



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

AUGUST 2025

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Calvary Messenger

August 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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Discipleship

Barry Hochstetler, Hicksville, OH

To be a disciple of Christ may result in:
Choosing between owning a Bible and owning your house.
Choosing between reading your Bible and an hour of sleep.
Prison time if I attend church.
One less day of vacation if I attend church.
Execution if I witness to a stranger.
Mockery if I witness to a stranger.
My children being taken away from me if I teach them about Christ.
Not having much time for social media if I teach my children about Christ.
Financial ruin.
Sacrificial giving.
Needing to flee my homeland.
Being called to serve far from home.
Being a church leader with a short life expectancy.
Being a church leader with short Saturdays.
Being weak from hunger.
Fasting for strength.

When and where we live will depend on which choices we'll be faced with, but when and where we live does not change *"whosoever...that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."*

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Are you willing to take *"joyfully the spoiling of your goods"* to be a disciple of Christ?

A People Not Strong

In the days of late spring and especially after periods of rain, there are little mounds of sandy soil that appear throughout the lawn and along the driveway. Some of these little mounds are convex-shaped with a little hole in the center of the cone. If you look closely, you may see little “*people, not strong*” as they expand their subterranean homes and bring the soil above ground, one grain at a time. The Proverb writer includes ants as one of “*four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise*” (Proverbs 30:24). In the next verse he describes the ants as “*a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.*” Likely, the ants are expanding their storerooms to fill them with food in the days of summer.

While ants are not in the microscopic category of God’s creatures, they are relatively small compared to the four strong and swift creatures in the succeeding verses in the same chapter: the lion, a greyhound, the he goat, and a king. A part of God’s creative genius is the variety of creatures and their importance on our planet. While God’s creation includes things large

and humongous (think stars), He often has used some of His smaller creatures and things to accomplish His will. Man’s “bigger and better” mantra is not congruent with God’s value system. Often, the opposite is true, and that’s the focus of this essay along with some data on ants.

Antwiki.org reports that there are 14,469 described species of ants worldwide. The world’s smallest ants are those in the genus *Carebara*. In Sri Lanka, *Carebara bruni* reaches a total length of 0.8–1.0 millimeters (0.31–0.39 inches).¹ In contrast, the South American genus *Dinoponera* contains one of the largest species of ants in the world, with female *Dinoponera gigantea* specimens measuring 3–4 cm (1.2–1.6 inches) in length.²

“Counting ants is a bit like counting grains of sand on a beach. But six researchers have proved they were up for the task. They’ve come up with the latest—and most comprehensive—estimate of the number of ants in the world: 20 quadrillion [20 plus 15 zeros]. That’s 12 megatons [one megaton equals a million tons] of biomass—more than all the wild birds and mammals taken together.

“Ants are important ecosystem engineers, moving dirt, distributing seeds, and recycling organic matter. There has been some research to see how ants are distributed around the world, but there was no global estimate of how many there are.

“So for the work, researchers combed through 12,000 reports from databases in many languages, including Bulgarian and Indonesian, finding 489 studies with rigorous enough methods of collecting and counting ants to be included. Most of the studies were not focused on ants per se but on larger questions of biodiversity and just happened to sample ants. The team was surprised to find how concentrated ants are in the tropics, being most plentiful there in savannas and moist forests.

“The new estimate is two to 20 times higher than previous ones, the team reports today in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. But is likely more accurate, the authors contend, because it is the first ‘bottom-up’ effort that relied on actual counts of ants caught around the world.”³

The biblically-proclaimed character strength of the ant is its diligence in preparing food during the summer months for the times when food sources dry up and are unavailable. Indeed, the proverb

writer tells the lazy man to consider this tiny creature and be wise.

It is this diligence in chewing plant matter that makes ants a nuisance in many places. From carpenter ants that can eat away at building structures to leaf-cutting ants that cut $\frac{3}{8}$ ” pieces of leaves and carry them vertically to their places of storage, they are all fulfilling their God-given calling. Of course, the combination of ants and picnics is a well-known problem we face. I recall walking along the highway after a semi-truck had scattered its load of wheat in an accident. Many local people were salvaging the fresh wheat for food, and then I observed a colony of ants doing the same thing. There was a string of ants, each with a grain of wheat in its pincers, fulfilling their God-given calling by carrying this plentiful food source to their subterranean granaries.

