



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

MAY 2023

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Calvary Messenger

May 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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A Series of Meditations on the Spirit


Richard Stoltzfoos, Burgettstown, PA

I. A great abyss of wailing waste,
Of silent nothing—not a sign
Of movement or of moment more,
But one horizon-hovering line,
The lively Spirit, Breath, and Wind,
The same all three, and all divine.

II. A swift Word glows, and sows the waste
With particles of gathering light
Which separate and group, and breathes
Along earth's aged satellite.
Below these far, below the birds,
Breath enters dust, and dust gains sight.

III. Ye winds which blow where'er ye list,
Ye four winds, come upon these bones,
These dead and dry, and give them flesh.
We hear of mercy in Your groans,
We sense a Presence in this tomb,
For we have souls another owns.

IV. Fragrant beams of radiant moon
Light Joseph's dreams; there seems a one,
A wiser spirit, clothed in white:
"The hurt you fled has been undone,
Your time in Egypt has elapsed,
Return to Israel with your son."

V. A group of vessels, vats of oil,
Ripple with lordly breath untamed,
A wind that whistles in the pines
Which lights in fire the lamps new-named;
Each surface shimmers with bold flame,
And bears a fragrance unashamed. 

The Voice of God

Throughout history, men and women have sought to hear from their gods. Shamans and mediums have professed their ability to receive word from deities, often for power and control over their fellow humans. The Bible records various examples of people seeking a revelation or power from their gods.

In King Saul's final days, he sought out a "familiar spirit" to talk with the prophet Samuel for direction in the battle with the Philistines. Despite Saul's method of seeking direction, it appears that he heard God's judgment upon his sinful ways.

When Elijah called for a showdown between Baal and Jehovah, the test for the true God was fire from heaven to ignite the sacrifice. The prophets of Baal called on their god from morning until noon without any divine ignition. Despite their attempts to get the attention of their god through crying with loud voices, leaping upon the altar, and even cutting themselves with knives until blood gushed out upon them, there was no response from Baal. *"And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of*

the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded" (I Kings 18:26, 29).

The response from the LORD God to Elijah's humble prayer was immediate, despite the drenched sacrifice. *"Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God"* (I Kings 18:37-39).

Today we seek God's direction on important decisions in life and on truth vs. Satan's lies. Does God still speak to us today? How does His voice reveal His will and truth for us today?

When God pursues us

One of the greatest differences between the true God and the deities that mankind follow is God's pursuit of humankind.

When Adam and Eve listened to the

wrong voice and disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they attempted to hide from God's Presence. He did not give them up to the beguiling serpent, but pursued them and asked where they were. *"And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"* (Genesis 3:9).

After Cain's sacrifice was rejected and the murder of his brother, Abel, God pursued him as well. *"And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"* (Genesis 4:10).

Dreams and visions

In the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit was not freely given, God spoke to people in dreams and visions. When Jacob fled from his brother, Esau, God spoke to him as he slept. *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven... the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac"* (Genesis 28:12-13).

One of the most memorable times that God spoke to humans was when He called to the young child, Samuel. Despite Eli's unfaithfulness to God, Eli was able to help Samuel recognize the voice of God. *"And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was*

no open vision... Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place" (I Samuel 3:1, 9).

Even in the New Testament, after the Holy Spirit had come upon His disciples, God spoke to people through visions. In making the drastic change from the physical to the spiritual people of God, this clear object lesson of *"a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air"* (Acts 10:11-12) gave direction to Peter and the other apostles to recognize that the Gentiles were accepted into the family of God.

Face-to-face

There were rare times when people had a physical encounter with God. After Jacob wrestled with an unknown assailant before meeting his brother, Esau, he was amazed that he had not died. *"And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"* (Genesis 32:30).

Moses was a rare man indeed, who saw the similitude of the LORD. This testimony comes from the LORD God Himself when He condemned

Aaron and Miriam for claiming equality with their brother. *“If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”* (Numbers 12:6-8).

Nature

God speaks to mankind constantly through the natural world. His glory is revealed daily in nature. *“The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory”* (Psalm 97:6). While God’s revelation in nature is less detailed than the written Word of God, it does show His power to all who chose to believe. *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1:20).

Angels

There are numerous accounts in the Bible of God speaking to people through angels. An angel appeared to Gideon while he threshed wheat by the winepress. *“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said*

unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour” Judges 6:12).

And, of course, the angels brought the news of the coming Messiah to Joseph, Mary, and the shepherds.

God coupled the vision of the sheet of unclean animals to Peter with a visit to Cornelius by an angel. These nearly simultaneous events confirmed to these two men that God’s church was now open to the Gentiles.

Still small voice

Sometimes, the most compelling voice of God is a quiet one in the stillness of our hearts. After the miracle of the fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, Elijah was discouraged and fled in fear from Queen Jezebel. In the solitude on Mount Horeb, he witnessed spectacular natural events, but the still small voice from God asked a simple question. *“And he [God] said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his*

face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:11-13).


The life of Christ

Although we were not walking with Jesus when He was here on earth, we do have the record in the Gospels of His life and His teaching. According to the following verse, Jesus is the "spitting image," as we say, of God, the Father. "*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the **express image of his person**, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of*

the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1).

The written Word of God

Last, but definitely not least, is the written Word we can read with our own eyes. While it may be more sensational to hear an audible voice that seems to be of God or have an angel stand before us, the written Word is universally more practical and safe. It speaks to our hearts in all phases of life and communicates the will of God and His truth for our daily lives. Let's read it as hearing it from "*the mount out of the midst of the fire.*" It truly is the Voice that speaks to every situation and era in each of our lives!

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17). 

Announcement

2023 Youth Fellowship Meetings

Eastern - Dayspring Christian Fellowship, Taylorsville, NC - TBD

Northern - Mt. Olive Church, Montgomery, IN - July 21-23

Southwest - Cedar Crest Church, Hutchinson KS - August 4-6

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The Use and Abuse of Offences

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

The Sunday School is a useful institution of the church. Here at Weavertown we are having the study of Galatians. My analytical mind was drawn to Galatians 5:11, *“And, I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.”* The word “offence” became an object of some outside-of-class study for me.

Let’s begin with definitions. Ever since I was a teenager, the meaning given for offense was often repeated as being a cause for someone else to do wrong. So, if I played ball on Sunday, someone else used that as a justification for him to play ball on Sunday. He was offended, so I was the cause for his violation. If I drove over the speed limit, then someone else who was offended at me did the same.

My dictionary gives nothing close to that. First off, the variation of the spelling for “offence” and “offense” has it that “offence” was an old British spelling, and the dictionary refers only to “offense” as the spelling currently used. Either spelling is correct and has the same

definition. In some cases, the same word can refer to an enticement to sin according to Strong’s Concordance. Strong’s says to be offended can be a cause for apostasy.

Webster says to offend is to break a law or religious commandment, to commit a sin or crime, to create resentment, anger, or displeasure. To cause an offense is very similar to offend, but also to cause hurt feelings and the condition of being offended.

Apparently, the Apostle Paul was accused by some people, saying he preaches the value of circumcision, hence the need for it. The extension of that line would then call for adherence to keep the law of Moses. No, of course not, he says, because then the Judaizers would have stopped hounding Paul. They were offended and kept on persecuting him for consistently calling people to faith in Christ as the only way to be accepted by God.

In answer to his own question, he says, *“then is [would be] the offence of the cross ceased”* if his preaching had required circumcision as a religious merit in order to be accepted by God.

The preaching by Paul of Jesus Christ crucified and risen again was an offense to the Judaizers because that would replace their standard for righteousness with God. Out of that, they were displeased, full of resentment, and angry. The embarrassment of saying Jesus' resurrection was rigged by His disciples lasted for more than one generation (Matthew 28:12-15).

Paul called it "*the offence of the cross.*" The truth of God needed to be proclaimed, and Paul was under heaven's assignment to do so. The unbelieving Jews resented Paul for his preaching and were greatly offended, even angry at him. Those who denied the truth were greatly offended, but Paul was not offended by their continual reactions against him.

Jesus also had spoken a woe in Matthew 18:6 against the people who offend those children who believed in Him. The faith of a child is precious to Jesus, to which He said it were better for one to have a heavy millstone tied to his neck and without remedy be cast in the sea and drowned. Then Jesus gives verse seven which is central to this discussion. "*Woe to the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come: but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!*" (Two

mentions of woe, and two occasions of exclamation marks!) People who are offended do not easily repent of their error.

The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day were argumentative, agitators, making false accusations, scorning, and self-righteous. They despised the truth itself and those who taught the truth. This raises the idea that those who are in error are usually the ones who are offended. Paul was not offended. Jesus was not offended. The common people were not offended; the Bible says they were glad to hear Jesus' teaching. The Jewish leaders went so far in being offended that they put those in their ban (John 9:22, German) if they heard of any who confessed that Jesus was the Christ.

