



Calvary

MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

MARCH 2025

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Calvary Messenger

March 2025

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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The Secret

Ralph Spaulding Cushman

I met God in the morning,
When my day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise
Like a glory in my breast.

All day long the Presence lingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered,
Other ships were sore distressed,
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other moorings,
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I too had loosed the moorings,
With the Presence left behind.

So I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day.

The Inheritance of the Saints in Light

"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:12).

The right or privilege of inheritance has distressed people for thousands of years. For many parents it is disturbing to not have children who will carry on their name to future generations. Abraham beseeched God for children since it seemed the only heir he had was his steward, Eliezer. In the same marriage, Sarah was adamant that her stepson, Ishmael, would not be heir with her own son, Isaac.

But it is equally distressing to people who are or want to be part of an inheritance. Abraham and Sarah's grandsons, Esau and Jacob, both despised a birthright and swindled a brother for part of the inheritance. Later, Esau was heartbroken when Jacob also stole his father's blessing from him.

However, most inheritances promise earthly fortunes and not

eternal life as God promises to His children.

Here is part of a Reuters article from November 2008 about another interesting inheritance story.

Nina Wang swapped billions for eternal life:

Late Hong Kong tycoon, Nina Wang, who died of cancer, signed over her fortune to a feng shui master after he promised her eternal life, according to a newspaper report on Tuesday.

Wang, formerly Asia's richest woman, died in April last year, but the existence of two conflicting wills has complicated the inheritance of her estate, which media reports estimate to be more than \$12 billion.

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese practice of divination, seeking to align natural energies to optimize good fortune or health. Many Hong Kong residents, rich and poor, swear by the practice, with some feng shui masters having an almost cult-like following and great influence over clients.

The court's judge, Johnson Lam, responded that "this is a court of law, not a court of feng shui," the

newspaper reported.¹

While an earthly inheritance can be both a blessing or a curse, there is an inheritance that is literally “out of this world.” The only heirs in this eternal inheritance are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. This promise of eternal life is not a farce but will be an inheritance in the Kingdom of Light where darkness will never shade or darken our thoughts and lives. Neither can it be purchased with earthly fortunes.

Jesus, the Heir of this Kingdom of Light, came to this dark earth and proclaimed to be both the Source and Giver of light. *“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”* (John 8:12).

Inherit a new nature

This inheritance begins even in this dark world. Becoming a child of the Father of Light makes us a new creation. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (II Corinthians 5:17).

It is only by God’s grace and divine power of the blood of Christ that we can have a new nature, even here in this dark world.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (II Peter 1:4).

A shared inheritance

We share this inheritance with all other saints in light. The word used for saints is “hagios” which simply means those who have set their lives apart to live for God. If we are true children of the Father of Light, we should walk in the light with other Light followers.

I John 1:5 *“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (I John 1:5-7).

Unfortunately, we can too easily become overcome with the darkness within our hearts and have a legacy of bitterness with the fellow heirs that we live with. The following story shows that this family did not follow the Father of Light.

Wellington Burt: An Embittered Legacy

In March 1919 at the age of 87,

1. <https://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyle/nina-wang-swapped-billions-for-eternal-life-report>

Lumber Magnate Wellington Burt passed away, leaving behind about \$40 to \$90 million at the time. That's about \$625 million to \$1.41 billion in today's dollars. Certain individuals were gifted about \$1,000 a year. This included Mr. Burt's wife, children, and four servants. Most of the fortune went into a trust. Mr. Burt named his relatives as the heirs to the trust.

Reportedly, however, Mr. Burt had a falling out with his loved ones before he passed, making it a point to highlight that in his last wishes.

In fact, although Mr. Burt's relatives were heirs to the trust, no payments would be distributed from the trust until 21 years after the death of his last grandchild. In other words, only heirs who were great-grandchildren or more distant relatives would be eligible to receive a payout from the trust.

Ultimately, Mr. Burt's last grandchild passed away in 1989, at which point the 21-year countdown started. It came to an end in November 2010, just nine years shy of a century after Mr. Burt died.

At that point, the trust reportedly held about \$110 million, and it was divided between 12 heirs. The remarkable terms of this trust and Mr. Burt's unusual estate plan have come to be referred to as a "legacy

of bitterness" in and outside of legal circles.²

Incorruptible Inheritance

Our Father God has promised that He will keep His part of the legacy of the Kingdom of Light. We can rest assured that we will not be swindled out of our eternal inheritance. This inheritance is incorruptible, as Peter says. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an **inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**"* (I Peter 1:3-5).

Our Father will never be guilty of a legacy of bitterness. Not even the accuser of the brethren can bring false accusations to our Father. God knows our hearts and if we continue to walk in His Light, we can be confident that our inheritance in the Kingdom of Light is secure.

In the meantime, let's nurture our relationship with other *"saints in light."*

AY 

². <https://tawlawtx.com/legal-advice/wills-gone-wild-7-astonishing-estates/>

Announcement

Migrant and Immigrant Forum

March 11-12, 2025

Are you interested in outreach to migrants or immigrants? Would you like to learn more about refugee resettlement or teaching English to internationals? Do you want to interact with people who are conducting Bible studies with people from other countries? Anyone interested in these topics is invited to attend a meeting, March 11 PM, and March 12 AM, 2025 in Pittsburgh, PA. Speakers are from the following Anabaptist organizations: *LifeQuest Community, Anabaptist Refugee Committee, Oklahoma Anabaptist Refugee Ministry, Streetlight Christian Ministries, and Global Immigrant Platform.*

To obtain a program:

www.LifeQ.org/events | e-mail: contact@lifeq.org |
call/text: 814-325-7644.

He who thinks twice before he speaks says only

half as much.



Announcement

Youth Sponsor Gathering

March 2025

How Can We Inspire Deeper Connections Between Our Youth, the Church, and Their Creator?

Are you passionate about guiding our youth in their faith journey?

We're exploring the idea of a weekend gathering for youth sponsors to share ideas, gain inspiration, and strengthen our efforts in fostering spiritual growth.

Potential Weekend Highlights:

- ***Biblical Leadership:*** A message on mentoring and guiding youth with Christ-centered leadership
- ***Success Stories:*** Learn effective strategies and activities from other youth groups.
- ***Collaboration:*** Exchange ideas and tackle challenges together.

Does this interest you?

Let us know if you are interested in attending and possibly helping plan a meaningful and practical event to strengthen our youth ministry efforts.

Feel free to reach out via phone, text, WhatsApp, or email:

Leon Bontrager | 574-536-9483 | leonbont@gmail.com

Daryl Chupp | 269-625-2022 | dechupps@gmail.com

You may also contact any of the Rosewood Fellowship ministry team, Shipshewana, IN, with additional questions.

A World View of Religion

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

This paper will not consider original Christianity as a religion. It will acknowledge real and actual Christianity on the basis of both accepting and promoting the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. That comprises all of the New Testament with its history, its record of transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament, along with its future prophecies.

Religion is man's way to God, construed by the means that satisfies man to be accepted by such a deity, either real or supposed. In some cases, it can go from a person's original supposition to what can develop through the centuries to mystical evolution of human ideas. That can be what happens either through add-on concepts or by religious reductions for more favorable approaches, the former more frequent than the latter.

The "flash" for this article was given rise by John Robson in *Epoch Times*. He quotes Tom Holland in his book, *How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. He says the non-Christian heathen have varying

degrees of callousness toward "the poor or the weak [which] might not have the slightest intrinsic value." He goes on to say "that only from Christianity come values such as compassion for our fellows."

Here is my extension to his comments along this line, which in a general worldview concept has been enlarged and appreciated by yours truly. It surely is one of the larger Bible principles, O.T. and N.T., as a layman's scope of the whole world.