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11). Indeed, the

wisdom of these “*people not strong*” is greater than some humans who are too lazy to work for their own sustenance.

Then there are some ants that can make humans and animals suddenly remove themselves from their original location.

Army ants move en masse, hence their name. They strike terror into other insects that may be in their path and are not able to escape. And many people who live in regions that are home to fire ants recall a sudden awareness that the place where they are standing is on top of a fire ant colony. These ferocious little creatures seem to wait until they have moved past a person’s ankle before grabbing skin with their pincers and arching their backs so they can more forcefully push their stingers into a person’s skin. This double-whammy instinctively makes people quickly move to another location, jump up and down, and stomp their feet while slapping their legs—all at the same time. Often they need to be pulled out, one at a time. I don’t recall that God used ants in the conquest of Canaan, but He did use hornets to drive out two kings of the Amorites. “*And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow*”

(Joshua 24:12).

At various times in the history of Israel, God caused the enemy of His people to suddenly flee during the night and leave all behind. In II Kings 7, the army of Benhadad, king of Syria, besieged Samaria during a famine. In this case, the enemy army heard “*a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us*” (7:6). They fled for their lives and left great provisions for the starving residents of Samaria. It is possible that at other times of miraculous and mysterious deliverance from enemy armies that some of God’s little creatures were used by their Creator. He doesn’t need sword or bow.

Let’s remember that so much of the Kingdom of God is incongruent with the values of man. Love is stronger than hate, kindness is more disarming than armed force, and “*the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace*” (Psalms 37:11). Even “*the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men*” (I Corinthians 1:25). May we faithfully follow the true Strength despite the enemy’s attempts to get us to trust in the wisdom and strength

of man.

1. Guinness World Records

2. Wikipedia.org

3. <https://www.science.org/content/article/how-many-ants-live-earth>

AY



It Could Have Been You

Mila Eichorn, Luz y Esperanza, Paraguay

I can envision a tree with no branches,

I can envision a church with no pews,

I can envision a well with no water,

But Lord, I can't picture me without You!

As we stood beside a busy street handing out tracts, I noticed a girl coming down the street. At once she caught my attention. You could tell she was young, but she looked old and spent. Above all, you could sense a cloud of darkness and gloom hanging over her. When Dad offered her a tract, she hesitated a bit, then said, "No," and walked on. A few minutes later, she walked past again, pulling a big box behind her.

As I watched her, I thought to myself, she looks so lost and without any hope. At the same time, I was like, that could have been me. I could have been in her shoes. I don't know her story, and I can only imagine what all she goes through. But my heart ached

for her and all the other people who declined a tract. It made me think: am I really thankful for a Christian family and for Christian friends? Often we take our Christian heritage for granted. We become wrapped up in our lives and say there's no hope for the rest of the world. But there is hope. And that hope is in the Cross. Not in the wood and nails, but in the mercy this monument of love displays. Jesus came to this world to deliver the captives and heal the brokenhearted. And He leaves us a charge. That charge is to spread the Gospel. What about the lonely, old man who sits on his porch, reading a magazine to pass the time. Has he ever heard the Gospel? Then there's the girl at the checkout counter, the salesman, and the list can go on and on. Be bold. Share the Good News. You might be the streetlight that shows someone the way HOME!

Remember, you could have been in their shoes!



Sunday School: The Church's Garden (Part 1)

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

There is an institution of the church that has been around for a long time. Here is a little quiz on the above statement:

1. The early church started having Sunday School (S.S.) in its first generation. True False

2. Paul's helper, Timothy, was later the leader in the S.S. movement. True False

3. Being lost in the Dark Ages, S.S. was again started by the early Anabaptists in 1525. True False

4. S.S. was first begun in England in 1780. True False

5. S.S. was first started by the Puritans in New England in 1690. True False

6. S.S. was first started by the revivalists in America in 1810. True False

I was born and raised at the Weavertown Amish Mennonite (Beachy) Church, which was founded on September 29, 1909. My father was four years old and my mother was one month old at that time. Her parents were one of the 35 families who broke away from the Amish church over its implementation of applying the strict ban against any

church member for any reason who changed to any other church. That was the one and only issue.

They did not begin having a church-approved S.S. until July 22, 1928. However, there were laymen who conducted German language school at a one-room public school building in the winters of 1914 and 1915. It resumed again in the four winters of 1924-1927, being sort of a combination German School/Sunday School. In the spring of 1928, church council approved establishing a S.S., also held in a one-room public school house. Imagine having classes for 105 people in a one-room school building! Church council soon approved to rent a large vacant church house for S.S. only, which was central to where our people lived. It was built by the Church of the Brethren in 1888, named by them as the Bird-in-Hand House.