The offense of the cross continues in our day. Many Muslims will ban their own if they confess Christ as their Savior, sometimes even threaten to kill them, and in some cases have done so. Lesbians and homosexual persons become greatly offended when the Bible is quoted in its judgment against them. Atheists are very deeply offended at the proclaimed fact that there is the eternal Lord God.

These people are irritated, resentful, angry, scornful, and react quite strongly but usually within


the limits of the law in the country where they reside. It is of particular interest to observe that people who practice truth and righteousness seldom rise in reaction and become offended at those who err. Political parties in numerous nations in the world in recent years have become very offended at the other side to the point of physical combat and bloodshed. Even the two main political parties in the United States have caused strong offenses to each other in recent times. National elections have been times of deep stress, resentment, ungentlemanly arguments and debates. Some larger newspapers have featured slanted quotes in favoring their chosen candidates, including slander and verbal mud-slinging. Apparently, many newspaper editors are also offended when it comes to political and economic issues.

Some of us have been confronted by Christians who are offended that we do not vote in our governmental elections. Here again is a revealing point: those who are offended are usually in error. Truth has no reason to be offended and usually is not resentful, upset, and accusing those

who are in error. Being offended has contributed to some of the present-day apostasy—an abandoning of a faith (Webster). In a biblical application it is abandoning the one true faith in God and His eternal Word.

In a plain Mennonite ministers' conference, they had one preacher explain the biblical interpretation some Mennonites use and another preacher gave a topic on the opposite view. The moderator told the one preacher he should be careful to not offend those who hold to the opposite view. Teaching what the Anabaptists taught will cause less offense in some churches than teaching what Jesus and the apostle taught.

The Bottom Line is that those who consider themselves to be the conservative Anabaptists might themselves have a few areas that could be addressed in regard to this matter of being offended. Being resentful, argumentative, and a bit angry has the marks of being offended, whosoever he may be.

Truth is not offended. Righteousness is not offended. Love is not offended. Humility is not offended. Faith is not offended. Think on these things. 

What the world needs is *peace* that

passes all **misunderstanding**.



The Freedom of Forgiveness Received

(Part 2 of 3)

Joel Kime, Lancaster, PA

In part 1 (published in the April issue) Joel relates how he hit a horse and buggy while driving recklessly fast on Kissel Hill Rd. Joel was 17, and the Amish couple in the buggy had been married five days earlier and were on their honeymoon. The newlywed bride was killed. Part 2 begins with the events of the evening on the day after the accident.

That evening, my parents, my youth pastor (who had been at our church for only three months—still amazes me that he came—another example of godly commitment), and I went to where we thought the viewing was going to be. I felt so nervous that there was actual pain ripping across my guts. I didn't know what these people were like (shows how much this Lancastrian cared about the Amish subculture, as I grew up surrounded by it) or what was going to happen. Would they come pouring out onto the porch of the house with shotguns? That was literally the image in my mind. We arrived at the house, but it didn't seem like anyone was at home. We had mistakenly been given the location, not of the viewing, but of

the husband's family's home. Some of his relatives were inside, and my mom remembers his grandmother coming out to meet us, hugging me, and expressing her forgiveness. This kind gesture I do not recall, most likely because, in my mind, the worst was yet to come. Amazingly, the husband's father was there and needed a ride to the viewing. We took him with us as he directed our way. The father, while very reserved, wasn't mean to us and even expressed his forgiveness. But can you imagine driving to the viewing of your son's new wife with the family of the guy who was responsible for her death?

When we finally made it to the viewing, we saw Amish buggies parked all over the farm property, heightening my fear. This was a tragedy in the life of Lancaster's Amish community, drawing many to support the family and attend the viewing. A loss in what was supposed to be a joyful season made the front page of the local newspaper. Then the moment came. We got out of the car and walked into the dimly-lit house. My mom mentioned that because the father-in-law was with

us, we didn't have to go through the painful process of knocking on the door but were immediately ushered into the house. I had never been in an Amish home and was surprised at how similar it looked to my own. The family, through the grapevine, knew that we were coming and met us in the front room. The parents of the Amish lady who died, Melvin and Barbara Stoltzfus, walked up to me and put their arms around me. Through tears, I muttered how sorry I was, and they spoke some of the most incredible words that I think are possible to utter, "We forgive you, we know it was God's time for her to die."

Unbelievable. It was totally, absolutely amazing. But the family went even further than that! They proceeded to invite my family to come over for dinner! And they wanted us to come soon, within a few weeks! I cannot express the relief that flooded over me.

Then someone led me to a back room where the husband, Aaron Stoltzfus, stood beside the open casket of his wife, Sarah. To my surprise, as I nervously glanced at her, I was looking at a beautiful young woman. Aaron, like her parents, came to me with open arms. I asked, "How can I ever repay you?" He simply forgave me. We hugged as the freedom of forgiveness swept

over and through me.

As I read and reread the previous few paragraphs, I feel extremely limited in my command of the English language to evoke the feeling of what took place. When I tell the story live, it seems to carry a greater impact. Maybe the audience reads my face. Maybe the emotion can't help but flow through me. All I know is that the Stoltzfuses' concise words of forgiveness rushed through me with power. Some people have said that Amish can forgive like that because their theology leans toward fatalism, meaning that they believe everything is determined and is bound to happen. There is no reason to get all bent out of shape about something bad. God is in control. They become somewhat emotionless about all the pain and suffering in life. They are much more capable of dealing with it well. I don't know how true that is for every single Amishman, but I do know that this particular family is very emotional in a positive way. They are incredibly upbeat and warm people. And I know the accident, Sarah's death, was very hard for them.

My mom, recalling the events, said, "I will never forget what Pastor Jim told us the next day. He watched Joel during this entire night. He said he started out as a young teen with

an incredible burden of guilt on his shoulder but walked out of that house with a tremendous weight taken from him through forgiveness.”

The Sentence

The Stoltzfuses did have us over for dinner sometime in that next month, an event I recall with wonder. There we were, sitting in that same Amish home with Sarah’s family, Aaron, and some from his family, too. The table was loaded with delicious food, and never once did they show any kind of resentment. Never once did they attempt to make us feel bad. On the contrary, it was a kind of get-to-know-you session, an intentional beginning to a meaningful relationship. We exchanged stories comparing the Amish subculture with mainstream American culture. They were so kind by opening their home and hearts to us!

The broader Amish community in Lancaster was also very impressive to me. I still have the pile of at least 50 cards that I received from various Amish people across the county. They were constantly encouraging me and pointing me to God.

It was also at this time that I clearly recall a striking visit from my soccer coach. I remember meeting him at the door one evening, probably just a few days after the accident. I

will never forget what he said. “Joel, you will be compassionate from now on.” How true. Since that time, I have never had trouble forgiving people. Not that I have worked on it and have become talented at it. On the contrary, I think God must have changed my heart because I don’t have to try to forgive anymore. It flows out as naturally as my heart beats without my having a say in the matter.

Handing my keys over to my parents, I did not drive again in the ensuing months. My trial was set for February 5, 1992. Because of the severity of the accident, I was charged with vehicular homicide, a charge that indicates the accidental, but irresponsibly reckless use of a vehicle that caused the loss of life. I’m not sure where it falls on the murder/manslaughter scale, but I do know that if I would have been one year older, I could have been facing jail time, which is another facet of the whole story that points me to the grace of God. I was 17, a minor, and was therefore dealt with under the juvenile justice system, and saved from a much harsher penalty in the adult courts. Soon after the accident, I was assigned a probation officer and a public defender to walk my family and me through the penal process prior to the court date. The

standard punishment for juvenile vehicular homicide at the time was a suspension of the offender's driver's license for three years, 200 hours of community service, payment of all court costs (only about \$100), and probation until the community service requirement was completed. To me, with Sarah's life gone because of my actions, it was an extremely generous sentence.

My trial and punishment served as another moment for the Amish family to demonstrate the freedom of forgiveness. They wrote letters to the judge, begging for my pardon, asking that I be acquitted on all counts! Imagine the character it would take to write that letter! Because of the severity of the crime, however, a

pardon was impossible based on the law. At the trial, my dad asked the judge if it might be possible for me to get my license back sooner because I would be going to college soon and would need to drive. I hoped that maybe I could have more community service in exchange for a short suspension. But the judge held firm to the standard, a wise decision that was completely rational and acceptable to my thinking. As we walked out of the courtroom, my probation officer met us in the hallway. I will never forget pulling out my wallet and handing over my precious driver's license to her that day after the court appearance.

Joel Kime serves as pastor at Faith Church in Lancaster, PA.