• • • • •

The world scope can be divided between the West and the East as the most simple and basic division. Eastern religions might give a basic recognition to Jehovah God while numerous others do not. Western religions have a high view of the God of heaven and earth, Creator, Sustainer, Sovereign, Divine Judge with a due regard for His final judgship. Some refer to a Higher Power or "the man upstairs." In my taxi work with the Amish, some men have referred to "da gute Mann" (the Good Man). The Jews felt it to be

sacrilegious to speak forth the name of Jehovah God from their lips. Why should we as God's children have any problem to speak out His name? Or our own preachers announce a greeting to the church in the name of "the Man from Galilee." Why not be joyous to speak forth the mighty name of Jesus?

The Bible often speaks of giving praise and glory to God's name, as in, "*Know ye that the Lord, he is God*" and "*Bless the Lord, O my soul.*" The apostles spoke with great power, often glorying in the name of Jesus!

Our world's population has passed the eight billion mark, which is said to be increasing at the rate of around 83 million per year. That can gradually increase exponentially from this current base figure so that every 12 years or less, the world population increases by another billion. There are so many people currently that there could be split-offs to bring about new religions.

Dominant religions in the East are Hindu, notably in India, which recently has surpassed China as the world's most populated country. China is a close second, where the Buddhist is dominant. Both Hindu and Buddhist religions are widespread also in the neighboring regions of eastern countries. Islam is listed as non-Christian in the World

Book encyclopedia, along with lesser knowns, such as Confucianism and Shintoism. Judaism is also listed as being non-Christian, with the lowest number of adherents of the ones mentioned so far.

The major religion of the West is Christianity with all its various forms and sects.

Atheism is not mentioned in my World Book as being a recognized religion. Or, as Webster states, "A person [atheist] who believes there is no God," and therefore has no religion. Foreign students who visited our church as a group would be asked to stand, say their name, country, and religion. Those from Eastern countries would most often say, "I have no religion."

In years past, people would identify as being of a given religion, or as being a Catholic if they had Catholic parents. They were not a member of the Catholic church, did not attend and pay their dues, and so were said to be "non-practicing" Catholics. In the same way a Jew, being considered a "non-practicing" Jew, yet counted as being a Jew. When Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Products sent their case to the U.S. Supreme Court, our newspaper referred to them as "practicing Christians." Very interesting; I relished it!

The Western world can trace its

religious roots to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman, *“For salvation is of the Jews.”* And so it is. Or as Paul said, *“To the Jew first, and also to the Greek”* (Gentiles).

The Christian church was born in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost *“And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41). That salvation Gospel was soon heading on a decidedly western march, beginning in the continent of Asia in Jerusalem. In only a partial generation, it had entered eastern Europe with local churches being established as it continued on its western trek.

However, it could not or did not perpetuate itself, let alone be able to maintain itself, even where it began with great success and spiritual enthusiasm. Eventually, after several centuries passed, a faithful minority kept the Christ-saving flame alive. The advent of the printing press enlivened peasant and priest, commoner and elite to the call of the Gospel. Wherever it did so in larger Europe, it tended to go westward.

Religious freedom was one of the main drivers for a large migration to North America. Wide swaths of Christianity shone everywhere as it moved ever westward. Europeans, especially Catholics, also took it to

Central America and on to South America. Christianity also moved on to Australia and the isles.

By 1900, it largely stalled in its western advance. Meanwhile, the heathen of the Eastern World had many gods: their main gods, then more intermediate gods, and lesser gods. The evolution of these gods was poised to exert more of a grip on everyone in their regions. That domination was often driven by fear. Adherents multiplied, and as they grew, they also solidified in their domination.

Some of these gods were given much adulation, besides reverence and worship accordingly. The Gospel clashed with these multiple gods at Athens in Greece in Paul's day. In Galatians, Acts, and I Corinthians, Paul's writings remonstrate against the gods of the Gentiles. There also were many gods named in the Old Testament.

The Gospel being taken westward into Europe provided a seedbed for its advance by its people-movement into the Americas. The defining identification of the Western world from the Eastern world is principally an allowable recognition of Jehovah God, precisely clarified by His Son Jesus Christ the Lord. The belief in God cannot be theologically nor academically granted unless there

is some allowance that Jesus Christ is God, as Jesus clearly said in John 17:11, 21-23. The understanding cannot grasp this glorious fact, but faith joyfully embraces that pyramidal truth!

The testing of values becomes quite remarkable and astounding in these 2000 years since the establishment of the first believer's church in Jerusalem. We have these surface differences as notable comparisons.

- Wars are more frequent in the Eastern World (East).
- The Western World (West) has consistently been more prosperous.
- Dictators usurp more power and dominance in the East.
- Eastern religion and governments are given to suppressing the poor.
- Western churches and governments have done much to relieve the poor, not only in their own countries, but also in countries all over the world.
- World migration of peoples is strongly to the West, as it becomes possible.
- The West allows all religions in their midst, the East does not.
- The West permits a broad representation of people in schools and government; the East tends to not do so.
- Historically, God has been recognized in the West as Creator

and Sustainer, being eternal, where the Gospel of Christ can be freely preached, with also allowing freedom of the press.

- The West has numerous holidays to remember facets of God and Jesus Christ.

- Historically, the West has honored the God-ordered Ten Commandments, not only by their governments, but also largely as conscience-guided people.

- The West has a higher sense of godly-based justice than the East.
- Eastern governments have more often aspired to rule the whole world.
- Western governments have more often recognized the creation principle of fairness in regard to borders and national dominance.

Granted, there have been exceptions to the foregoing, with pockets of wholesale violations, i.e. Nazism and some movements in Central and South American countries. The tenets of democracy have been given to forward the better values of humanity. Some religions and political ideologies have been given room in the West that tends to undermine the values and worth of godliness, Christianity in particular. Some of these appear to be a growing threat to historical Christianity.

This, brothers and sisters, is an ascending and universal fact of great


dominion and power, solely derived by divine origin and revealed to mankind. It was in place in the mind of God before the creation of the world. It was put in place at the creation of time, the earth, and all living things with the seed within itself. Its continuity underscores and attests to the Supremacy of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, King and Sovereign over the nations. Jehovah God is the Benefiter and Supplier to all mankind, and in His lovingkindness and mercy graces the world additionally by having sent His Son to be the Savior of all who will call upon Him to be saved from their sins.

Finally, at the end of the world, God will be the Judge of all the earth, judging the world in righteousness. All wrongs will be set right, bringing holy vengeance and punishment to the ungodly. In His time, He will reward those who believed on His Son Jesus Christ, whose fear was relieved by God's proposition to repent of their sins, and who then live as "practicing Christians," according to the test of true Christianity. That test is to repent of our sins, deny self

in daily practical terms, witness for Christ according to the divine nature in our hearts and mind, and give glory to God as a routine thought and verbal response.

The Bottom Line is that we greatly rejoice that all this was given for all the world to know. It was recorded by history since the origin of the world. That history, very importantly, has no time gaps that are not covered by the record in the Bible. It is connected to God by various genealogies, overlapping events where multiple authors concur with each other. It is applicable to our time, all the "present time" of every generation. It is additionally covered by future prophecy, in which even those prophecies blend and are in tandem with each other at numerous places.

We are assured of all this by the profound revelation from God, Who spoke at various times and places to prophets chosen by Him.

The heathens continue to fear; "Practicing Christians" continue to believe! 

Morning prayers lead to *evening praise.*

Four Essential C's

Jay Miller, Mifflintown, PA

In the year 1944, a young Christian married man in his mid-twenties received a notice to appear before the draft board of the United States Army. World War II was in full swing, and the U.S. military needed men.

This young man, who later became my grandfather, was especially sought for because of his occupation of being a pattern maker. Pattern makers were in high demand because of their manufacturing skills in metal fabrication. They were valuable in the machine shops on battle ships, making parts onboard, thus keeping the ship floating and functioning.

Grandpa, being a conscientious objector, could not support any part of the military.

At the draft board office, Grandpa faced a burly, stern officer. Grandpa was quite nervous as the big man tried to force him to sign a paper stating he would enlist in noncombatant service as a machinist on a war ship. He was assured that he would not even have to carry a gun or go through training. Grandpa prayed for God's strength and guidance and refused to sign the paper.