Our Weavertown church has no record of ministerial backlash against allowing S.S., even though the German school had not needed church approval. The core approach to the German school was to read sizeable portions from the New

Testament, mostly the Gospels and Acts. That was very good, being foundational to Christian salvation and righteous living. It sparked interest in having our very own S.S.

When our notable church statesman and bishop, John A. Stoltzfus, proposed taking council with the church to approve an organized S.S., he spoke favorably of the S.S. as a benefit, especially for the children. He emphasized it as “de planz gotah fon dee gma,” being the “garden of the church for planting.” That concept pertains to this day—always has. Many people have, as adults, remembered a certain S.S. teacher whose love and encouragement meant much in their formative early “planted” years. There is what is known as “the three generational syndromes.” It has often been noted how generational success goes through a three-generation cycle. The dad, or the parents, have a specific vision, work hard, sacrifice and save, and are notably successful. The next generation picks up on the examples and has a good start by both heritage and inheritance. Profits and successes go beyond the parents’ life track. Later, the third generation takes way too much as an entitlement “for granted,” as we say. True, so much was given them for which they needed neither to

sacrifice nor frugally manage. They tend toward excesses and splurging and consequentially have losses and struggle.

Some businesses have done likewise and some churches as well.

Grass roots beginnings of S.S. have often come about by revivalist fervor among layman. Right now, in 2025 in Lancaster County PA, the Amish churches are experiencing a four-way split. The one group early on began an “off Sunday” S.S., a first for them, and the option of preaching in English. One of their groups recently visited at Weavertown to see and learn how our S.S. is set up and operates.

Exploring for ideas for our 1988 renovation, we learned from a local church that using round tables for each class in the basement works very well without requiring lots of space between classes. Thus, individual classrooms are not needed. Round tables allow for people to talk toward each other so that each person can easily be heard without disturbing other classes. Our S.S. attendance currently is around 200 each Sunday. We have 15 tables in the basement for classes and also have classes in the auditorium.

While revivalism leads to S.S., it also promotes a continuing revival. Additionally, S.S. also has been used with good effect for evangelism.

The church mission's movement had variously employed it to invite children to attend classes when a church was not yet intended or established. Children in the past era were more ready to attend. Whereas now, they have more options of home entertainment and also greater ease to nearby pastimes of a more surface experience.

The quest for the soul of America is greatly diminished in our time and place. The same could be said at times even for ourselves and our young people. The need for S.S. for our own church people has always been important, and continues to be crucial to keep at least a minimal interest in the pure Word of God. It has its own unique place, being an integral part of the Sunday morning worship service. Our church's Bible study and Bible school is seemingly on a wane, and have a more voluntary attendance, hence being sporadic. Therefore, it is of particular importance to have attractive materials for study, with capable and studious teachers to lead the class in learning together.

Our Weavertown S.S. is at the 100-year mark. In those 100 years, or four generations of sons and daughters, we have always used open discussion sessions right from the Bible itself. The portions for study

were chosen by the ministers and superintendents. The system adopted was to begin in Matthew, then go to Acts and Romans, then back to Mark, then pick up again in Galatians and some following epistles, back to Luke, more epistles, back to John, followed by the rest of the N.T. to the end of Revelation.¹ That became standardized in the 1960s, always using the same set of verses which has content typical for an average S.S. class. In the 75 years of my memory, I do not recall of anyone ever asking for a change to S.S. quarterlies instead. Our teachers are encouraged to pace the class discussion to cover the lesson's scope. It is considered to be a poor and weak teacher who feels a compulsion to go back to the last part of last week's lesson because it was missed, and by that fails to get through today's lesson.

The teacher is responsible for the conduct of the class. If there are no leading concepts given for today's lesson, then there is reason for little meaningful discussion. On the other hand, if the teacher talks non-stop, why should those in the class bother to study it so there might be some profitable things to talk about by those in the class?