*I used to think that God's gifts were on shelves,
one above the other, and the taller we grew, the more easily we
could reach them. I now find that God's gifts are on shelves,
one beneath the other, and that it is not a question of
growing taller but of stooping lower.*

- F. B. MEYER



Come See My Heart

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

Into my lap there fell an opportunity to spend unexpected hours with an old friend. Our paths had diverged, and I was well aware of the thorns that marked her way in recent years. We found a cozy couch in a quiet space, and I listened as she told of recent discoveries of work to be done in her soul. As she spoke, her face glowed, not with triumph, but with humility and brokenness all fresh and new. It was a sacred moment.

As she spoke, tears glistening on her upturned face, there rose in my mind a vision of newly-sprouted hostas in my flowerbed back home. Pale growth reaching upward out of dark soil. Still lacking chlorophyll, but crammed with the promise of growth to come... just like the tender buds of faith within my friend. I paused and admired the grace that invited me to look inside to see the real.

That, my friends, is a beautiful thing. 



marriages

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

Helmuth-Miller

Bro. Micah, son of Rod and Anna Helmuth, Rochester, IN, and Sis. Joyce, daughter of Marcus and Lisa Miller, Kokomo, IN, on February 25, 2023, at Bethany Church by Darlton Bontrager.

Snyder-Stoltzfus

Bro. Taylor, son of David and Vonda Snyder, Plain City, OH, and Sis. Candace, daughter of Elmer and Bonita Stoltzfus, Plain City, OH, on March 25, 2023, at Grace Evangelical Church for Bethesda Fellowship by Elmer Stoltzfus.

Williams-Freeman

Bro. Jim, son of Jimmy and Jemima Williams, Minor Hill, TN, and Sis. Twila, daughter of Homer and Martha Freeman, Leoma, TN, on February 17, 2023, at First Baptist Church for Goodspring Mennonite Church by Perry Miller.



cradle roll

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

Beachy, Davon and Joanna (Yoder), Arlington, KS, fourth child, second daughter, Daisha Hope, February 11, 2023.

Chupp, Brad and Lucy (Steiner), Grove City, MN, second child, first son, Jaxon Reid, March 13, 2023.

Coblentz, Josh and Waneta (Lambright), Cochranton, PA, first child and daughter, Sophia Kate, March 9, 2023.

Dyck, Abe and Beulah (Swartzentruber), Montezuma, GA, (serving at Faith Mission Home), fourth child, second daughter, Finley Adeline, February 6, 2023.

Helmuth, Nevin and Tina (Wengerd), Augusta, WV, third child and son, Asher Tate, February 6, 2023.

Hochstedler, Dylan and Theresa (Wray), Amboy, IN, fourth child, third son, Wyatt Jackson, January 5, 2023.

Kauffman, Norman and Rose (Raber), Hicksville, OH, fifth child, second son, Micah Drew, December 14, 2022.

King, Chet and Rhoda (Stoltzfus), Port Royal, PA, fifth child, second son, Judson Manuel, March 6, 2023.

Kline, Shannon and Michelle (Yoder), Millersburg, OH, third child and daughter, Kaitlyn Danae, February 14, 2023.

Miller, Austin and Lisa (Miller), Ligonier, IN, first child and daughter, Ava Skye, March 11, 2023.

Miller, Conrad and Kanita (Yoder), Newcomerstown, OH, second child and son, Tyler John, March 7, 2023.

Miller, Duane and Diane (Weaver), Uniontown, OH, second child and son, Dirk Ellis, March 2, 2023.

Miller, Myron and Gena (Beachy), Washington, IA, second child and son, Matthias Lynn, December 3, 2022.

Núñez, Jorge and Amelia (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, first child and son, Jorge Alejandro, January 18, 2023.

Overholt, Leland and Amber (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, first child and son, Drew Harrison, March 7, 2023.

Peachey, Josh and Bethany (Yoder), Richmond, KY, second child, first son, Jackson Cole, February 11, 2023.

Richard, Matt and Monica (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, first child and son, Braxton John, November 23, 2022.

Rohrer, Kelton and Sabrina (Miller), Grove City, MN, second child and son, Andre Bennette, March 12, 2023.

Schrock, Anthony and Rani (Nissley), Hutchinson, KS, third child and daughter, Frances Catherine, March 6, 2023.

Sommers, Chris and Judy (Yoder), Wayland, IA, first child and son, Liam West, December 8, 2022.

Sommers, Jonathan and Jennifer (Coblentz), Meadville, PA, ninth child, fifth son, Jacob Elliot, December 16, 2022.

Stauffer, Toby and Isabelle (Zimmerman), Paint Lick, KY, second child and son, Isaiah Todd, January 31, 2023.

Stoltzfus, Eugene and Arlene (King), Mifflin, PA, third child, second daughter, Kendra Brielle, February 14, 2023.


Swartzentruber, Matthias and Jill (Wenger), Montezuma, GA, first child and son, Isaiah Bray, January 31, 2023.

Weaver, Micah and Rebecca (Yoder), Owenton, KY, eighth child, seventh daughter, Emily Dawn, December 25, 2022.

Wenger, Dallas and Jenny (Peachey), Paint Lick, KY, first child and daughter, Brittany Rayelle, January 12, 2023.

Yoder, David Lee and Heidi (Cross), Montezuma, GA, fifth child and daughter, Karina BethAnn, February 12, 2023.


Yoder, Derek and LaNita (Wingard), Montezuma, GA, second child and son, Wyatt Kade, November 12, 2022.

Yoder, Leland and Donna (Stutzman), Owenton, KY, fifth child, fourth daughter (one deceased), Darla Janae, January 6, 2023. 

ordinations

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

Bro. John Nissley, 68, (wife, Susanna Bender), Catlett, VA, was ordained bishop for Pine Grove Mennonite Church on March 19, 2023. The charge was given by Tim Miller, assisted by Lamar Hochstetler and Jonathan Martin.

Bro. Ervin Stoltzfus, 43, (wife, Kendra Rohrer), was ordained deacon by the voice of the church for Fountain of Praise Church, Lincoln, MO. Preordination services were conducted by Merlin Bender. The charge was given by B. Truman Yoder, assisted by Delmer Bontrager and Merlin Bender. 



obituaries

Blank, Elizabeth J., 79, of Perry, NY, passed away on January 3, 2023, at her home surrounded by her loving family. She was born in Lancaster, PA, on February 18, 1943, to the late Erwin J. and Annie S. (Glick) Miller.

Elizabeth was a baker who owned and operated the Bird-in-Hand Bake Shop in Bird-in-Hand, PA, with her late husband and after moving to Perry, she worked at Lantz's Bulk Foods in Warsaw.

She was a member of the Silver Lake Mennonite Church in Perry. Elizabeth loved to work, whether being at her jobs or at home. She enjoyed doing puzzles, playing games, cooking, and baking. She loved all the times spent with her family.

She is survived by two daughters: Beulah M. (Steve) Stoltzfus, Perry; Cheryl D. (Steve) Lantz, Iva, SC; two sons: Ron E. (Shirley), Intercourse, PA; Kevin J. (Angela), Uganda, Africa; sister, Elsie (Paul) Wenger, Akron, PA; brothers: Jonas (Miriam) Miller, Smoketown, PA;

Erwin "Butch" Jr. (Linda) Miller, Bird-in-Hand, PA; 15 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Jacob K. Blank, who passed away on October 25, 2022, son-in-law, Ivan Lantz, daughter-in-law, Heidi Blank, and brother-in-law, David Esh.

The funeral service was held on January 9, 2023, at Valley Chapel with James Allgyer, Lavern Stoltzfus, and Dathan Stoltzfus serving. Elizabeth was laid to rest in the Silver Lake Mennonite Church Cemetery.

Eby, Alma May, 85, beloved wife of Menno, passed away peacefully on March 1, 2023, at her home near Paynesville, MN, with family at her bedside. Alma was born May 18, 1937, in Sheldon, WI, to Jason and Gladys (Byers) Martin. On September 18, 1959, she was united in marriage to Menno Eby

in Hayward, WI. They shared 62 years of marriage.

She accepted Christ as her Savior and was baptized in her youth. She was a faithful member of Believers' Mennonite Church.

Alma loved gardening, raising huge strawberries and raspberries that she shared with many. She cherished her grandchildren and loved to have them read to her.

Surviving are her husband, Menno, children: Iva (Randy) Kauffman, Monroe, WI; Rhea Hershberger, Greenville, TN; Steven (Donna), Albany, KY; Kay (Daryl) Miller, Paynesville; Jay, Big Fork; Dena (Tom) Miller, Sheldon, MO; Orvan Lee (Christy), Abbeville, SC; 36 grandchildren, and 36 great-grandchildren. Also surviving are her siblings: Grace Shult, Ladysmith, WI; Mary Stoll, Goshen, IN; Earl (Lisa) Martin, Caledonia, MI; Leona Skrivseth, Blooming Prairie; Alta (Larry) Peterson, Mosinee, WI; and Nelson (Rhoda) Martin, Glen Flora, WI.