The officer then began asking hard questions such as, "King David was a man after God's own heart. He went to war and killed. Do you think you are better than him?" Another question: "If

someone threatened to kill your wife, what would you do?"

As the questions started coming, Grandpa said, "I felt a peace and calmness come over me. The Holy Spirit took control. The answers were immediately there. The officer kept asking questions and the answers kept coming. I did not think up the answers, but yet I spoke them. It seemed like I was not fully involved but was more like an observer. As he kept up the interrogation, his face turned red, and I saw he was getting more and more frustrated. After a while, he forcefully pushed his notes aside and started to condemn me personally. He told me I should not be allowed to live in the United States and am not worth the air I breathe. Then he shouted at me to leave and never come back—which I was glad to do."

Grandpa was granted C.O. status and served two years at C.P.S. camp #45 in Luray, VA. Through his life, he was an ordinary man who daily maintained his close relationship with God.

I'd like to suggest four C's that brought Grandpa successfully through his experiences and will also lead each of us to victory if observed.

Conversion

Jesus said in John 3:16-17, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth*

in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Jesus also said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6). At conversion, Satan loses his grip on one's life. A change happens, and a new journey begins. A person confesses his need of Jesus Christ as his Savior, repents of his sins, and pleads the blood of Jesus for cleansing. The Holy Spirit takes residence in the individual's mind, nurturing the heart and conscience. One's goal is now to model Christ in all his thoughts, words, and actions. Have you experienced this change in your life?

Commitment

Commitment is dedication to a long-term course of action. Webster says, "to bind as by a promise." The commitment to live for Jesus must be a life-long promise. The enemy of our souls is continually offering deceptive alternatives for truth, endeavoring to weaken your commitment to holiness. The depth of my personal commitment to Jesus and to a life of service will be observed by many and will directly affect the testimony of the church of Christ. *"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof"* (Romans 13:14).

We live in a time when commitments are taken lightly. Many are unfulfilled. Many are broken. Many folks have good intentions, but over time, these intentions are dropped or are subject

to change. Where is your commitment? God is looking for faithful, dedicated individuals. Can the Lord depend on you?

Conviction

Conviction is a strong belief. To the disciple of Jesus, conviction is the state of being convinced of the truth of the Word of God and commitment to the practical application of Bible principles to one's daily life.

Imagine drifting through life with a dull conscience and a few guiding principles, doing what pleases self, following the latest and greatest fads, questioning and pushing the bounds of home and church standards. What do convictions do for a person? A strong belief of truth creates stability. I am not speaking of strong, personal preferences. Sometimes an individual pushes his opinions, calling them convictions, simply in an attempt to manipulate things his way. This brings instability. Godly convictions are personal beliefs established, based on Scripture, that one feels necessary to possess as his own application of holy living to assist in staying anchored and grounded. Apostle Paul says, *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 2:6,7).

Conviction offers security. When the winds of apostasy and change blow, the Holy Spirit can reinforce personal convictions to help one remain strong

and secure in Christ. People live what is in their hearts. Is your belief system centered on the Word of God?

Consistency

According to Webster's dictionary, consistency is "agreement with what has already been done or expressed; conformity with previous practice." We live in a time of change, both in our communities and in our churches. Is change wrong? Do changes I make confuse others? How does God view change? Sometimes change is necessary and brings improvement. Sometimes change has negative impacts. Consistency describes God. *"For I am the Lord, I change not..."* (Malachi 3:6a). *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8).

Reasons along with motives should be thoroughly examined when seeking change in practical application of Scripture. Someone once said, "Consistency—thou art a jewel." What makes consistency so valuable? Consistency is predictable. It is not careless or rash. Consistency in the life of a Christian is a result of the active role of the Holy Spirit at work in one's life. It expresses firmness with an attitude of love and patience.

I would like to share an experience that happened to a progressive Mennonite family in Pennsylvania during the draft of the Vietnam War. The draft board refused to give a son in this family a conscientious objector classification. The father asked a member of the draft

board why his son could not get a C.O. status. This was the member's response, "To start with, your son drives a hot car, the same as my son. We go to church as a family Sunday morning, same as you. You and your wife wear the wedding band, the same as we do. You go to the same places we do. Your wife has her hair cut and wears slacks, the same as mine. There is really no difference between your family and mine. My son is being drafted too. Why should my son go into the military and your son be exempt?"

The Mennonite father asked his wife if she would be willing to change back to their former conservative lifestyle to which she replied, "No!"

With great sorrow he said, "I am sorry I lost something my father gave me, and am not passing it on to my son." The Mennonite son went through basic training, but the war ended before he was sent overseas to active duty.

How close to God are you? What is your vision for you and your family? Are you living with eternity in view? The depth of your relationship with God today will reflect tomorrow's outcome.

"But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou has known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:14-15).

[This article was first printed in the August-September 2024 issue of The Mid-Atlantic Informer. Used with permission.]

marriages

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

Bontrager-Brenneman

Bro. Ray, son of Joseph and Norma Bontrager, Monticello, KY, and Sis. Ruth, daughter of Lowell and JoAnn Brenneman, Falkville, AL, on January 3, 2025, at West Point Baptist Church for Emmanuel Mennonite Church by Wayne Nisly.

Brenneman-Yoder

Bro. Floyd, son of Lowell and JoAnn Brenneman, Falkville, AL, and Sis. Andrea, daughter of Allen and Esther Yoder, Millersburg, OH, on November 2, 2024, at Messiah A.M. Church for Fincastle Mennonite Church by Tim Weaver.

Gingerich-Fisher

Bro. Preston, son of Joel and Dorcas Gingerich, Minerva, OH, and Sis. Marlene, daughter of Marvin and Kathryn Fisher, Woodstown, NJ, on November 9, 2024, at Fellowship Bible Church by Joel Gingerich.

Hershberger-Yoder

Bro. Grant, son of David and Luann Hershberger, Wamego, KS, and Sis. Lilly, daughter of Noah and Verna Yoder, Lyndon, KS, on December 13, 2024, at Town and Country Church for Lyndon A.M. Church by Lawrence Overholt.

Mast-Gingerich

Bro. Dallas, son of David and Gloria Mast, Provo, UT, and Sis. Jana, daughter of James and Rhonda Gingerich, Leesburg, OH, on November 23, 2024, at The Gathering Place Church for Faith and Light Mennonite Church by Caleb Gingerich.

Troyer-Miller

Bro. Shawn, son of Julius and the late Linda Troyer, Farmville, VA, and Sis. Amy, daughter of Albert and Anna Miller, Farmville, VA, on August 2, 2024, at the home of the bride by Eli Troyer.



cradle roll

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

Brenneman, Andrew and Rosemary (Wagler), Aroda, VA, first child and daughter, Juniper Grace, January 12, 2025.

Fisher, Laverne and Grace (Miller), Auburn, NE, third child and son, Cayson Lance, August 21, 2024.

Gerber, Peter and Eugenia (Muntean), Suceava, Romania, sixth child, fourth son, William James, January 10, 2025.

Gingerich, Lukas and Karen (Hershberger), Saegertown, PA, first child and daughter, Iris Abigail, January 8, 2025.

Hershberger, Matthew and Violet (Miller), Newcomerstown, OH, second child, first son, Dallas Matthew, December 5, 2024.

Hostetler, Reuben and Rosanna (Yoder), Owenton, KY, sixth child, fourth daughter, Alexis Kaylee, November 19, 2024.

Jantzi, Lavon and Kaylyn (Adams), Brunner, ON, first child and son, Radley Brett, January 21, 2025.

Kauffman, Ben and Marty (Raber), Chesapeake, VA, first child and son, Grayson Eli, January 17, 2025.

Kauffman, Kyler and Andrea (Schrock), Montezuma, GA, first child and son, Dontae Ky, November 30, 2024.