The first S.S. for children was started by Robert Raikes in Gloucester, England, in 1780. The

children were largely unschooled and undisciplined, living in “incredible poverty,” in a demeaning culture and in “total ignorance.” Raikes died in 1811. At that time, the S.S., as a part of the church, had 40,000 children enrolled in many parts of the world.² By 1895, the Society for the Establishment and Promotion of the S.S. in England had distributed 91,000 spelling books, 24,200 Testaments, and 5,360 Bibles. By 1977, my 1977 edition of World Book states, there were 42 million children enrolled in the church’s S.S.³ (My opinion: that figure might be much higher now).

The first S.S. in the United States was started in Virginia in 1786 and soon after also in Rhode Island in 1790. The Bible, at that time, was a widely printed book for commoners, and was used for teaching spelling, reading, writing, and civil and godly morals. The U.S. did not put compulsory education in place until

some years later. When it did, the S.S. became a place to give mostly primary teaching on Bible lessons.

The Bottom Line is that the S.S. has proven to be an integral part of our Sunday morning worship. It provides Biblical nurture and spiritual benefit for all ages. It is an outlet for laymen to handle the Word of God in both study and expression. It employs a focus on the very will of God in understandable words with Holy Spirit-guided interpretation. Peace and unity are commensurate with the resulting brotherhood application. It is God’s garden; tend to it with due diligence and care.

1 The list also includes some O.T. books arranged for S.S. as used at Weavertown, available by request.

2 Anonymous author in Mennonite monthly Sword and Trumpet

3 1977 World Book Encyclopedia

4 Sword and Trumpet



If you have tried to do
something and *failed*
you are vastly better off than if you
had tried to do nothing and *succeeded*.

-Flora McKennon

A Gathering Called REACH

Gary Miller, Hutchinson, KS

Faith Builders hosted REACH 2025 on March 13-14, 2025, in Pittsburgh, PA. REACH provided a platform for nonprofit organizations, churches, and individuals to connect with each other and learn more about these ministries. Approximately 2800 guests participated in the two-day event, attending sessions, conversing over lunch and during breaks, and supporting ministries while fostering a vision for service.

REACH included six main sessions, 120 breakout sessions, ministry focus sessions, a ministry display hall, and opportunities to connect with old and new friends.

Main Sessions. The six main sessions and speakers included:

- “The Missionary and the Home Church” by Val Yoder,
- “Knowing Him, the Only True God” by Earl Peachey,
- “Selfish Service” by Anthony Hurst,
- “Pressurized Christians” by Amata Thomas,
- “A Vision for Kingdom Business” by Ellis Miller, and
- “Upon This Rock” by Elam Stoltzfoos.

These presentations were very inspirational and well-received. Recordings are available for purchase from Faith Builders.

Breakout Sessions. There were 120 breakout sessions spread over the two days. Here is a small sampling of the titles:

- Communicating the Gospel through Story
- Exploring International Business
- Living with Purpose
- Five Mistakes Ministry Boards Make
- Sustainability in Ministry
- Communicating Effectively in the Classroom
- Resolving Conflict in the Workplace
- Serving the Least of These
- Understanding the Conflict in Gaza
- Cultivating a Culture of Service
- The Opportunities of Urban Education
- The Effects of Mennonite-Operated Indian Residential Schools

Except for a few sensitive topics, these sessions were also recorded.

Nonprofit Ministries. The following 61 ministries set up

informational booths in the display hall:

- All-Nations Bible Translation
- Allegany Boys Camp
- Amish Mennonite Aid
- Anabaptist Foundation
- Anabaptist International Ministries
- Anabaptist Perspectives
- Anabaptist Refugee Committee (ARC)
- Anabaptist Savings and Loan
- Arising Light Asian Ministries
- Bald Eagle Boys Camp
- Brotherly Aid Ministries
- Carolina Chaplaincy Program
- CCM Global
- Choice Books of Northern Virginia
- Christian Aid Ministries
- Christian Light
- Comeragh Wilderness Camp
- Deeper Life
- DestiNations International
- Elnora Bible Institute
- Faith Builders Educational Programs
- Faith Mission Home
- Fresh Start Training Center
- Global Tribes Outreach
- Hearken House
- Heralds of Hope
- Hillcrest Home
- i58 Global
- Institute for Global Opportunities
- International Brotherhood Aid
- INVEST