She was preceded in death by her parents, daughter, Lyn Leffel, two grandchildren, four brothers: Lester, Ray, Loyd, Marlin; sister, Martha, and son-in-law, Roman Hershberger.

The funeral was held March 7, 2023, at the Evangelical Free Church with interment in Burr Oak Cemetery, rural Grove City.

Kauffman, John K., 84, Reedsville, PA, passed away on March 5, 2023, at his home. He was born on January 5, 1939,

in Lancaster, PA, to the late Crist K. and Annie (King) Kauffman. On May 7, 1959, he married Beulah E. Yoder. She survives at their home.

Also surviving are his children: Joseph (Ruth), Belleville; Regina (David) Byler, Mill Creek; Carol (Samuel) Hostetler, Reedsville; Tim (Ruth), Reedsville; Beth (Galen) King, Belleville; James (Abigail), Westminster, SC; 28 grandchildren, 30 great-grandchildren, siblings: Mary Peachey, Mifflin; Rebecca Peachey, Belleville; Anna (Frederick) Helmuth, Quaker City, OH; and brother-in-law, Eric Kraly, Ethridge, TN.

He was preceded in death by granddaughters: Shalom Kauffman and Hailey Kauffman; brother, Steve Kauffman, sister, Leah Kraly, stillborn sister, brothers-in-law: Henry Peachey and Lewis Peachey; and sister-in-law, Rhoda Kauffman.

He was a member of Valley View Amish Mennonite Church.

John was a lifelong dairy farmer in Armagh Township. He thoroughly enjoyed farming and especially planting corn. In his retirement years, he enjoyed vacationing and fishing at Chautauqua Lake with some of his children and grandchildren. Most recently, he was especially fond of visiting with family and friends and relaxing at Hostetler's Deli.

The funeral service was held March 9, 2023, at Valley View Amish Mennonite Church with Earl Peachey, Loren Yoder, and Jesse Zook serving. The burial followed at Locust Grove Cemetery.

Lightcap, Shelly Ann (Gerhardt), 51, of Stuarts Draft, VA, was welcomed into the presence of her merciful Savior, Jesus Christ, on February 8, 2023, surrounded by her family. Born August 26, 1971, in Sellersville, PA, she was a daughter of Sharon (Vasey) Phillips and Rodney L. Phillips. On May 8, 1999, she married the love of her life, Jeffrey S. Lightcap. They shared over 23 wonderful years of marriage.

At a young age Shelly heard the saving message of the Gospel and accepted the Lord in her childlike faith. She entrusted herself to her heavenly Father and a life of faith grew as she matured.

As a little girl, Shelly dreamed of becoming a teacher. Following high school, Shelly attended Valley Forge Christian College in Valley Forge, PA, where she earned a degree in Elementary Education. Following college, she served her Lord as a first-grade teacher for nine years at West-Mont Christian Academy in Pottstown, PA. At the start of their marriage, Jeff and Shelly committed themselves to ensure she remained at home once children came and to educate their children at home. That brought her much joy. Aside from her love of teaching, she was very dedicated to her family. Always learning and looking for ways to help her family in any way needed, Shelly had a holistic approach in thinking and living. That included becoming creative in culinary skills to ensure everyone was well-nourished. She was an avid gardener and was not afraid to try new things.

Shelly was a faithful member of Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Church, Stuarts Draft.

She was preceded in death by her father, Raymond G. Gerhardt, and an infant sister, Deanna Gerhardt.

Those Shelly left behind include her loving husband, Jeffrey S. Lightcap, two daughters: Sarah Lightcap and Elizabeth Lightcap, son, Matthew, all of Stuarts Draft; her mother and father: Sharon and Rodney Phillips, McKenzie, TN; brothers: Rodney Phillips, Jr. and Ryan Phillips both of McKenzie, TN; a paternal grandmother, Dorothy Jeanette Phillips, Souderton, PA; sisters-in-law: Karen (Paul) Gehris, Orbisonia, PA; Kimberley (John) Varela, Langhorne, PA; Carol Lightcap, Spring City, PA; Christine Lightcap, Royersford, PA; brother-in-law, R. Michael Lightcap, Douglasville, PA; nieces: Melissa Gehris and Emily Herr; nephews: Christopher Heffentrager, Jeremy Heffentrager, Nathan Herr, Michael Herr, Andrew Herr, R. Michael Lightcap, Jr., Evan Gehris; and many extended family members.

The funeral service was held at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Church on February 11, 2023, with Jonathan Miller, Simon Schrock, and Ken Miller officiating. Burial followed in the church cemetery with Darrell Hershberger serving.

Miller, Mahlon, 83, of Bremen, IN, died March 30, 2023. He was born on June 30, 1939, in Middlefield, OH, to Andy R. and Sarah (Graber) Miller.

On October 25, 1962, he married Irene Helmuth.

Mahlon accepted Christ in his youth and loved his Lord and Savior. He was a member of Clay St. A.M. Church in Bourbon, IN. He lived in the Nappanee area for 60 years and spent winters in Phoenix, AZ.

He is survived by his children: Linda (Thomas) Mast, Nappanee; Lauranna (Alpha) Miller, Owenton, KY; Lucretia (Larry) Hochstetler, Bremen; Matthew (Pam) Miller, Bremen; Marcus (Debra) Miller, Nappanee; Joyce (Joel) Helmuth, Nappanee; 33 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren; three sisters: Martha Miller, Mary Byler, Kathryn (Ray) Gingerich; three sisters-in-law, Delores, Esther, and Barbara; two brothers-in-law: Jake Byler and Daniel Byler.

He was preceded in death by his parents, stepmother, Mabel, his wife, Irene, son, Mahlon Mark, granddaughter, Lynell Irene Hochstetler; great-grandson, Michael Miller; brothers: Levi, Menno, Joe, John, Allan, Enos; sisters: Irene Slabaugh, Amanda Hostetler, Edna Byler, Bertha Byler and Sarah Ann Byler.

Mahlon was an ordained minister who preached with zeal and shared with many people spiritually and materially.

He was involved in the RV industry at Holiday Rambler and owned Newmar for 35 years. He enjoyed life with many ideas and inventions, hobby farming, and spending time with his grandchildren. He loved playing games with his family and enjoyed sharing his latest joke. He is missed by many whose lives he touched

and influenced.

The funeral service was held on April 2, 2023, at Nappanee Missionary Church, for Clay St. Church, with the home ministry and Alan Byler officiating. The burial followed in Maple Lawn A.M. Church Cemetery.

Nisly, Lena Catherine, 92, of Aroda, VA, went to heaven to be with her Lord on March 14, 2023. She was born October 7, 1930, to the late Moses M. and Elizabeth (Amstutz) Schrock in Sikeston, MO, and then moved to Delaware. She was preceded in death by her husband, Perry D. Nisly, in 2001.

She is survived by her daughters: Martha (David) Miller, IA; Mary Ruth (David) Kipps, Aroda; Dorothy Nisly, Aroda; sons: Kenneth (Priscilla), IN; Timothy (Loretta), Aroda; brothers: Enos, Leroy Jr.; sisters: Mary Yoder, Lydia Kanagy, Anna Mae Detweiler, Ruth Schrock; 17 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren.

Lena lived in Kansas and Stuart's Draft, VA, before moving to the Aroda area as pioneers of a new church planting. After her family was grown, she was involved in prison ministry with her husband. She enjoyed nature and the outdoors and had an adventurous spirit.

Lena thoroughly enjoyed the Lord's blessings and joyfully delighted in the people He placed in her life. Her life characterized the selfless heart of Christ, and we rejoice that she can now stand fully redeemed in His presence.

The funeral was held March 18, 2023,

at the Oak Grove Mennonite Church with Lamar Hochstetler leading the service. The burial followed at the church cemetery.

Peachey, Vincent Lane, 13, of Centerville, PA, passed away unexpectedly in his sleep on March 25, 2023, at his home. He was born April 13, 2009, to Mike and Gina Peachey.

He will be deeply missed by his parents and siblings: Brent, 21, (fiancé, Allison Nisly); Kendon, 20, (special friend, Kelsie Stutzman); Ashley, 18, (special friend, Caleb Yoder); Lana, 7, and Aleah, 1. He is also survived by maternal grandparents, Ervin and Ruth Miller, paternal grandparents, Earl and Edna Peachey, paternal great-grandfather, Perry E. (Martha) Bontrager, and many aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Vincent was an energetic young man who loved reading, going to school, lawncare, and helping Uncle Jason on the farm with his cousins. He was a hard worker who rarely complained and was always eager to help. His cheerful disposition will be greatly missed in the community.

