other side. Those strange people across the fence happen to be my friends too. I feel protective of the people on both sides.

One time I was reminding myself of all the nice things I know about a certain offender, and why I needed to love this person even if he didn't like or respect my friends on the other side. Suddenly, I had to wonder if this is how God feels when one of His children has attitudes toward another person He created and died for. Why are there so many verses in the Bible about loving our neighbors and not being tale bearers? Speaking of loving our neighbors, why did Jesus use people from two different cultures in the story of the Good Samaritan? Are there other cultures that are equal to the one we've always known? Could it be possible that some other people have discovered a way of doing something that is better than our way?

Maybe cultures are like flowers. Many women have a favorite kind of flower. Yet we wouldn't want our favorites to be the only type of flowers in the world. It would be boring if all flowers had the same color, size, shape, and smell. Similarly, different cultures can add beauty to our lives if we remember that many things can be done in more than one way.

All cultures have strong points and weak areas. It's easy to see our culture's strengths and other cultures' weaknesses. It's a bit harder to see other cultures' strengths. The hardest thing of all is to see our culture's weaknesses. We are so surrounded by our own culture that it is hard to really see it.

I can relate to the two young fish who went for a swim in the ocean. After a while, they came across an old fish who said, "Good morning, boys. How's the water?"

The two young fish continued on their way. Several minutes later the one young fish turned to his friend and asked, "What in the world is water?"

Before they could really grasp what water was, they would need to experience air. In the same way, I am often blind to my culture's peculiarities until I leave my comfortable corner and discover the shocking reality of how things are done in a different culture. Sometimes the differences make me grateful for the way things are done in my little corner. At other times, if I'm honest, I have to admit that their way of doing things is superior to our way. The challenge is to remain open-minded enough to accept new ideas but cautious enough to run every new idea through two tests. Is

it scriptural? Is it better than what we currently have?


The Word of God alone can tell us if a cultural practice is good or not. For example, having a casserole for Christmas dinner might be unheard of to some people, but I don't know of anything in the Bible that discourages it. If a group of people decides that is what they like, it is perfectly acceptable. However, if a culture normalizes anything that goes against Scripture, it is still wrong, no matter how many people accept or defend it.

Much more could be said on the topic of cross-cultural relationships, but I think I'll leave that for the experts who have scaled the daunting walls of international cultures. My tiny fence in Ohio seems to have only a few rules I need to remember while relating to those from the other side. Here is the main one, the one I most

often forget: the other person is as valuable as I am because the same God made both of us, and He loves us equally.

It sounds simple. It's easy to memorize. However, I expect it will take more years than I have left to grasp that rule as well as I wish I could. Thankfully, my Teacher never tires of reminding me of it and explaining how it applies to the various situations that arise.

To my fellow classmates, whoever you are and whatever fences you're facing, don't give up. Follow God wherever He leads you. Stop occasionally to enjoy the beauty of the cultures surrounding you.

To those of you who have graduated from the class and mastered the complexities of cross-cultural relationships, "Congratulations." Remember to thank your Teacher for giving you this gift. 

junior messages

A Blessing in a Mowing Accident?

Gena Bontrager, Bloomer, WI

“Larry!” Mom called, “Please fill the mower with gas, and mow the

lawn out front this afternoon.”

Eight-year-old Larry bounded up the steps of the back entrance and

threw his barn gloves into the closet. He looked forward to mowing the lawn. Only recently had he been allowed to drive the riding mower. It was fun!

Carefully, he mowed the grass beside the fence. Back and forth toward the locust tree he went. Oh, there's a branch I should have picked up before I started, he noticed. Oh well, I can grab it on the next turn, he thought to himself.

As he neared the branch, he clung to the steering wheel and pushed in the clutch to stop the mower. He stretched his arm far out toward the branch. Before he knew what had happened, his foot had slipped from the clutch, jerking his body in front of the mower, pushing it along 20 feet across the lawn. The roaring blade had traveled across his foot, tearing his shoe and stocking to shreds and then stalled the mower.

No! He thought. I don't even want to look at my foot! What will Mom say? A scream tore from his mouth.

"Mom!" He shrieked, "Help!"

Mom dashed from the house, alarm and concern written on her face. She pointed at Larry's left foot still under the mower and screamed, "I wonder how that foot looks?"

With an adrenaline rush, she was able to lift the mower off his foot and found minimal damage to the sole

of his other shoe as he got his foot out from under the mower. The little toe on his injured foot was missing, found later by his siblings. His back was scraped and bleeding. Mom carefully lifted him into her arms and carried him to the house.

"Dad will be home from work shortly," she said. "He can take us to the ER."

A few minutes later, Dad arrived. They were soon on their way. Mom held Larry's foot up high to help with his throbbing pain. Amazingly enough, only a small amount of blood flowed from his injury.