- Jungle Breezes Youth Ministries
- Kingdom Channels
- Life Counseling Ministries
- LifeQuest Community
- Lighthouse Publishing
- Living Water Christian Ministry
- Loving ARMS
- Macedonian Teaching Ministry
- Mexico Mennonite Aid
- Ministry Training Center
- Mission Interests Committee
- Mountain View Nursing Home
- Northern Youth Programs
- Ohio Wilderness Boys Camps
- Olive Branch Mennonite Missions
- Open Hands
- PEACE Ministries
- Reach Out Ministries
- SALT Microfinance
- Seedtime Acres
- Sharon Mennonite Bible Institute
- Shenandoah Christian Music Camp
- Silver Springs Ministries
- SLM Ministries
- Streetlight Christian Ministries
- Stories Made New
- Sunny Crest
- Urban Mennonite Ministries
- United Christian Mission
- Tidings of Peace Christian School

Ministry Focus Sessions. On the second day, 51 ministries presented a 20-minute Ministry Focus (17 at a time), providing attendees with an

introduction to their work and recent developments.

Attendee Reviews. Here are a few observations gleaned from those who attended REACH 2025:

- Enthusiasm, energy, openness, and friendliness characterized the atmosphere of REACH 2025, as participants from diverse Anabaptist backgrounds gathered to learn from seasoned field workers. These experienced individuals shared their passions and goals, offering inspiration and insight. It was very encouraging to see God uniting His people to carry out His work! (returned missionary)

- I really appreciate the collaboration between nonprofits and being in the same space. The topics were great, but for me, connecting with others was the highlight. (nonprofit administrator)

- I was thrilled to join a sea of 2800 others who love God and are committed to Kingdom building. Ryan Grove's breakout session, "Understanding the Current Conflict in Gaza," rich in history and theology, offered insights into the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We were reminded that there are many nonviolent Muslim and Christian Palestinians. One wonders, "Why should the Palestinians be paying for the horrors of European anti-

Semitism?" (nonprofit board member)

- Reflecting on my experience at REACH, what stands out most vividly is the time spent with friends and the relationships that were formed and deepened. Traveling many hours to Pittsburgh and back could have been exhausting, but the fellowship, laughter, and dictionary surfing made the time fly by. While the content of REACH was meaningful and thought-provoking, it was the camaraderie and personal connections that left the most lasting impression on me. (schoolteacher)

- It was encouraging to join thousands of Anabaptists in focusing on ministry and missions. Val Yoder's talk on "Missions and the Local Church" was a highlight, urging churches to prepare and send leaders. May God continue to inspire a vision for long-term, faithful ministry both near and far! (pastor)

In conclusion, REACH gathered Christian workers from diverse walks of life: farmers, businesspeople, parents, young men and women, missionaries in Belize, food distributors in Ukraine, teachers in city missions, educators and students in Bible institutions, chiefs in boys' camps, producers and distributors of Christian literature, and more. They shared a vision for ministry and

joined hands to support one another. It was an enriching and delightful experience. May the resulting outflow

of service bring glory to God and further His purposes in our time.



Heroes of Faith

Christian Burkholder

1746-1809

Ray Shank, Rochelle, VA

Christian was born in a first-generation Anabaptist family in the Jura mountains. This was a safe place for fugitive Anabaptists from other parts of Switzerland. They were tolerated here as valuable tax-paying renters who farmed where others were unsuccessful.

After Christian's father died, his widowed mother carried out the plans to move to America. With six children and funds borrowed from the church, she and a group of Anabaptists settled in what is now Lancaster, PA.

Christian, the youngest child in his family, had a travel debt to repay. He was only eight years old. Six years after arriving in America, the Burkholder family had paid their debt to the church.

The next year, 14-year-old Christian made a momentous purchase. It was a classic Martyrs Mirror with 1500 pages, weighing 13 pounds. To him it was worth the one pound and

seventeen shillings he spent because, as he said, "I had purchased it for the benefit on my soul's salvation."

Many of the rest of us have benefited from the perspective this book gave Christian as a leader in the church. Christian became minister at 24 and bishop at 32 in what became the Weaverland district. His tenure covered the trying Revolutionary War period.

Even more confusing was the evangelical revivalist movement that drained young people from Anabaptist homes. In Christian's evaluation, "There are many who think the present state of Christendom is like a Babel and take great pains to destroy this Babel and instead build up Jericho and call that Zion".

In a paradigmatic treatise, Christian laid out an Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith. The Address to Young People has become a standard catechism for Anabaptists for the last two centuries.



marriages

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

Jantzi-Jantzi

Bro. Kendrick, son of Ronald and Jennifer Jantzi, Milverton, ON, and Sis. Ruthanna, daughter of Arnold and Rosemary Jantzi, Wellesley, ON, on May 24, 2025, at Donegal Mennonite Church for Fairhaven A.M. Church by Arnold Jantzi.