Knepp, Gary and Sarah (Raber), Lexington, IN, fifth child, fourth son, Lincoln Dru, December 4, 2024.

Knepp, Randall and Emily (Graber), Odon, IN, fourth child, second son, Tate Henry, October 5, 2024.

Martin, Andy and Arlene (Raber), Hicksville, OH, fifth child, third son, Liam James, January 6, 2025.

Martin, Joel and Sara (Herr), Stevens, PA, eighth child, third son, Carlos Orlando, September 28, 2024.

Miller, Conrad and Kanita (Yoder),

Fresno, OH, third child, first daughter, Nicole Joy, January 13, 2025.

Nisley, Brian and Sara (Byler), Meadville, PA, first child and daughter, Ivy Juliet, January 27, 2025.

Nisly, Luke and Lydia (Goertzen), Oswego, KS, fourth child, second son, Elisha Stanley, January 30, 2025.

Overholt, Benny and Bethany (Yoder), Montezuma, GA, sixth child, second daughter, Kyra Jade, December 10, 2024.

Petersheim, Tim and Deanne (Stauffer), Narvon, PA, fifth child, fourth daughter, Laura Gabrielle, December 28, 2024.

Petre, Dennis and Donna (Yoder), Moulton, AL, seventh child, fourth daughter (one daughter stillborn), Darlys Fern, December 13, 2024.

Schlabach, Jason and Kristi (Miller), Burkesville, KY, fifth child, third son, Derek Jensen, December 4, 2024.

Schmucker, Levi and Angelene (Bontrager), East Kalimantan, Indonesia, seventh child, fifth daughter, Robin Maymie, February 24, 2024.

Schrock, Robert and Leanna (Wagler), Stuarts Draft, VA, fourth child and daughter, Emma Kate, January 20, 2025.

Stoltzfus, Jared and Sherilyn

(Stoltzfus), Coatesville, PA, first child and son, Bryce Emerson, July 24, 2024.


Stoltzfus, Jeff and Natasha (Schrock), Narvon, PA, first child and son, Tyreese Klay, October 19, 2024.

Yoder, Ray and Alina (Miller), Minerva, OH, seventh child and daughter, Mary Jewel, October 7, 2024.

Zook, Kevin and Jen (Weaver), Burgettstown, PA, fifth child, second daughter, Gracelyn Ellie, January 8, 2025.

ordination

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

Bro. Josh Stoltzfus, 28, (wife, Amanda King), was ordained minister at West Haven Amish Mennonite Church, New Holland, PA, on December 8, 2024. The charge was given by Ben Stoltzfus, assisted by J. Ivan Stoltzfus and Melvin Beiler. Al Stoltzfus and Jared Stoltzfus shared the lot. 

obituaries

Beiler, Elizabeth, 78, of Grove City, MN, died January 3, 2025, at the St. Cloud Hospital. She was born on May 11, 1946, in Hutchinson, KS, to John and Mary (Miller) Yoder.

Her family moved to MI before settling in Grove City, where Elizabeth attended Grove City schools. On August 1, 1970, she married Melvin Beiler. They were blessed with five children: Steve, Lisa, Rachel, Miriam, and Jethro and made their home on the family farm in Grove City.

Elizabeth devoted many years to being a homemaker and caring for her children. She was well-known for preparing delicious meals and being a gracious host. Above all, Elizabeth was a woman of deep faith. She loved

her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, served Him faithfully, and eagerly encouraged others to follow Christ. She was a woman of prayer and loved reading the Scriptures. As a pastor's wife, she faithfully supported her husband in ministry and was his encourager. As an active member of Believers Fellowship Church in Grove City, she offered counsel and encouragement to many over the years. She had a passion for gardening, preparing food, serving others, and cherishing her family.

Elizabeth is survived by her husband, Melvin, children: Steve (Ellen), Lisa (Les), Rachel (Titus), Miriam (Jarrod), Jethro (Rosie); grandchildren: Darin (Angela), Amy (Steven), Jeremy, Brandon (Jenna), Mariucz, Kadafi, Travis,

Patrick (Summer), Jordan (Lyndsay), Haley (Noah), Lucas, Kaitlynn, Noah, Mia, Bruce; and great-grandchildren: Grayson, Palmer, Cameron, Elliot, and Bennett. She is also survived by her siblings: Orpha, Ruth (Richard), Reuben (Mary Ann), Simon (Ruth), Nathan (Doris), and John Mark (Ruth).

She was preceded in death by her parents and sister, Mary Esther.

The funeral service was held January 7, 2025, at the Evangelical Free Church in Paynesville with burial at Burr Oak Cemetery in rural Grove City.

Bontrager, Mary Ellen, 91, died November 4, 2024, in her home in Arlington, KS. She was born July 29, 1933, to Menno Jr. and Elizabeth (Nisly) Yoder. Mary Ellen married Eldon Bontrager on May 5, 1955.

Mary Ellen was a homemaker and found fulfillment in caring for her family. Her careful attention to detail was seen in all that Mary Ellen did. Her food preparations, gardening, care of animals, but most of all her children, benefitted from her meticulous ways.

Mary Ellen is survived by children: Carolyn Bontrager, Arlington; Myron (Ilene) Bontrager, Arlington; Phyllis (Gareth) Yoder, Timpson, TX; and Marilyn (Dan) Korver, Ladysmith, WI; daughter-in-law, Mamie Bontrager, Arlington; 27 grandchildren; 57 great-grandchildren; brothers: Emery (Faye) Yoder, Edwin (Clara) Yoder; sister, Clara Mae (Melvin) Nisly; and sisters-in-law: Edna Yoder and Amy Yoder.

She was preceded in death by her husband, parents, children: Lynette, LaVon, Faith, Regina; four stillborn great-grandchildren; and siblings: Katie Viola Yoder, Henry Yoder, and Glenn Yoder.

The funeral service was held at Arlington Mennonite Church on November 9, 2024, with Wilbur Yoder, David Yoder, and Greg Bontrager serving. Burial was in the church cemetery.

Glick, Rebecca S., 80, of Quarryville, PA, passed away on January 9, 2025, at Lancaster General Hospital. She was born in Gap, PA, to the late Christ F. and Hannah (Stoltzfus) Glick.

She was a member of Pequea Amish Mennonite Church. Becky had a talent and love for painting and drawing.

She is survived by three siblings: Benuel (Rachel) Glick, Palmer, MA; John (Barbara) Glick, Oxford, NY; and Esther (Eugene) Grimm, Quarryville. She is also survived by 15 nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by a stillborn brother and a sister, Sarah Glick.

The funeral service was held at Pequea Amish Mennonite Church, on January 12, 2025. Interment followed in the adjoining cemetery.

Miller, Elizabeth (Lizzie), 94, of Stuarts Draft, VA, passed away peacefully at her home surrounded by family on December 11, 2024. She was born on June 6, 1930, in Thomas, OK, to the late Tobias and Mattie (Yoder) Miller.

She moved with her family to Stuarts Draft, VA, in 1950 where she met Irvin

Miller, her husband of 68 years. They were married on September 20, 1951. She faithfully supported her husband in his many interests and projects.

Lizzie was a charter member of Pilgrim Christian Fellowship and was a lifelong, loyal supporter.

She enjoyed serving others by caring for her family, serving countless meals, babysitting grandchildren, and was known as Mama Miller to many children of her daycare years. Grandma's box of crackers was always a highlight for the grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Irvin, a brother, four sisters, daughter-in-law, Rosy, grandson, Dale, great-granddaughter, Jocelyn, and great-grandson, Joshua.

Survivors include 11 children: Maynard (Shirley), Stuarts Draft; Edna (Stanley) Mast, Concord, AR; Allen (Joanna) Miller, Stuarts Draft; Fern (Marlin) Miller, Kalona, IA; Sarah (Jay) Mast, Goodspring, TN; Freeman (Emily) Miller, Amherst; Truman (Irene) Miller, Stuarts Draft; Floyd (Luella) Miller, Flintville, TN; Rose Miller, Stuarts Draft; Eldon (Faith) Miller, Myerstown, PA; Merle Miller, Stuarts Draft; 47 grandchildren, 99 great-grandchildren, a brother, three sisters, and many nieces and nephews.