Upon arrival at the ER, Larry waited his turn quietly, hoping the wait wouldn't be too long. His foot was beginning to throb with pain. A kind and caring nurse appeared at the door of the hallway. "Larry, you may come with me," she called.

Larry was thankful for Mom and Dad's help in getting to the doctor's examination room. It was decided that they would do surgery that evening, removing a small part of the foot, which included the bone of his little toe. They grafted skin from the top of his thigh onto his foot.

At one point when a nurse was taking his blood pressure, which seemed abnormally high for his age, she told them they would need to see his doctor concerning this.

Five days later, Larry was thrilled to go home. The doctor reminded them that due to his high blood pressure, they should make an appointment with their family doctor to investigate the reasons.

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Summer vacation was coming to an end. Dad announced one day that they would take Larry to see their family doctor. How he wished he wouldn't have to go!

When the doctor saw him the next day, she felt she knew what was wrong, and sent Larry directly to the hospital for more testing. "I will have the test results back in a week, and I'll be in touch then," she said.

However, the next morning they received a call from her. The doctor told us, "I was so curious about the test results that I personally took them to the hospital lab last evening. I already set up an appointment for Larry at Riley Children's Hospital next week in Indianapolis."

• • • • •

On the long drive to Riley Children's Hospital, Larry entertained himself with the new book Mom had bought him. He would be happy to have these tests behind him!

When the tests were completed, Larry and his parents met with the doctor to hear the test results.

"Unfortunately, we discovered

a coarctation of the aorta artery. This means the artery never grew properly and caused approximately two and one-half inches of the aorta to be narrower than normal. While it typically is about the size of your finger, right now yours is the size of the lead inside the pencils you use at school," the doctor reported. "Quite often the issue is not discovered until children have developed complications or even heart failure and death. Your toe accident may well have saved your life, young man," he said with a grin.

During Larry's surgery, the surgeon entered between the ribs in his back and sliced the tiny artery open. He attached a Dacron patch to the artery which had grown a clump of tiny vessels around the narrowing to try to assist the blood's flow to the lower body.

• • • • •

Before surgery, a heartbeat couldn't be found in Larry's feet, but afterward it was strong and sure! His blood pressure in his upper body was back to normal. As they returned home, Larry and his parents discussed what a miracle it was.

"Who would have thought running over my foot with the mower could have saved my life?" Larry mused. "Sometimes good things are hidden in the rough things we go through!"

“Yes,” agreed Mom, “our all-knowing heavenly Father does send us blessings in disguise! Psalm 66:9 says, ‘Our lives are in His hands.’”

“We can trust that He will take care of things that we know nothing about, so that His will is done,” added Dad. “No wonder He told us so often in His word not to be afraid but to trust in Him.”

To God be the glory for the gift of being able to live with nearly normal health.

Note: Several major heart surgeries later, Larry is thankful for the skill of many talented and caring doctors and nurses, and the Lord, Who is the greatest Healer of all.



youth messages

Flowers Grow in the Valley

Josh Kooistra, New Concord, OH


Have you ever felt tired? And I’m not talking about the after-a-hard-day’s-work tired or tired-from-staying-up-for-24 hrs.-straight. I’m talking about being mentally and emotionally exhausted. Perhaps Murphy and his horrible law have been busy. Whatever could go wrong seems to have gone wrong. The transmission went out on your vehicle, the coffee maker broke, your phone is on the fritz, you’re worried about some health/vision issues you’ve been having but your doctor/optometrist can’t see you for a few weeks. Your computer has

a virus, your AC/heater seems to have a mind of its own (and not an agreeable one), you are having stress at work, and you’re dealing with some relationship conflict. Perhaps money is tight, you’re being pressured to help donate for something but the unpaid bills on your desk are staring at you. There are deadlines to meet, promises to keep, food to make, folks to help, and somewhere in all of that you want to spend time with God. It feels like everything all at once is on your shoulders and every time you think you’re making headway, something else comes up. Two steps

forward, one step back. And you're DONE. You're THAT kind of tired.

Many of you may have experienced some or all of these things. I know I have. I know what it's like to go to bed and dread the morning because I know the problems that are waiting to be faced and navigated through. The stress from this knowledge has

a way of exhausting us. It also has a way of pushing us to our limits. Proverbs 17:3 says, "*The refining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts.*" Recently, I heard a song that I felt expressed feelings similar to my own. The writer Samantha Ebert was battling cancer when she wrote this song.