Miller-Gehman

Bro. Jackson, son of Keith and Miriam Miller, Free Union, VA, and Sis. Charlotte, daughter of Harry and Julia Gehman, Myerstown, PA, on June 14, 2025, at Swatara Mennonite Church for Elm Street Mennonite by Jonathan Martin.

Raber-Yoder

Bro. Lamar, son of David and Barbara Raber, Tippecanoe, IN, and Sis. Julie, daughter of Willis and Laura Yoder, Millersburg, OH, on June 14, 2025, at United Dayspring Church for United Christian Fellowship by Willis Yoder.

Shetler-Hershberger

Bro. John, son of John and Caroline Shetler, Lamar, MO, and Sis. Christina, daughter of Eli, Jr. and Katie Hershberger, Lexington, IN, on April 4, 2025, at First Christian Church for Living Waters Mennonite Church by Floyd Lengacher.

Vinar-Hostetler

Bro. Austin, son of John and Jeanette Vinar, International Falls, MN, and Sis. Rachel, daughter of Edwin and Esther Hostetler, Auburn, KY, on May 17, 2025, at Providence Mennonite Fellowship by Jason Miller.



cradle roll

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

Beiler, John and Julie (Yoder), Arlington, KS, first child and daughter, Summer Camden, May 13, 2025.

Chupp, Cameron and Yolonda (Gingerich), Sarasota, FL, second child, first son, Paxton Hayes, May 10, 2025.

Delagrange, Victor and Emma (Schwartz), Osgood, IN, fourth child, first daughter, Melanie Kristin, April 26, 2025.

Diener, Kyle and Lori (Chupp), Arthur, IL, second child, first son, Carson Alexander, April 12, 2025.

Gingerich, Derek and Deborah (Wagler), Loogootee, IN, sixth child, fifth son, Elliott Christian, May 20, 2025.

Gingerich, Jolynn and Kathryn (Byler), Mechanicsburg, OH, fourth child, second daughter, Helen Merci, May 13, 2025.



Heft, Matt and Meri (Vendley), Mountain View, AR, second child, first daughter, Kamera Danielle, July 1, 2025.

Helmuth, Tyson and Treva (Herschberger), Lovington, IL, eighth child, fourth son, Hunter Cole, May 28, 2025.

Herschberger, Phil and Michelle (Jess), Sullivan, IL, third child, first daughter, Kylie Noelle, April 10, 2025.

Hostetler, Leon and Melody (Beachy), Auburn, KY, fifth child, fourth daughter, Reagan Hope, June 11, 2025.

Kauffman, Levi and Rachel (Stoltzfus), Belleville, PA, second child (first child deceased), first son, John Remington, May 2, 2025.

King, Lavern and Marlene (Smoker), Belleville, PA, fifth child, third daughter, Sarah Janae, May 22, 2025.

Knepp, Jason and Janelle (Yoder), Fincastle, VA, fourth child, third daughter, Kara Janelle, March 20, 2025.

Martin, Edwin and Kodie (Miller), Baltic, OH, first child and son, Braiden M, June 17, 2025.

Mast, Enos and Joanna (Bontrager), Falkville, AL, seventh child, fourth son, Joshua, June 5, 2025.

Miller, Brandon and Trina (Stoltzfus), Auburn, KY, second child and son, Anton Jon, June 7, 2025.

Miller, Christopher and Hannah (Miller), Arthur, IL, third child (one son deceased), first daughter, Marissa Jean, January 3, 2025.

Miller, Jon Eric and Anita (Yoder), Big Prairie, OH, fifth child, third son, Noah Lamar, June 4, 2025.

Miller, Karl and Darella (Rohrer), Grove City, MN, fifth child, second daughter, Abigail Elizabeth, March 18, 2025.

Miller, Kristen and Rhonda (Brenneman), Danville, AL, ninth child, sixth son, Matthew Joel, April 26, 2025.

Miller, Seth and Beth (Keim), Milan, IN, second child, first son, Xanti Vincent, April 30, 2025.

Miller, Wynnston and Krista (Zook), Grove City, MN, first child and son, Cole Daryl, March 5, 2025.