A funeral service was held on Friday, March 31, 2023, at Plainview Gospel Church with John Nisley, Earl Peachey, Lucas Hilty, and Roy Hershberger officiating. The committal service followed with Martin Schlabach officiating.

Swarey, Ivan Lee, 68, a beloved brother, husband, father, and grandfather, died

peacefully at home in Greenville, VA, on February 22, 2023, after battling metastatic melanoma. Ivan was born on November 13, 1954, to the late Ben and Mary Swarey, in Stuarts Draft, VA.

His family moved to Virginia Beach for six years before returning to Stuarts Draft. He worked as a drywall contractor before marrying the love of his life, Magdalena (Lena) Miller, on April 3, 1975. They partnered in raising a family and farming during their 40 years together. Ivan was a loving husband who devotedly cared for his wife during her 10-year cancer journey until her death in 2015.

Left to carry on their legacy are seven children: Mary Anna (Kevin) Graber, Odon, IN; Malinda (Jonathan) Miller, Stuarts Draft; Paul (Amber), Greenville; Marcia (Loren) Miller, Alvarado, TX; Karen (Jerrel) Miller, Dayton; Naomi (Kevin) Shenk, York, PA; Evelyn (Titus) Hershberger, Stuarts Draft; and 31 grandchildren. He is also survived by two brothers: Thomas (Tina), and Allen (Sylvia), both of Stuarts Draft.

He was preceded in death by his twin brother, Irvin (Sharon, who survives), Long Island; and infant brother, Paul.

Ivan was known for his love of animals, farming, and the outdoors, as well as his gentle disposition towards all. He was dedicated to his church, Pilgrim Christian Fellowship, where he taught Sunday school and served as trustee and school board member. He also volunteered for years as a Bible study leader at Cold Springs Correctional Unit in Greenville. Deeply missed, his legacy

will continue through his family and the many lives he touched.

The funeral service was held February 26, 2023, at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Church with Simon Schrock and Ken Miller officiating. The burial followed in the church cemetery with Duane Weaver serving.

Troyer, Katie Ellen, 75, of Stuarts Draft, VA, peacefully passed away at her home on March 1, 2023, surrounded by her family. Born August 22, 1947, she was the daughter of the late Amos C. and Mollie (Byler) Zook. On August 23, 1968, she married Edward N. Troyer who preceded her in death in 2015.

Katie was a dedicated Christian and a member of Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Church. She is fondly remembered for how she equally loved and enjoyed her grandchildren. She also enjoyed flowers, feeding birds, and cooking.

She is survived by eight children: Kenneth (Sharon), Waynesboro; Wayne (Joyce), Staunton; Vernon (Mary Ann), Taylorsville, NC; Nelson (Marie), Warsaw, MO; Rosanna (Philip) Beachy, Fredonia, KY; Katura Troyer, Stuarts Draft; Jonathan (Andrea), Stuarts Draft; Henry, Concord, AR; 32 grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; a sister, Mary Jane (Leroy) Beachy, Millersburg, OH; and numerous nieces and nephews.

In addition to her husband, she was preceded in death by a stillborn son, Samuel Glen, three brothers: Crist, Alan, Henry; and three sisters: Lydia Schrock, Florence Miller and Barbara Miller.


The funeral service was held March 2, 2023, at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Church with Simon Schrock, Ken Miller, and Enos Kauffman serving. A graveside service was held March 4, 2023, at Crowley's Ridge Mennonite Church, Advance, MO, with Ethan Stutzman officiating. The burial followed in the Crowley's Ridge Mennonite Church cemetery.

Yoder, Alta Jean, 83, died at her home in Kalona, IA, on December 26, 2022, following a long illness with Parkinson's disease. She was born July 24, 1939, in rural Kalona, IA, to Lloyd and Clarissa (Hochstedler) Yoder.

In her youth she accepted Christ and was a member of New Hope Mennonite Church in Washington.

Alta is survived by a brother, Willis (Wilma), Kalona; 12 nieces and nephews and a number of great-nieces and nephews.

Preceding Alta in death were her parents, brothers: Ernest and Glen Dale (infant); sisters: Pauline Yoder, Susan Yoder, Anna Marie (infant), Velma Yoder, and Iva Yoder, who died in early childhood; and a sister-in-law, Esther Yoder.

The funeral service was held on December 29, 2022, at Sharon Bethel Church with Gabriel Beachy, Delmar Bontrager, and Elwin Stutzman serving. Interment followed at the Sharon Bethel Cemetery. 




Yoder, Verlynn Paul, 54, of Grove City, MN, entered into the presence of his Lord on February 28, 2023, with his loving wife by his side. He passed away at the Mennonite Guesthouse near Mayo Clinic from a heart attack after an eight-month journey with a malignant brain tumor. Verlynn was born on May 12, 1968, in Litchfield, MN. He was the dear husband of Laurel D. (Martin) whom he married on June 28, 1997, in ON, Canada.

He is lovingly remembered by his six children whom he cherished: Marita (Wes) Chupp, Paynesville; Wynston, Kenlyn, Donovan, Landon, and Katrina, all of Grove City; his parents, Abe and Laura Yoder, sister, Melanie, brother-in-law, Gregory Horst; his wife's parents, Leighton and Florence Martin; and many uncles, aunts, cousins, brothers and sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews, and friends.

He was preceded in death by a brother, Byron, a niece, Alondra, and a brother and sister-in-law, Sanford and Bonnie Martin.

Verlynn was a faithful member and pastor at Believers' Fellowship Mennonite Church. He had a passion for youth and enjoyed his involvement with Calvary Bible School where he taught numerous years. He served at Fresh Start in IN for five years and at IGo in Thailand for one year. He faced numerous challenges in life that he chose to view as opportunities rather than obstacles. Verlynn was a man of integrity, and whenever given an opportunity to serve he would say, "Whatever bit I can do to build the Kingdom of God."

Verlynn also enjoyed being a farmer and woodworker. For many years he enjoyed going to The Swapper's Meet with his family to sell lawn furniture and baking. Watching sunsets, sitting around campfires, and camping with his family were highlights. He made many trips to the Boundary Waters and longed to go again with his family.

The funeral service was held March 5, 2023, at the Evangelical Free Church with interment following in Burr Oak Cemetery, rural Grove City. 

observations

Many of those who were able to experience the complete solar eclipse on August 17, 2017, described it as a very worthwhile experience. To folks who comprehend just a bit of the size and scale of the solar system, the way that things need to be so perfectly

"lined up" for this to occur, regard an eclipse as quite a spectacular marvel to behold. The person who knows God, Who set all these things in motion, sees this as another evidence of God's creative genius. The path of total obscurity traversed the US mainland from west to east. The total

shadow passed over the west coast in northern Oregon and headed into the Atlantic Ocean over the coast of South Carolina. Approximately 12 million people lived within this path of total obscurity of the sun.

Should the Lord tarry, April 8, 2024, will bring another total eclipse to the USA. The path for this one enters Texas from the southwest and last touches the US in Maine. The population of those living in the path of totality for the 2024 event is more than 32 million residents. The well-documented experience of the 2017 eclipse has served to heighten the awareness and interest for people wishing to experience this rare phenomenon. Carbondale, Illinois, and the surrounding area is slated to have the rare distinction of experiencing two total solar eclipses in a span of seven years.

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Weather forecasts have become more accurate as mankind's understandings of the factors that affect the weather grows. Short-term forecasts are also much more specific and accurate than long-term predictions. However, the accuracy is, overall, not particularly reliable.

On the other hand, predictions for eclipses are extremely accurate. Weather patterns are shaped by factors that vary, difficult to anticipate,

and not completely understood. But eclipses can be predicted with astonishing accuracy because of the way that our Creator designed the movement of the celestial bodies. Our perfect Creator set things in motion with flawless precision. It makes those who predict these things look pretty smart when they accurately predict things years and decades in advance. However, the only reason for this accuracy is that the assumptions rest on the precision with which God set things in order.

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Speaking of weather, I recently found some interesting statistics related to hurricane activity as reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association's (NOAA) Hurricane Research Division. From 1850 to 2000 the US was hit by an average of 5.93 hurricanes with a Category 3 or higher each decade. In the decade from 2000 to 2010 there were seven, and in the decade from 2010 to 2020 there were three more. So far in the decade from 2020 to 2030, there have been three more. Now this is only reporting landfall of hurricanes in the US that are Category 3 and higher. The most active decade for landfall for these hurricanes was when 10 such storms hit the US in the decade of the 1940s.

Each of these decades has averaged

a total of 18.5 Category 1-5 landfall hurricanes for the US. The decade of the 2000s recorded 19 such hurricanes, and the decade of the 2010s brought 13 more.