*Well, blue skies and hillsides feel so far away,
And I wrote in my notebook that I've seen better days
Than the ones as of late. I can't bear the weight.*

*The rain won't stop pouring out my window pane,
And I haven't left my bedroom in 76 days.
I wish something would change, 'cause I'm losing faith.*

*So I brought it up in a desperate prayer.
Lord, why are You keeping me here?
Then He said to me, "Child, I'm planting seeds.
I'm a good God, and I have a good plan.
So trust that I'm holding a watering can,
And someday you'll see, that flowers grow in the valley."*

*So whatever the reason, I'm barely getting by.
I'll trust it's a season knowing that You're by my side,
Every step of the way, and I'll be okay.*



*'Cause I brought it up in a desperate prayer.
Lord, why are You keeping me here?
Then He said to me, "Child, I'm planting seeds.
I'm a good God, and I have a good plan.
So trust that I'm holding a watering can,
And someday you'll see, that flowers grow in the valley."*

*When I'm on the mountain and looking down below,
I'll see a valley of flowers that needed time to grow,
And I'll thank You for the rain—the hurt and days of pain.*



*And I'll bring it up in a grateful prayer.
Thank You, Jesus, for keeping me there.
You know just what I need, and You've planted seeds.
'Cause You're a good God with a real good plan,
And You hold my world and a watering can,
So I can have peace, 'cause flowers grow in the valley.*



God allows things in our lives in order to draw us closer to Him. Youth are in a very critical phase in life. You are making decisions that will have massive ramifications on your futures. You make choices like how far to go with your education, who to be friends with, and where to spend time in service (which impacts who you build relationships with and where many people have encountered potential significant others). Depending on your situation you may be deciding where you will call your home church. Uncertainty, especially through adversity, can quickly get us down and have us questioning what God is actually doing in our lives.

Recently, I was challenged with the story of the children of Israel just a few short months after their exodus from Egypt. Here in Exodus 19-20 was a group of people who had just

spent years in slavery and bondage before finally being freed to go and take back their birthright of Canaan. Yet, instead of being in Canaan where they thought they would be by now, they found themselves in the shadow of Mt. Sinai. How did they end up in this position? Instead of leading them to the Promised Land, God, through the pillar of cloud, had led them hundreds of miles from where they expected to be by that time. Why did God do this? Our children's Bible story book¹ gave these three reasons.

First, because He knew that His people, just freed from centuries of slavery, were not ready to meet the warlike Philistines who lived in the southern part of Palestine. (Exodus 13:17-18)

Second, because He had some lessons He wanted to teach them,

1. *The Bible Story, Mighty Men of Old*, Volume 2, pp 153-154

and for this He needed time and a private place, shut off from the rest of the world.


Third, and most important of all, He was planning a great future for these people, and He wanted to have them all to Himself for a while until He was sure they understood what sort of people He wanted them to be and what kind of work He wanted them to do. (Exodus 19:5-6)

These reasons may or may not be exactly why God had Israel where He did. God is the only One Who really knows, but I couldn't ignore the parallels to our lives—especially during seasons of uncertainty about the will of God and the future. We think we know what we want and what is best for us, but maybe God knows that we aren't quite ready yet.

Recently, I sat in the emergency room with a friend and co-worker who had an accident with a table saw. He asked me, "What am I doing wrong? This is the sixth time this has happened to me. I love what I do and can't imagine doing something else, but I wonder why God keeps allowing this to happen to me."

I shared with him a challenge that I received from the story of Job. It doesn't have to always make sense.

Job went through all that he did, and it doesn't say anywhere that he ever found out why on this side of eternity. Things were great. Job was perfect. His life was perfect and then one day it turned completely upside down. We would say that Murphy's law was busy that day and the following months. But then one day it all turned around. We know why it all happened because we are privy to all the details written in the account. It doesn't say that Job ever found out why, and he had to be ok with that.

God doesn't owe us an explanation, but we do owe Him our trust. We will get tired. Things will get discouraging. We won't always understand why God has us "miles away" from where we think we should be, but that's ok. Bad things are not always a result of sin. Sometimes God is just drawing us closer to Himself. Sometimes it has nothing to do with us, but our response and faithfulness while navigating a situation might be solely for a testimony to someone else. God's timing is perfect and if we are willing to trust and wait, He will reveal His will in time. Allow God to use the valleys in your life to produce the beauty that will bring glory to Him. 

Do not mistake *activity* for achievement.

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THOUGHT GEMS

Talk is cheap—do something!

• • • • •

A mistake proves that someone at least tried.

• • • • •

He who takes the wrong road makes the journey twice.

• • • • •

It is not the IQ but the I WILL that is important in education.

• • • • •

The reason talk is cheap is that supply far outpaces the demand.

• • • • •

Indifference, not hate, is the strongest enemy of love. C. S. Lewis

• • • • •

If you don't learn from your mistakes, there's no sense in making them.

• • • • •

To get maximum attention, it's hard to beat a big mistake.

• • • • •

Action should not be confused with haste. Lee Iacocca

• • • • •

Friendship doubles our joy and divides our grief.

• • • • •

It doesn't do a person any good to sit up
and take notice if he keeps on sitting.