The funeral was held December 14, 2024, at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship. Interment was in the church cemetery.

Schrock, Glenn Howard, 71, of Salisbury, PA, passed away on December

28, 2024, at Wellstar Cobb Medical Center, Austell, GA, while visiting family. He was born November 24, 1953, in Meyersdale, PA, to the late Herman and Elsie (Yoder) Schrock. He married Joanna Yoder on May 26, 1979.

Glenn accepted Christ at an early age. He was baptized as a youth and was a faithful member of Mountain View Church. He was a loving and faithful husband to his wife, Jan, for 45 years and a fun-loving brother and uncle who loved to spend quality time with his family. He was an avid outdoorsman who loved hunting and hiking. As an entrepreneur, he provided various farming services to his community for over 40 years. One of his favorite passages of Scripture was Psalm 103. We are thankful for the promise of eternal life and that we will see him again.

Along with his wife, he is survived by one brother, Cliff (Terresa) Schrock, OK; four sisters: Judy Schrock, Angie (Don) Eget, Dottie (Steve) McClure, and Carolyn Faith (Scott) Cabe; nieces and nephews: Lanae McClure, Seth McClure, Trevor McClure, Dakota Cabe, Dylan Cabe, Jarrett Hartshorn, and Chloe Hartshorn, all of GA.

The funeral was held at Maple Glen Mennonite Church on January 4, 2025, with Merlin Beachy and David Kauffman serving. The burial followed in the Mountain View Mennonite Church Cemetery.

Yoder, Elmer A., 65, of Montezuma, GA, passed away on November 19, 2024.

Elmer was born on July 16, 1959, in Americus, GA, to Alva and Sarah Yoder.

He grew up in Montezuma along with 11 siblings. He was baptized in his youth and was a faithful member of the Montezuma Mennonite Church for many years, serving as a Sunday school teacher, youth counselor, and in many other capacities as needed. He was faithful in providing for his family and operated a butcher shop for over 30 years, touching many people in the community and surrounding areas. Elmer enjoyed reading and studying and also had a unique way of connecting to people on a personal level. His greatest joy was his family and spending time with them.

Elmer is survived by his beloved wife of 36 years, Rosanna; son, Benjamin, KY; six daughters: Rebecca (Ryan) Weaver, Kenya, Africa; Christina (Adam) Yoder, Montezuma; Andrea (Kevin) Yoder, Coshocton, OH; Katlyn (Leslie) Yoder, Mannsville, NY; Jessica (Anson) Weaver; Kristen Yoder, both of Montezuma; three grandsons, and eight granddaughters.

He was preceded in death by his parents and sister, Laura Whitt.

The funeral service was held November 24, 2024, at Montezuma Mennonite Church. Burial followed in the church cemetery.

Yoder, Eldon Lee, 73, of Madison, VA, passed away on January 10, 2025. Eldon was born February 15, 1951, in Virginia

Beach, VA, to J. Elmer and Amanda (Hochstetler) Yoder.

Eldon was the youngest of nine children. The Yoder family left Virginia Beach and moved to Madison when Eldon was 11. As a young adult, Eldon was called to serve at Hillcrest Home in Harrison, AR. Following his service, he returned to VA where he met Paula Kurtz, who was serving at Mountain View Nursing Home. They married on October 12, 1974. Eldon and Paula would build a home and welcome four children.

Eldon worked as a mason, building many homes, chimneys, and walkways in the Madison area. Throughout the years, Eldon was involved in many church activities including jail ministry. In more recent years, Eldon served on the board of Mountain View Nursing Home. He was a faithful member of Oak Grove Mennonite Church.

Eldon is survived by Paula, his wife of 50 years, and four children: Angela Yoder, Plain City, OH; Brian Yoder, Charlottesville; Sheldon (Joanne) Yoder, Aroda; Melody (Michael) Hostetler, Kenya, Africa; and eight grandchildren: Andre, Alexandra, Jennika, Kaylee, Allyson, Jazlynn, Anthony, and Kyra.

Eldon was preceded in death by both parents, two stillborn children, Gloria and Jordan, and siblings: Treva Zook, Viola Yoder, and Owen Yoder.

The funeral service was held at the Oak Grove Mennonite Church, on January 15, 2025. Burial was at the church cemetery.

The story is told of a blind boy who sat on the steps of a building with a hat by his feet. He held up a sign which read, "I am blind; please help."

There were only a few coins in the hat—spare change from folks as they hurried past.

A man was walking by. He took a few coins from his pocket and dropped them into the hat. He then took the sign, turned it around and wrote some words. Then he put the sign back in the boy's hand so that everyone who walked by would see the new words. Soon the hat began to fill up. A lot more people were giving money to the blind boy.

That afternoon, the man who changed the sign returned to see how things were. The boy recognized his footsteps and asked, "Were you the one who changed my sign this morning? What did you write?"

The man said, "I only wrote the truth. I said what you said but in a different way."

I wrote, "Today is a beautiful day but I can't see it." Both signs spoke the truth. But the first sign simply said the boy was blind, while the second sign conveyed to everyone walking by how grateful they should be to see.

When life seems full of troubles, it's difficult to maintain an attitude of gratitude. All we see are our problems, like a blackened storm cloud casting a dark shadow over our lives.

And the times when everything just seems to be going smoothly? We often take these precious moments for granted too. Caught up in the bliss, comfort, and familiarity of it all, we can simply forget to be thankful.

So what, then, is gratitude? Simply put, gratitude is a habit. It's a way of looking at the world and all the good things in it with a feeling of appreciation, regardless of whether or not your current situation is to your liking.

Gratitude is a heart-centered approach to being at peace with yourself and with all you have. When you practice this feeling of gratitude, it attracts even more things into your life for which to be grateful.

-Author unknown

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Gratefulness is a theme that I return to from time to time. It may just be that this is because when I do a bit of self-reflection, I understand

that I need to grow in this area. Those who make gratitude a habit are much more pleasant folks to be around than are those who are skilled at pointing out all the negative things they can find.

As we reflect on the last six months, it is fitting to be reminded that we always have much to be grateful for. Those of us who live in the USA and have not taken up residence under a rock somewhere, are likely aware that six months ago Joe Biden was president, and Kamala Harris and Donald Trump were campaigning to see who would win the presidential election. Donald Trump won the election and was subsequently inaugurated in January.

Some of our neighbors are pretty happy about the way things have turned out. Some are discouraged. Since Trump took office some have been pleased with the actions that he took. Others are filled with foreboding about what might be in store.

I also acknowledge that I may have frustrated some of our readers by neither denouncing nor endorsing the actions of either of these administrations. This doesn't mean that I don't have opinions about what things are better. I suppose all of us do.

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I propose that we do better to concentrate on things we have to be thankful for rather than the things that are wrong in this world. Regarding the recent events in the political realm, I'm thankful that we live in a country that recently experienced a peaceful transition of power. I'm grateful that despite all the things that are wrong in this country we experience a high level of economic, religious, and personal freedom. These blessings are so remarkable that they are the envy of many people in the world. What we consider normal in this country is regarded as miraculous in many other settings. Let's be thankful for the good things that are very commonplace.

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I recently listened to an audio book by Nick Ripken (pen name). The title was *The Insanity of God*. The title isn't attractive but the story is compelling, indeed. The author and his wife went to Africa as missionaries and experienced a variety of victories and difficulties. Nick began administrating humanitarian aid in devastated war-torn Somalia. The intense spiritual opposition and devastation left him exhausted and dealing with questions about whether God's power was able to penetrate the darkness that characterized Somalia

at that time.

Nick and his family returned to the USA to refresh themselves and deal with their faith questions. The mission organization they were working under was supportive of Nick traveling to other areas in the world that experience or have experienced persecution and opposition to the Gospel to see how God provides for people in these situations.