I'm not quite sure how to reconcile this raw data with what seems to be a wide-spread understanding that hurricanes are becoming ever more numerous and more potent. I don't find much support for that conclusion based in this numerical data. It is true that this raw data only applies to those storms that made landfall in the US and doesn't measure things like central atmospheric pressure of the storms or the rainfall that they generated. I would need to devote more time than I wish to in order to understand how those things might compare.

I don't find it controversial that hurricanes today continue to set records as expressed in damage in terms of dollars. However, with a growing population living near the coast where hurricanes hit, as well as escalating construction costs and inflation in general, it stands to reason that any damage that results will likely be much more expensive than it would have been in 1913, for example.

Furthermore, since the general public has the ability to quickly learn about far-flung news events, the global community is much more likely to "experience" bad

storms from afar than it would have 100 years ago. The tracking and reporting of these storms is often covered in real-time, with constant scrolling updates. The saturation of information disseminated to the masses has the potential of creating a sense that these things are growing in number and intensity in a way that a cold examination of the data might not support.

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Kerri Christopher wrote an article in the February 2023 issue of *First Things* entitled "Three Christmas Dinners." Kerri's article described the Christmas holiday of today's typical 32-year-old. This opinion piece centered around three meals that this single 32-year-old experienced. We'll call him Hank just for clarity's sake.

Hank's first Christmas dinner last year was in the home of his biological mother. Hank's father and mother were young and immature when Hank was born and never got married. Hank's mother had gotten married after she and her boyfriend had Hank. She and her first husband raised a family together. But that marriage failed and she married again after Hank's half-siblings were adults. She and her current husband were starting over and had a child. The toddler at the table is the only child that Hank's mother and second

husband have and is Hank's half-sibling. That Christmas dinner was a bit awkward, since Hank's only biological connections were to his mother, his half-sibling toddler, and the other adult children that his mother had with her first husband. Hank left as soon as he could politely extricate himself from that event.

From there, he went to the home of his biological father. After Hank was born, his father married his stepmother, and they raised the three children they had together. This stepmom, the wife of his father, tried extra hard to include Hank in the family. Nevertheless, the mixture of photos on the wall, some of Hank, but most with the mother, father, and three children, remind Hank that he never lived with this family. His stepmom tried to demonstrate her interest in him, but Hank still felt more like an extra appendage rather than an integral part of the family unit.

The next day, Hank went to the Christmas dinner he looked forward to the most. He went to his grandparents' house. At least he called them his grandparents. Hank shared their surname, but there was no actual blood relationship. These grandparents are the parents of Hank's first stepdad. Hank's former stepdad and his new girlfriend didn't stay very long after dinner

which was fine with Hank. These "grandparents" were the folks in his family with whom he shared no biological kinship but the closest relational connection. Grandma remembered that her 32-year-old "grandson" was especially fond of pecan pie and made sure to prepare and serve that for Christmas. They inquired about his vocational and social situations. They invited him to go to church with them as he knew they would because church was so very important to them. Of course, Hank never went to church because religion wasn't really his thing. But it still made him feel valued when they assured him of their ongoing prayers for him. This was the one dinner out of the three in which Hank felt the genuine relaxation that comes from a sense of belonging.

If you're like me, it is a bit dizzying to keep track of all the twists and turns of Hank's family situation. I find this fictional depiction arresting and instructional in several ways.

First of all, it is good to cultivate empathy for those whose family structure is fragmented. However, those from stable homes should guard against subscribing to the whole "I am superior/you are inferior" dynamic. When we think about the importance of making good choices, we should all remember that

this opportunity doesn't extend to choosing our ancestors.


The family of God is comprised of folks who have been granted forgiveness after repentance and grace to rise above difficult circumstances. May our church families be places that welcome all of our "family" to our proverbial "holiday tables."

Could we also just all pause and purpose anew to do our best to honor God and His design for the family, in general, and our families in particular? In the same way that we aren't capable of choosing our ancestors, we can't make decisions for our posterity. However, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't do all we can to make it as easy as possible for them to make wise choices.



Many of today's professing Christians are clear in their understanding of the wrongness of the unnatural and unscriptural concept of gay marriage. This is appropriate.

Many of today's professing Christians regard the permanence of marriage of one man and one woman for life as a lofty and unattainable ideal. So, the unscriptural concept of divorce and remarriage are met with a collective and regretful shrug of the shoulders. This is not appropriate.

Is it surprising that the watching world finds it difficult to take professing Christians very seriously who say one thing and live another reality? 

—RJM

Women of Faith

Alfredo Mullet, Chilton, TX

The Holy Scriptures are filled with the stories of great men of faith, but we dare not neglect to recognize the many women who faithfully assisted them in fulfilling God's will in their generations.

Here are some names from the biblical record of wonderful women of faith: Eve, Mrs. Noah, Sarah, Hagar,

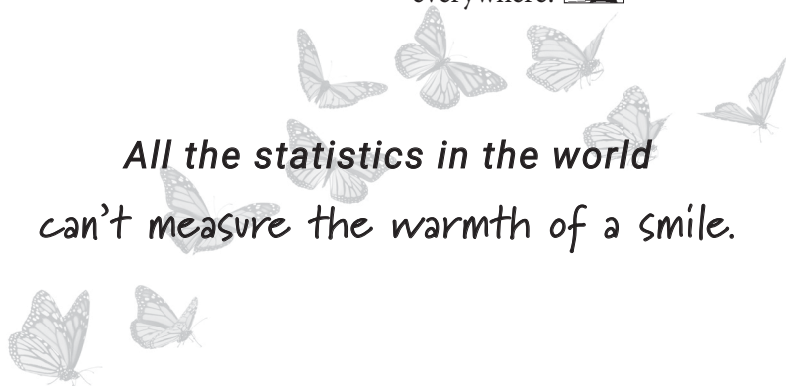
Rebekah, Tamar, Jochebed, Rahab, Deborah, Jael, Mrs. Manoah, Hannah, Ruth, Abigail, Bathsheba, the Queen of Sheba, Jehosheba, Naaman's slave girl, King Lemuel's mother, Esther, Elizabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Susanna, the Samaritan woman, the Syrophenician woman, Priscilla, Lois, Eunice, Lydia, Phoebe, Philip's

prophesying daughters, Damaris, and many more.

These were females of all ages, nationalities, and classes. They were daughters, mothers, sisters, aunts, and wives who were moved with conviction in their hearts to respond to the need of the day. Many severed family ties, others risked their reputations, and some were even willing to face death, courageously taking a stand for God and His people. Although they were not seeking renown, yet to believers of all generations, the mention of their names are beautiful sources of inspiration.

God, in His sovereignty, selected these women and through their heroic acts of faith accomplished His purposes for mankind. Even so today, for the church to be able to reach its full potential in carrying out its divinely intended mission, to win the world for Christ and promote His righteous reign on earth, it must give its dear sisters their rightful place in taking each one by the hand, thereby accepting them as partners and co-laborers in God's Kingdom. Surely the Lord has a specific plan and a special place for every one of His women today.

God bless all faithful, godly women everywhere! 



*All the statistics in the world
can't measure the warmth of a smile.*

mission awareness

Mothers on the Mission Field

Floyd Stoltzfus, Gordonville, PA

A Christian mother, wherever she resides, is entitled to one of the most endearing

vocations the world has ever known. In addition to this noble career is the honorable calling of a missionary

mother who, along with her husband and children, is privileged to be stationed in a region of God's harvest field that often requires extra grace, wisdom, and good balance to fulfill God's purpose.

In many respects, normal duties of life on the mission field for mothers have not changed from living in the home community. Meals have to be prepared. The table needs to be set. Dishes get dirty and need to be washed. As usual, the laundry room gets cluttered with dirty clothes. Of course, washing and ironing the laundry is another chore. General household duties do not escape: sweeping and scrubbing the floors, washing windows, dusting the furniture, and on and on.

Cockroaches sneak into cupboards, closets, and empty suitcases. Snakes wiggle into the laundry room or even into the kitchen. Muddy roads with deep ruts during the rainy season are quite common. Dry season can be threatening with extreme heat, dust, and unwelcome allergies.

Cold winds, snow and more snow, and icy roads can be a challenge but also a welcome with the family inside a warm house beside the wood stove. Oh, the beauty of God's marvelous creation is an incentive to draw nearer to our great Creator. In the north and even in the southern hemisphere the

abundance of mosquitoes are most unwelcome guests. And then the consequences of the bites and sores can result in disturbed and restless sleep.

Babies on the mission field are a wonderful gift from our heavenly Father in establishing friendships with lost neighbors and communicating the good news of salvation. Babies are also such a blessing in building bridges of love and lasting relationships in the national church.