Raber, Jason and Katrina (Wagler), Lexington, IN, eighth child, sixth daughter, Kallie Hope, April 29, 2025.

Rohrer, Kelton and Sabrina (Miller), Atwater, MN, third child and son, Aaron Drew, February 13, 2025.

Stoll, Jason and Amanda (Wagler), Cross Hill, SC, second child, first son, Conner Jase, May 15, 2025.

Stutzman, Nathan and Christina (Mast), Crossville, TN, first child and daughter, Avonlea Sage, May 29, 2025.

Troyer, Dwayne and Violet (Herschberger), Newcomerstown, OH, first child and son, Alex Lincoln, June 4, 2025.

Wittmer, Jared and Carol (Wagler), Montgomery, IN, second child, first daughter, Saige Caroline, March 2, 2025.

Yoder, Daniel and Kathy (Miller), Hutchinson, KS, third child, first son, Tristan Daniel, June 2, 2025.

Yoder, Darrel and Linda Dawn (Herschberger), Sullivan, IL, fourth child, third son, Dalton Lane, February 7, 2025.

Yoder, Jared and Rosanna (Miller), Hanover, IN, fourth child, third daughter, Amber Lynette, May 7, 2025.

Yoder, Joash and Loretta (Wengerd), Hanover, IN, sixth child, third son, Alex Kade, May 13, 2025.

Zook, Jonathan and Lynita (Kauffman), Narvon, PA, first child and daughter, Jeneva Louise, June 3, 2025.



obituary

Raber, David H, 79, of New Concord, OH, passed away at his residence on May 28, 2025, from cancer. He was born on July 30, 1945, to the late Henry and Elsie (Lapp) Raber. On September 2, 1965, he married Amanda M. Coblentz who faithfully cared for him until his death.

David was a member of the Heritage Mennonite Church. He loved the Lord and was always willing to give of his time to bless others. In 1972, he was ordained to the ministry, and in 1988, he took his family to Faith Mission Home for three years. David, Amanda, and Hosanna went to Romania in 2005 and served for 14 years. David touched

many lives with his faith and dedication. He will be missed by his wife, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

In addition to his wife, Amanda, he is survived by his eight children: Gary (Lois), Clarkson, KY; Kay (Ivan) Peachey, Boonesville, VA; Jonathan (Susan), and Matthew (Leona), both of New Concord; Josiah (Bethany), Lott, TX; Timothy (Glorianna), Quaker City; Hosanna Raber, New Concord; and Phoebe (Emanuel) King, serving in the Middle East; 42 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; siblings: Lydia (John) Miller, Middlebury, IN; Keturah (Paul) Sommers, Minerva; Alice (Crist) Troyer,

Hartville; Alfred (Miriam), Hartville; Leroy, Columbus; and Verton (Sue), Ravenna.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brothers: Wayne, John (Anne), and Alvin.

The funeral service was held at Heritage Mennonite Church, New Concord, OH, on June 1, 2025, with Marion Miller officiating. Burial followed in the church cemetery.



Kind *hearts*

are the garden,

Kind *thoughts*

are the roots,

Kind *words*

are the flowers,

Kind *deeds*

are the fruits.

I had a conversation with Vince who gave me a bit of his life history. He grew up in Illinois and lived in a variety of places before settling down in Alaska. When he married, he left the Catholic church of his childhood to join the church his wife grew up in. But with time they both ended up back in the Catholic church.

Our conversation turned to a recent miscarriage in our family and the disappointment surrounding that experience. He then recounted a difficulty that his mother had in her sunset years when she was plagued by dementia. He said that she forgot most things, but one thing she continued to repeat to herself and her son was this haunting question, “Did I do the right thing?” She had experienced a miscarriage many years prior. Vince said something to the effect that, “You can imagine that someone in our church tradition (Catholic) has a lot of questions regarding how to relate to this situation.” I do not know what the position of practicing Catholics is with regard to what should be done with an infant who died before birth. This dilemma prompted quite a bit of anxiety for Vince’s mother in her old age. She didn’t talk much but often wondered out loud if she’d done the

right thing. Vince tried to assure her that she had done the best she knew. But it still bothered her.

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The issue of childhood conversion, guilt, and accountability is one that we shouldn’t try too hard to standardize. However, I’d like to make a few observations related to this theme, in no particular order.

- As we teach our little children about Jesus and Who God is, it’s good to remember that it is never too early for our children to learn to say “yes” to God, according to whatever level of understanding they have. Saying “yes” to God is a good habit to cultivate.