Nick began his research in Russia after the dissolution of the USSR. The stories he heard from people who had experienced intense persecution left him amazed at the provision of God amid persecution. He was told of a youth gathering where those in attendance were able to assemble almost the entirety of the four Gospels from the collective memory of the group. Another elderly brother talked about the approximately 600 songs and hymns he had written in prison. The way he sang his “heart songs” in prison was a tremendous encouragement to those incarcerated with him.

After visiting Russia, he went to eastern Europe and unnamed places in southeast Asia as well as China and finally, to various Muslim countries. These travels encompassed several years. What Nick said and heard again and again was that God was very active and building His

church in places and settings where the opposition and persecution were intense and often fatal for the Christians. Nick’s question regarding the effectiveness and power of the Gospel was resoundingly answered in the affirmative.

Nick was so impressed by the miraculous nature of God’s provision in the face of extreme opposition that he had a burning desire for this to be known by Christians in the West. But those who were living in these circumstances regarded persecution and opposition as normal and unremarkable. It was described by more than one person as being as normal as the sun coming up in the morning.

Toward the end of the story, Nick and his wife were hosting a young lady in their home in the USA whom they had met at a refugee camp abroad. She had come to the Lord from a very hostile Muslim context. While visiting with Nick’s family, they sat in a church service in which a family had come to Christ and all were being baptized.

As the service progressed and time for the baptism approached, the lady who was visiting seemed nervous and fidgety. The Ripkens inquired if she was OK. She assured them she was. Later, she explained her nervousness and unease. In her experience with

baptisms, they were always risky events and accompanied by varied opposition. She wondered when someone might interrupt the service with violence and try to disrupt the baptism. Secrecy, violence, and opposition were all associated with her experience of believers' baptism, and it was completely absent on that day. She could scarcely believe that, as she looked around, all were smiling, relaxed, and peaceful at this baptismal service! She exclaimed that she thought she would never live to see the miracle of a relaxed, peaceful, and public baptism. The miracle of this type of freedom was

thoroughly amazing to someone who had experienced persecution and opposition up close.

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This account reminded me that many things I regard as normal are really amazing demonstrations of God's provision. This provision might actually seem downright miraculous to those whose context is quite different. May the Lord give us the grace to look beyond the good things that we take for granted and live out our gratefulness to God for His good provision for us.

RJM 

I Saw a Beautiful Thing

A Delicious Honesty

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

It was a three-way conversation, at a family reunion. Seated beside me that Friday evening was a young mother and across the table from us, a single cousin in her 30s. I knew both, but they had not yet met. The one is an extrovert with high capacity for action, laughter, drama, and frankness. The second woman is introverted with a sensitive, artistic nature—she works and lives alone. Without preamble, I dove in with a question to the young mother whom

I knew better, “So, how are you? What are you learning?”

Without hesitation, she offered herself to be seen and known: “We're just coming off a five-week technology fast.” She went on to explain that this was a joint effort on the part of husband and wife to address her addictions.

Across the table, my single cousin leaned forward, her non-Mennonite ears nearly glowing with curiosity. “What? Quilting videos? Cooking


shows?” Her mind clearly spinning as she tried to take this in.

“No. True Crime.” I think that’s what the refreshingly honest reply was. I offered some admiring comment about this refusal to hide in shame and the beautiful willingness to be seen in the middle of mess. “I’m done with pretending,” she responded. I don’t recall just where the conversation went from there, but I felt sure the angels were cheering. She soon left the table to see after her lively youngsters, and the cousin and I sat another hour.

We wove our way through common questions of work and hobbies, but clearly this disclosure rocked her mind. “I thought she had it all together.” And from there, she offered bits of her own soul to me: old wounds and misunderstandings. Places of disappointment with God and family. Personal limitations she’s

learning how to manage.

Friends, this is how Jesus can be brought into meal time with someone you’ve never met before—by refusing to pretend all is well. By risking visibility in the middle of struggle. Actually saying aloud, “This is where I am.” When did you last speak up like that? Have you tried?

Have we forgotten it is the homecoming sinner that heaven applauds, not the all-put-together saint? Will you join me in removing the pharisaical robes and donning sackcloth? Imagine the table talk at potluck dinners if we were willing to do as this young mother did! Or if that’s too public, what about one-on-one coffee with a friend? Now that’s something I could get excited about! Enough about gardening, Pinterest, and hunting! Let’s dish up some delicious honesty and serve each other grace. 

The worst lies are those that most resemble

truth.

Conrad Grebel

1498-1526

Ray Shank, Rochelle, VA

How did a young man who lived half a millennium ago, and who died at age 28, leverage so much that we consider important today? Conrad's upbringing was in a Zurich patrician family with accompanying privileges. His education was extensive for that time period. His perspective was broadened by six years of university study in Renaissance Humanism at Basel, Vienna, and Paris. Although that amount of time should have resulted in a degree in one of the standard disciplines, aimlessness kept him from that goal. Coming home to Zurich in defeat from the University of Paris underscored the futility of the life he had lived to that point. His correspondence to his brother-in-law, Vadian (former teacher in Vienna), chronicles the lack of coherence his education had left him in.

Meanwhile, "back to the classics" humanists, who through their study of the Greek and Latin New Testament texts, rediscovered Christ and His teaching. Erasmus,

a Dutch scholar, had inspired a religious renaissance, which led to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther had taken the ideas much further and acted on them. Ulrich Zwingli, as the priest at the large city church in Zurich, was leading a reform movement as Conrad retreated home to that city.

Needing a cause, Conrad found the intellectual group clustered around Zwingli invigorating. The introduction to the rebirth of New Testament study was a positive start in what became a short but stellar ministry. Meanwhile, at age 24 he married against his parents' wishes to a woman of lower social standing. Since the strain of health and financial problems put him at the mercy of his parental roof, a personal crisis was inevitable. It came and resulted in a regenerative spiritual experience with Christ. The academic study of Scripture had turned to a personal life-changing outlook. His letter writing turned from Greek classical gods and goddesses to evangelical

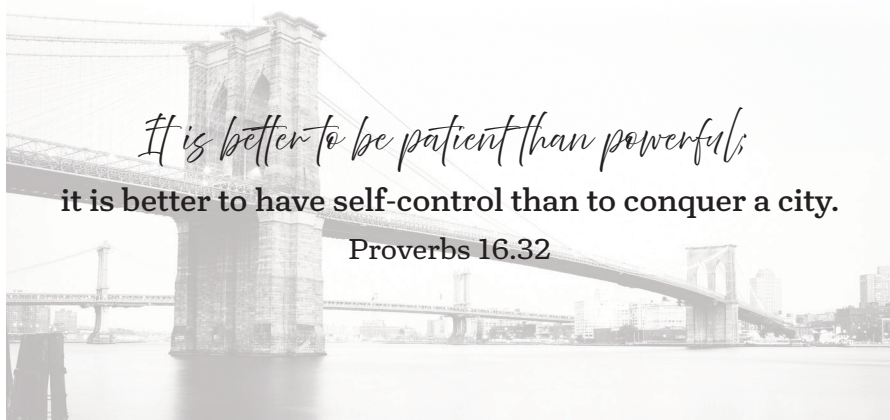
expressions of trusting Christ. Although his external conditions were still lamentable, his spirit was on fire for the Kingdom of Christ. The literary abilities of the circle around Zwingli helped them ferret out the nuances of church life as described in the New Testament. A more thorough reform is mapped out in Zurich.

Zwingli, the star and hero of the church reform in Zurich, got cold feet and allowed the city council to determine when and whether each individual reform would be implemented. Grebel and a number of his fellow students were disappointed and then aghast at Zwingli's foot dragging. They met separately for study and encouragement. When the city council forbade their continuing meeting, the die was cast. As this study group met on January 21, 1525, they tried to understand how to be obedient citizens and still be

loyal to Christ and His Word. In the tension of that prayer meeting, one of the attendees asked Conrad to administer Christian baptism. As baptism continued around the circle, the group was cemented into a functioning Body of Christ.