Enjoy family life. Have daily suitable chores for your children. Establish a regular schedule for mealtime, school hours, and bedtime. Having a qualified system in the home builds security and worth to any child. Captivate the attention of your children by reading wholesome godly books to them. This is a helpful evening project before retiring. There is a large selection of valuable character-building books available through Rod and Staff Publishers, Christian Light Publications, Christian Aid Ministries, and others. Putting a puzzle together can serve as a mental exercise to stimulate concentration in fixing one's attention to a specific goal—that is to get that last piece fitted. While some interaction with local children is unavoidable, parents


need to carefully monitor and guide the play of their children.

Now some valuable thoughts from a voice of experience: “The missionary mother—what a challenge and a responsibility! You learn to adapt to a whole new way of life. It will be just what you make of it. Will it be a joy or a drudgery? God calls for joyful and willing service. Let your life as a mother radiate that kind of attitude. It will be “catching” to those around you.

“You may be going on the field with just your husband, or it may include children. Both are important to you and are your first responsibilities. You serve as a helpmeet to your husband. His work may seem more important or more glamorous than your own, but remember that you

will help lighten his load by the way you respond to his responsibilities.” (by Mary June Glick)

As much as possible, go visiting with your husband. Take your children along whenever it is feasible. What a joy to sing together, read the Bible, and pray! Expound the Scriptures. Ask questions. Allow them to talk. Share with them your problems and frustrations. Do they have problems or hurts? Learn to know your neighbors by name. Take an interest in their culture. By all means, learn the language of the people.

Blessed is the wife and mother who has a quiet place in her home, seeks a quiet heart, and guards a quiet time for her private devotions to worship the Lord. 

A Woman After God’s Heart

Active Remembrance

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



While studying the book of Esther, our Sunday School class pondered the preservation of Purim since its beginning in the fifth century. By celebrating Purim in early March every year, Jews actively

remember the marvelous way God protected their race as told in the book of Esther. This celebration was inaugurated for all Jews, for all time, in all places. Thousands of years later, I can purchase fancy Purim plates or masks or Haman cookie cutters on

Amazon should I wish to throw a Purim party. Giving to the poor and a public reading of the book of Esther are included in the festival traditions.

We mused collectively about whether our families, church culture, or community have any special days in which we remember together any amazing feat or deliverance from our past. Do we observe any memorials that highlight the wonders of our almighty God? Will our children remember us as persons who made a big deal out of Who God is and was and His ample provisions for us?

Continuing our Sunday School musings with my husband, he reminded me that our Anabaptist culture is sprinkled with sad history, stories of persecution, and of forefathers fleeing for their lives and even of death. While these hardly qualify as celebrations of deliverance and victory, in their own way they still highlight God's faithfulness. Our broader culture appropriately remembers tragedies like the Holocaust and the enslaving of African Americans. As a church family, we commemorate Jesus' death at communion, several times each year. In our congregation, we invite our little people to sit close by in a lineup of observation as we ceremoniously wash each other's feet. They also get to taste the bread

after the service is over. Exodus 12 talks about keeping the Passover and answering the questions that children will ask. We *do* celebrate birthdays and wedding anniversaries that denote joy and remembrance and the gift of life. Mother's Day, Christmas, and such, express remembrance and celebrations with big significance. *Remembering* takes effort. When I was mothering young children, some of my busiest days were the days of their birthdays when their meal of choice and a specially-featured cake was the expected order of the day.

Would there be additional ways to shape some type of remembrance that could translate into praise and glory for our deeply-loved Father so as to draw attention to Him and to encourage future generations to honor Him? Are there memorable ways that mothers, teachers, and grandmas might inspire worshipful remembrance? Deuteronomy talks about writing God's words on the gates and doors, and binding them around our arms and wearing reminders on our heads. We *do* wear symbols on our heads, don't we, to remind us about Who God is and our place in His arrangement? This command becomes deeply personal!

Here's one of my personal favorites on the concept of *writing on our gates*. In the late 70s, I lived my teen

years in an orphanage in El Salvador. Unclaimed children of the streets found refuge within our walls. In our collective home they found love in the shape of soap and water, abundant tortillas, rice and beans, Bible stories, laps for being held, and protection from the shameless evil they'd witnessed too young. Long before the era of Wall Words®, on the beams above our main living space were painted the Spanish words: "Padre de huerfanos y Defensor de viudas es Dios en Su santa morada." (A father of the fatherless...is God in His holy habitation.) Roman and Amanda Mullet, pioneers of the orphanage, took seriously the Deuteronomy commands and with the help of a local artist and their Spanish Bible, instilled into all of our minds the guarantee that a heavenly Father provided special care for children who didn't have earthly parents.

The Hebrew word for remembering speaks of bodily activity, and not only an exercise of the mind. Let me illustrate this word by comparing two husbands' ways of remembering their wedding anniversary. Rachel's husband *remembers* and brings her a dozen roses before whisking her off to dine at a fine restaurant. By contrast, Anna's husband defends himself to his heartbroken wife, late

that evening, by insisting that he had *remembered* the date even if he hadn't done anything to indicate his *remembrance*. God is like Rachel's husband. When God *remembered* Noah in the ark, He sent a wind to evaporate the flood waters. *Remembering* in the Bible leads to action.

The following examples of active remembrance inspire me. The extended Eichorn family in Paraguay, South America, gathers every December 8, for a special time of remembering the day their family arrived and began their new life in a new land. Another young family keeps a photo album filled with memories of big and little ways God provided for them miraculously. One lady planted an ornamental tree with a dated plaque with the words "I will remember the works of the Lord" to draw attention to God's personal gift of healing. Another mother nurtures a small flower garden of white flowers, remembering their infant son who went to be with Jesus. A dear friend who was wed later in life, celebrates *month-iversaries* with her new husband in active gratitude, because months add up quicker than do the years!

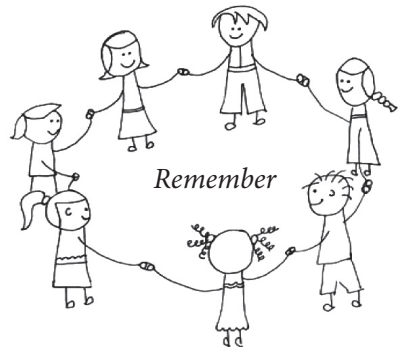
As an aid for my own remembering, I make notations in my Bible, writing dates in the margins when the passage

became especially meaningful. Like the date of my baptism alongside the verse I used in my testimony. The birthdate of our fledgling congregation beside Deuteronomy 8:1. My first separation from my parents alongside II Corinthians 6:18. And many, many dates beside Psalm 27:14! As I page through my worn Bible, it's something like a diary or a timeline or an altar, and I am flooded with the reality of God's faithfulness during many yesterdays. In a way, the dates tell me that He will be faithful yet again. In the Old Testament, the patriarchs built altars at sites of God-encounters. Later, when passing that location, they remembered and worshiped again. That's what my notes in my Bible do for me.

What if we would look for interesting ways to emphasize our faith and gratitude to those watching and following us? If our lessons have color, texture, and flavor it helps the truth stick with the younger generation. Maybe it would be like celebrating The-Day-We-Wrecked-the-Van-and-Walked-Away-Unhurt. Or like one of my friends who always made a celebration of the

season's first snow, complete with hot chocolate, fuzzy socks and mittens. How about a memorable field trip to celebrate an adoption? Or post-surgery healing? Or grandpa's new knee? The day the orioles show up - go on a picnic. I know a mother who habitually whispered Psalm 23 to her nursing infant. Or the one who repeated Scripture while braiding pigtails. Another mother taught Psalm 112 to her preschoolers as a birthday surprise for their daddy.

God's faithfulness in big and small ways is worthy of intentional celebration and making a big deal. Does our *remembering* look like Rachel's husband or Anna's? Maybe our cause for celebration isn't as big as Purim or about the salvation of our race. Or, then again, maybe it is.



He who is *full* of himself is likely to be quite *empty*.

A Song in the Face of Death

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

What would you do if you thought your life would end any minute? In the rugged highlands of Guatemala in the 1980s, guerrillas ruled ruthlessly with no respect for life.

José could not understand why the merchant was so upset. He was demanding payment for the pipe fittings immediately. He had stopped him right on the street.

“You will get your payment,” José quietly told him. “We will pay you 10 percent extra for all your trouble.”

“You good-for-nothing Christian,” the merchant shrieked, “You will come with me to my lawyer’s office immediately.”

José was shoved through a doorway. Looking around him, his heart began to pound. “Have I walked into a trap?” This was no lawyer’s office. “Lord, help me!”

“So, you are here,” a stranger sneered as he sauntered into the room. “I have been waiting for you.”

José shuddered as the man cursed and swore. “I have walked into a guerrilla’s den,” Jose realized in horror. “They are going to kill me

unless my God saves me.”