With the wrath of the city authorities threatening them, *"they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). Grebel went to an area where his family had lived during some of his boyhood days. His father had been a ruling magistrate at that time; now the son was a fugitive.

House and field preaching became a fruitful ministry as many eagerly heard and accepted the newfound Gospel. Within two years of those first baptisms, Grebel's rigorous lifestyle, combined with his former illness, helped to terminate the earthly life of this young star of the reformation.





He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win;
We drew a circle that took him in.

-Edwin Markham

Sermon Preparation (Part 1)

Floyd Stoltzfus, Gordonville, PA

Preaching is described as “that unique procedure by which God, through His chosen messenger, reaches down into the human family and brings persons face-to-face with Himself. Without such confrontation it is not true preaching. Since preaching originated in the mind of God, and is His own distinctive medium for reaching the hearts of men with a message that is calculated to save the soul, it is obviously His prerogative to set the standards” (*Expository Preaching Without Notes*, by Charles Koller). The only valid directives for preaching are the directives revealed in the holy Scriptures.

My heart reaches out to brothers chosen by God and commissioned by the church to preach the Word in a mission setting where he is assigned to preach every Lord's Day morning (sometimes twice in a day) and perhaps during the week. Faithful ministers know the physical, emotional, and spiritual energy that

is exhausted in 45-50 minutes of preaching. Some missionaries are not quite prepared for this responsibility and the stamina this requires on the long haul. I tell my dear wife that I am often more hungry and food tastes more delicious on Sunday noon after preaching than after a normal work day.

Following, under three major points, are a few directives given to enhance preaching for the glory of God:

The Prerequisites of the Messenger

- He must be born again. This means that the preacher has sincerely repented and received by faith the forgiveness of sins and opened his heart to the Lord Jesus.
- The preacher must be living in victory over sin and exercising the specific characteristics in the catalog of qualities as recorded in I Timothy 3.
- The preachers must have a call. In the Old Testament “the prophet was a man who felt himself called by God for a special mission, in which

his will was subordinated to the will of God” (by William Albright). This call to specific ministry was different than a call to an ordinary vocation. This idea of a specific commission is carried into the New Testament era where God “gave some apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11). In a broader sense all disciples of Jesus are called to “the ministry of reconciliation” and “we are ambassadors for Christ’s sake” (II Corinthians 5:18b, 20a).

The Preparation of the Messenger

- The messenger must prepare himself. “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD” (Isaiah 52:11). Jesus said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). Study the Word, not just to preach, but study to feed yourself. A preacher’s messages are often best if they come from personal regular Bible study, instead of choosing a message and only then to study.

- The messenger is “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly” (Romans 12:3b). What great tragedies could be avoided in a preacher’s life if he would heed seriously to this wise counsel!

- The messenger is to be watchful

and humble as was the Apostle Paul, “Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

- The Apostle Paul gives more solid counsels to Timothy: “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (I Timothy 4:15, 16). We are to take great pains with the ministerial responsibilities and to be completely absorbed in them. In summary, that is meditation, evaluation, and continuation all for the final salvation of souls.

The Preparation of the Message

- The Bible is not a record of man’s religious discoveries. Someone has said, “It is the record of God’s unfolding revelation of Himself, the spoken Word.”

- Using the expository method of delivery is the closest to the biblical pattern of preaching. Both textual and topical preaching have also proven to be powerful and edifying under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Expository preaching is selecting a passage of Scripture and finding a dominating theme in that passage. Next, you search carefully

for integrating points, normally three, that relate and expand the theme. Using other Scriptures to amplify and define more clearly the surmounting thrust is such a blessing. Expository preaching is not a verse-by-verse study. It is not a commentary. It branches out but always comes back to the theme in the selected passage. Reinforcing the message with biblical examples or life illustrations and stories is enlightening. These serve as windows in a building. However, it is possible for a building to have too many windows. In other words, too many stories can distract from the message. Making practical applications from the key points needs to be related to the major theme and is extremely important for the life of the body of Christ. The supreme test of all preaching is what happens to the man or woman in the pew.

- Expository preaching keeps us close to the divine revelation. Evidence of this method was used during the time of Ezra. Notice the precise wording: “*So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense [expounded the meaning], and caused them to understand the reading [by making practical applications relating to the times]*” (Nehemiah 8:8). This method has the greater potential for

spiritual nourishment, enrichment, and revival. Expository preaching is to unfold, to unravel, and to make clear holy writ.

- Get on your knees with a blank piece of paper and seek God's face as to the needs of the congregation. The Holy Spirit is the faithful Teacher to lead us in selecting the passage of Scripture best fitted for the time, and He desires to fill us with all the fullness of God.

- It may be helpful to you as a preacher and a blessing to the congregation, to select a book in the Bible and choose interesting themes to prepare to preach on. I repeat, do not feel obligated to preach verse-by-verse. Preaching is not the same as teaching in Sunday School. Especially, in choosing a long book in the Old Testament or the New Testament, it may be needful to skip some chapters and choose passages of Scripture with discretion. I remember some years ago one of our ministers preached book-by-book from the minor prophets in the Old Testament. I never forgot how it fed and blessed my spiritual soul, and the congregation was encouraged and edified.

- Read the text repeatedly. Write it out (at least portions of it). That will help you to see truth that you did not notice before.

- Break it down and think it through. Preparing an expository message is defined as: “thinking about thinking, until you really think what God thinks.”

- Set it in its context and look it up by comparing Scripture-with-Scripture. Use a sound Bible dictionary. A concordance and other Bible helps like *Customs and Manners in Bible Times* can be a means of enriching your study and meditation.

- Organizing an adequate filing system in separate folders of various subjects and topics can be very helpful in selection of material to enhance the message.

- The preacher's message should have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Study it thoroughly and saturate it with prayer.



- To be concluded

The finest gift a man can give to his age and time is
the gift of a *constructive and creative life.*

-Wilfred Peterson

A Woman After God's Heart

With

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



When I ponder that Emmanuel means *God with us*, the power of the word **with** both draws me in and humbles me. It means that the Almighty Creator of the universe

descended into a drooling, diapered infant. That a sovereign God would “*learn obedience through what he suffered*” far exceeds my comprehension.

In Jesus, the almighty, self-

sustaining, sovereign God is **with** us. In Jesus, God becomes real and relatable. This Man Who was and is **with** us, embodies the difficulties and temptations that come with being human. **With** us, in the sense that Jesus shows us how to live. **With** us, in that He comes, and He stays.

Interestingly, Old Testament high priests were honored as being super human, but in stark contrast, Hebrews highlights the *humanity* of our High Priest. His loud cries and tears and obedience (Hebrews 5:7, 8) extend comfort. But they convey much more! God-becoming-flesh-in-Jesus offers us the assurance that the race can be run. We travail, we resist, we struggle, we feel overwhelmed, we cry, and we groan. Yet, we can overcome. Jesus did.

I borrow from Malcolm Guite's poem, "O Emmanuel." O come... be our God-**with**-us, O long sought **With-ness** for a world without.

It will take our lifetimes to explore the depths of living in God **with-ness**. Some of us can see better in pictures than in theological wordiness. Here are a few real stories about God's women, presenting God-**with**-us to a world *without*.

The oven timer sends Luann scurrying toward the bread to be removed from the oven. Her guests would surely be awed at her artisan

*sourdough bread. Baby Effie wails when her mama rushes past, catching on that she wasn't coming for her. Angie and Alfred's fussing over the Legos tower reminds Luann that her children's emotional needs were corroding her hurried preparations for guests. Rethinking her priorities, she grabs Effie, hugging her tightly, and in a single sweep she plops down next to the other two. "Mama's **with** you," she whispers into their squabble. "I'm going to stay right here and watch you play. I won't leave you for a long time."*

*Birthday memes, emojis, and messages pinged Hannah's phone all morning. She felt the warm assurance that she was being thought about. Then an alert of another kind called her to the front door. Her friend waited there, bearing a brunch for both of them to enjoy over the next several hours in lady-chatter of friendship and encouragement. A birthday gift of **with-ness**!*

Miss Cecilia and Miss Janette welcomed five lanky, ebony lads into their living space, who kicked off their shoes beside the door. This was youth night with brownies, table games, and a devotional by one of the mission leaders about the Good Sower, good seed, and a good harvest. Lively banter reflected how easily the fellows revolved in this space. One of the mouthier lads needed a reminder

about respect, but mostly goodwill prevailed. These young men were approaching a crucial age when they would choose between becoming men of the street like so many around them, or follow the God of Miss Cecilia and Miss Janette. These Amy Carmichaels of today are showing them what God-**with**-us looks like, in a world without. These ladies bandage a comrade's foot injured in the latest shooting. They coach, comfort, and correct. They feed and nurture. They stay **with** them when others leave.

Sandra prefers winter evenings beside the fire in the living room, alongside her knitting, a good book, and her husband nearby. It's like a magnet, and this Saturday evening would be no exception, after an especially busy week. Until the husband called her from work. There was a church service he'd really like to attend just four hours away. It would mean coming home after midnight, but it was important to him. Would she go with him? Sensing her hesitancy, he offered that he was willing to go alone. Resistance to his sudden idea pushed around in her mind. Really? Until she remembered three couples who were currently saying their good-byes to each other, victims of cancer and sudden accidents. How comfortable would her recliner be that evening if she sent her man out by himself? She

smiled sheepishly, as she considered how her husband was like God. God also likes when we're **with** Him. He asks for our company, our love, and to lay aside the other things we'd rather do—for time **with** Him.


The elderly gentleman scarcely spoke English and couldn't find his gate at the airport. He showed surprise when we spoke his language. He was trusting, but puzzled when we boarded the sky train because he had a plane, not train, ticket. We stayed **with** him until his gate, and he thanked us profusely.

Godly multi-lingual youth served as guides and greeters to those who daily crossed the southern border into America. One young lady followed a Holy Spirit nudge to bake cookies to take along as she "worked the border." On this day, as she shared her cookies **with** the Middle Eastern immigrant, he was overcome with emotion. He said he'd only ever seen cookies in movies and he'd dreamt once that upon entering America, someone would give him a cookie.

We could tell more stories about the difference between a store clerk who says, "your item is found in aisle 3," as opposed to the clerk who says, "come **with** me, I'll show you." We would tell about the one who sits **with** us when we're sad, without many words, yet **with** us. About times of God **with-ness** at night when sleep

evades us and all is still.

The Gospel of Matthew bookends around God-**with**-us. In the first chapter, Jesus is introduced as Emmanuel, God-**with**-us. In the last verse of Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples that He will be **with** them always, even to the end of the world.

Only a God like this can say *as He is leaving*, “I will always be **with** you.” I have so much to learn from this God-Man Who shows us what *being present* truly means. “And so shall we ever be **with** the Lord” (I Thessalonians 4:17) assures me that one day we will understand **with**—perfectly. 

junior messages

Angel in the Grocery Store

Wilma Miller with Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

My dad’s eyesight was getting worse. The doctor said he had macular degeneration. He, Dan, couldn’t see well at all. It was not easy to see him just sitting in his chair, but thankfully he did not complain much. There were eight of us children. Of course, he and Mom always loved when we all came home. One sister lived in Florida and the rest of us were in various areas of OH.

When Dad was in his eighties, he had other health problems and eventually could not get out of bed. Mom and the rest of us faithfully cared for him. In the end, when we knew he did not have long to live, all the children came home. Dad was surrounded with love. He was somehow aware that we were all there.

We wondered when he would breathe his last breath? Finally, some of us left. We went home to shower and to rest. While we were gone, he peacefully passed away. It was springtime. We were sad but rejoiced that Dad was home in the land of eternal spring, the land of no more suffering.

When my dad passed away, one of my sisters did not cry much during the calling hours. She was busy talking with family and friends going through the line.

But the day after Dad was buried her tears came. She cried and cried. She tried to do some housework and get her focus on something else. That did not help, and her tears still flowed. Finally, frustrated with herself and her tears, she asked her husband to

go with her to get groceries.

Her husband was on his phone when they pulled into the parking lot of Save-A-Lot. She went on in and started filling her cart with needed food. Most of the previous week she had been at her dad's bedside. The family needed a lot of groceries.

She noticed a well-dressed man walking past her with only a few items in his hands while her cart was full. Her husband also noticed the man when he joined his wife at the checkout.

As they came to the checkout, this man with impeccable clothes was in front of them, paying for his few items.

My sister started putting her items on the counter. The man in front of her was friendly and asked if she had a large family because of her full cart.

"I had been gone a number of days due to being at my dad's bedside while I still had the chance. His funeral was yesterday," she told the man.

He responded that he was sorry about her losing her dad and started asking her questions.

My sister wished he would not ask her about it; she wished he would just be quiet. She did not want to start crying again. As she put the last of the groceries on the counter, the stranger stepped behind her and said, "I will get this."

She was so shocked that he would pay for all her groceries. He paid, and then he put his hand on her shoulder and said, "I'm sorry about your dad. God bless you."

At his touch, she felt a warmth run through her whole body, like someone pouring warm, refreshing oil on her.

Then the stranger turned and walked out the door.

My sister and her husband went out to thank him again, but the man had disappeared. They did not see him get into a vehicle. He had simply vanished.

Right then she knew he must have been an angel. An angel! God had sent an angel to comfort her. Her heart was warmed with the reminder that God knows and cares when we are hurting. She felt loved and comforted with this unexpected surprise reminder of God's care.

"But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17).

"For His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord" (Psalm 117:2).

"Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant" (Psalm 119:76).



Return to the Old Paths

Craig Eicher, Butler, IN

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls...” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Pete, the kitten, was born one blustery spring day and placed in a cardboard box on our front porch. He seemed quite contented at first. One day his eyes opened, and he discovered the four walls hemming him in.

Pete hated those walls and seemed constantly to try climbing out of the box. He did not seem to realize that he had been placed in the box for his own protection and that a few scant feet away were parked two “giant” vehicles that could easily crush his tiny frame.

Pete grew by leaps and bounds. He seemed bent on his “freedom,” and one day he climbed out of the box. From that day forward it was impossible to keep Pete penned up. We would place him in the box only to have him climb back out a few minutes later.

I was home the day one of our family members backed one of the

cars out of the driveway and didn’t see Pete crouched behind the back wheel. As I watched his tiny body twitch in death, I thought about how sad it was that we had not been able to communicate to Pete the value of staying in the box.

Many Christian youth in our churches today are much like Pete.

They chafe under parental discipline and church guidelines. They buck moral issues and live for the day they can make their own decisions. One day they grow big enough to climb out of the protective box of parental moral supervision that God placed around them. Once outside, many of them look back with regret and realize that their parents were not so narrow-minded, after all.

Dear Christian youth, be very careful how quickly you discard the Christian heritage that has been handed down to you. Realize the value of age and maturity over youth and inexperience, and remember the words of the Lord in Jeremiah to the children of Israel, “Return to the old paths!”

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THOUGHT GEMS

Nothing ruins truth like stretching it.

• • • • •

A shady business never yields a sunny life.

• • • • •

When you brood over your trouble, you hatch despair.

• • • • •

In every life there must be a grave and self buried therein.

• • • • •

Always put off until tomorrow what you should not do at all.

• • • • •

When you dig another out of his troubles, you find a place to bury your own.

• • • • •

Prayer will loosen many a knot that my own hands cannot untie.

• • • • •

When you get into deep water, keep your mouth shut.

• • • • •

When you are wrapped in yourself, you are overdressed.

• • • • •

It is better to suffer wrongly than to do wrong.

• • • • •

Selfishness is the essence of sin.