“Lord, help me, save me,” he pleaded silently. He knew the terrorists played no games. Like a cat that tormented a mouse for a time, they may torment him, but the end is always the same. To them life is cheap. These lawless and ruthless men killed myriads of people without mercy.

The men were swearing and calling José a deceiver and many horrible names. What could he tell them? He reached into his pocket for tracts he always carried. He handed them to his captors. With a gentle voice he told them, “These papers will help you understand our beliefs.”

The stranger snatched the pamphlets and tore them into shreds.

Ah, there was his Bible in his shoulder bag. José’s hands trembled as he reached for the precious Word he carried with him everywhere. He paged through the Scriptures searching for something to read to the men. He did not see the hand that flashed out until his precious Bible was ripped away and flung to the floor.

The hostile man shook his fist in

José's face. He grabbed José by the shoulders and shook him furiously until his teeth rattled.

"Lord, help me to be faithful. If my time has come to die, receive my spirit," José cried out to God.

José knew the guerrillas did not appreciate his nonresistant stand as a leader in his community and church. Perhaps they thought if they got rid of him, they could persuade more villagers to join their forces. The pastor fell to his knees and softly began to sing the song that he thought would be his dying prayer.

I am trusting, Lord, in Thee,
Thou art faithful, Lord:
So faithful to me!
Néer hast Thou forsaken me,
Even though I'm weak;
I'm trusting, Lord, in Thee.

As the song filled the room, a powerful wind blew until the entire building shook and shuddered. Hailstones pelted the roof like a volley of bullets. José's captors froze, and their cruel eyes widened in terror.

In a flash, the men ran out the door. José was left alone, kneeling in awe, reverence, and worship. He was free! José picked up his Bible. He was unharmed and safe! He walked out of the death trap. "God, Your power delivered me from the wicked enemies." His heart sang. "What a mighty God You are!"

As he traveled home, his heart overflowed with praises to his Deliverer. Over and over the powerful words of his prayer song flowed out of his grateful heart. "I am trusting, Lord, in Thee, Néer hast Thou forsaken me."

The song and the memories of God's faithfulness filled José's heart with courage in the difficult events of the coming months. Again and again he sang, "I am trusting, Lord, in Thee, Néer hast thou forsaken me."

[Adapted from Under His Wings, by Urie Sharp with Dorcas Sharp Hoover. ©2002 Christian Light Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.]



youth messages

Just a Little Chat (Part 3)

Josh Kooistra, New Concord, OH

Dave hummed to himself as he got the coffee brewing and headed out onto the

porch to take the cover off the flattop grill and get it started. A quick glance at his phone showed that it was 7:32.

He had heard stirring from the guest room and figured that Brad would be emerging soon. Dave thought back to his conversation the evening before. It seemed that Brad was sincere, but almost like he was avoiding what he really wanted to talk about. Dave recalled some of the things the two of them had discussed over breakfast the previous Saturday. It seemed like Brad was struggling to find his place and purpose. It was hard being 17. Even though it had been seven years since Dave was that age, he still remembered the feeling of being able to do many adult things but not being considered an adult. Being in the youth group but still heavily reliant on his parents. Having so much of his money go to his Dad and not really having a huge say as to what he did for work. Still driving his parents' car... it was just a feeling of uncertainty. Not really sure where he fit in...

Dave's thoughts were interrupted by Brad opening the door to the house.

"Mornin', Dave!" Brad said cheerfully. "Where can I find a coffee cup?"

"Mornin' to you too!" Dave replied with a grin. "Top door just to the right of the coffee maker."

"Thanks!" Brad replied, turning and starting to close the door behind him.

"I'm right behind ya," Dave interjected. "I need a cup of that stuff myself, and I need to get the eggs and sausage out here so I can grill them!" Soon the two were standing by the grill, sipping cups of coffee. Once the food was ready they took it inside, prayed for the food, and dug in. The food was delicious. Dave had sold himself short on his skills, and the two young men made a valiant effort to put it all away. After they'd finished the food and washed the few dishes, they refilled their cups of coffee and went outside to enjoy the sunshine and pick up their conversation again. As the friends slid into the Adirondack chairs on the porch, Dave broached the subject. "So what have you been thinking about this last week, Brad? I enjoyed last night's conversation, but it seemed like you may have been skirting the real topic."

Brad shrugged his shoulders, "I've had a lot to think about. Since so many of my friends left, sometimes it feels like I don't fit in all that well. I'm a church member but I don't really feel needed. I just don't really know what to do with myself."

Dave thought a little bit about Brad's words before answering. "Well, Brad, you aren't the first guy your age to feel that way. What you're describing is not uncommon. Are

you planning to go to Bible School this next year?”

“I was thinking about it, but I wasn’t sure if I was going to or not. I just don’t know what God wants from me,” Brad said in frustration. “I can’t seem to figure out what God wants me to do. Sometimes I wonder why we bother with all these standards and stuff. I just feel all mixed up sometimes.”

Dave nodded slowly, “This past Sunday when you were gone, Brother Landon shared a devotional on God’s revealed will versus His unknown will. One of his main points is that in order to discern God’s unknown will for my life, we must first be obedient to His known will—what He commands in His Word. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not judging you, but maybe the fact that you feel that God is strangely silent is not because He has put up a wall between you but rather you might have something between you and Him that you need to sort out.”

Brad was quiet for a minute while he processed what Dave had said. He crossed his arms over his chest defensively before his shoulders slowly slumped and he relaxed in his seat. “Ya, I think I need to do some soul searching. I haven’t been really serious about my relationship with God.”

“What do you mean by that?” Dave pressed, “It’s easy to say, but it’s hard to do—I should know. There was a time in my life when I was involved in things I knew I shouldn’t have been. I listened to music that wasn’t even remotely Christian. I read books I knew my parents wouldn’t approve of, and although I looked like everything was fine outwardly, God and I were not on the same page.”

“You? Yah, right!” Brad countered. “You’ve always seemed like you had it all together.”

“That’s exactly what I wanted people to believe. I would have been better off being openly rebellious than to add hypocrisy to my rap sheet.” Dave smiled wryly. “It was a good year or two before it was discovered what I was into. I was almost glad to be caught. I couldn’t change on my own. That’s when I got an accountability partner and it helped me immensely. Back to you though, what did you mean by what you said—soul searching, not being serious, and all that?”

“I guess I’m a lot more like you than I thought. I struggle with listening to music I shouldn’t. I kinda glossed over some of the stuff I’ve done with Carson and his buddies. We often watch movies, some of which are not good at all. I don’t feel good about

it, and my parents have no idea. I've wasted a lot of time on social media, and I find myself more concerned with my digital life than my spiritual one. I just don't know where to start to change." Brad sat dejectedly in his chair.

"Well, Brad," Dave answered, "You've already started. You told me, and now you have someone who will pray for you about it. I would be glad to be an accountability partner for you if you would like me to. If not, that is fine, but I know from experience that it helps to have someone check up on you."

Brad looked up sharply, "Accountability partner? Like people have when they have purity issues?" He looked a little uneasy.


"Call it what you like. Accountability isn't just for moral things. It can be for any area of life that you are struggling with." Dave responded with a chuckle.

"Oh, okay, just checking. If someone found out, I don't want them thinking I'm a pervert or anything. I just feel like I need someone to talk to sometimes."

"I'm available, Brad," Dave said. "Anytime you need me, just shoot me a text or give me a call. I'll make time for you. That's what friends are for."

Brad gave a sigh of relief. "Thanks, Dave, I appreciate you taking time for me like this. I didn't realize you had gone through the same thing I am going through now. It's good to know I'm not alone."

"Never alone, Brother," Dave answered, "never alone."

[In the last few articles I've tried to touch on some issues youth face or things they see that can frustrate and discourage them. Times are different now than they were 18 to 20 years ago when I faced these things. Although the format may have changed, peer pressure, spiritual mediocrity, and the threat of hypocrisy are just as prevalent today as they were then. Accountability is powerful. Find a friend or trusted individual who will check up on you in areas you struggle with. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Proverbs 27:17. God bless you as you strive to serve Him faithfully! JK] 

We may not always **see** eye-to-eye,
but we should walk hand-in-hand.



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It takes two hands to applaud.

• • • • •

A man is known by the silence he keeps.

• • • • •

If you'd like to spoil the day for a grouch, give him a smile.

• • • • •

The fellow who does things that count usually doesn't stop to count them.

• • • • •

A dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live fish to swim upstream.

• • • • •

Some folks are as proud of their ancestors as if they were responsible for them.

• • • • •

When at night you cannot sleep, talk to the Shepherd and stop counting sheep.

• • • • •

When leading a public prayer, speak loudly enough to be heard of men and sincerely enough to be heard of God.

• • • • •

People wrap themselves up in the flimsy garments of their own righteousness and then complain of the cold.

• • • • •

If you don't believe in cooperation, look what happens when a car loses one of its wheels.