- Scripture teaches us that it is the decision of the individual that condemns him or her. Hence a child who has not rejected God’s call should be regarded as innocent.

- Where the innocence of children is underestimated, an overemphasis on child-evangelism often results.

- Following Christ is about much more than saying the right thing or praying the right prayer. It is very good to say the right thing and to acknowledge our sin and our need for a Savior and to come to the Father in Jesus’ name. For those of us who remember the dread of conviction

for our sin and have chosen to follow God, it is right to understand that our journey as a believer had a beginning. That beginning is sometimes referred to as conversion. But as important as that beginning is, let's cultivate the awareness that it isn't enough to say "yes" to God one time, but that we must continue to say "yes" to Him, in order for our new birth to blossom into life in Christ.

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On Sunday, June 22, 2025, a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus was visited by a subject who opened fire on the congregants before detonating an explosive device. He perished in the blast but killed about 25 people in the attack. Preliminary investigation by the Syrian government indicates that the Islamic State is responsible for this attack during the Sunday morning prayer service at the Mar Elias Church.

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As of this writing, the world is anxiously watching to see what will become of hostilities that are being exchanged between Israel and Iran. Then the USA sent bombers to try to flatten three nuclear development sites in Iran. Both Israel and the USA stated that their objective is to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The Iranian government then launched an obligatory attack on a US military base in Qatar that

was mostly thwarted. "Wars and rumors of wars" sounds like an apt description of current events.

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It's always important to love our neighbors and each other. But in the current environment of international and ethnic hostility, Jesus-followers, whose lives are characterized by love, stand in sharp contrast to the primary prevailing cultural sentiment. Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, indicated that His followers would be known by their love of one another. Is that what we're known for?

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It's been several decades since Penn Valley Christian Retreat in McVeytown, PA, began offering seminars. The rotation of seminars offers focused teaching and support for people from different locations who might not have many folks in their immediate community who identify well with their experiences. With today's relative ease of travel and the proliferation of communication, Penn Valley fills a helpful niche for many. The seminars address a wide variety of pertinent issues. Penn Valley has an informative website (<https://pennvalleyretreat.org>) that has a current schedule of upcoming seminars and other pertinent information. The following is taken from the website:

"In the late 1980s, there were three

brethren from the Amish Mennonite community who had a vision for a retreat setting where God's people could come together for a weekend of encouragement and fellowship with others who faced similar issues in life. From that humble beginning, Penn Valley Christian Retreat grew to what it is today.

"There are various seminar weekends including Marriage Enrichment, Christians in Business, Mentally Handicapped, Golden Age, Physically Challenged, Christians in Healthcare, and many others.

"There are approximately 25 seminar weekends throughout the year. The remainder of the time, Penn Valley hosts banquets, reunions, and church groups.

"Penn Valley Christian Retreat is owned and operated by the Anabaptist group known as the Beachy Amish Mennonites. The board consists of seven members plus three ministerial advisers taken from the above group."

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In early June on a bicycle tour across the lovely state of Kansas, I had occasion to visit with Tim, a gentleman from Liverpool, New York. He was wearing a shirt that said, "Rift Valley Academy." I made a comment about his shirt and asked if there is a Rift Valley in New York or if this was the one I was thinking about

in East Africa. He said the school that was referenced on his shirt was indeed in Kijabe, Kenya.

This man and his wife taught at this school, which is a boarding school for missionaries, in the early 90s. Their two children were born in Kenya. Over the last 30 years, they have returned a number of times for shorter, fill-in needs at the academy.

We ate supper together toward the end of the week and our conversation returned to Kenya, a subject of mutual interest. Tim said that just a few weeks ago, he and his wife had again been asked to return to Kenya to help out at the academy for several months this fall. He and his wife will both be retired by that time. Prior to receiving this request, he and his wife had agreed together that they don't feel that their age is well-suited to pursue a return to Kenya on their own, but that if a short-term opportunity to return would present itself, they would be willing to give it careful consideration. They weren't sure how to answer this request. He and his wife were both praying about it. He had made up his list of "pros" and "cons" as to whether they should go. He said the "cons" list was longer than the "pros" list, but that those reasons were considerably more selfish as he considered the competing factors. Throughout the last several days, he felt that the Lord

was indicating more and more that they should go. Earlier that very day, Tim said that he felt that the Lord confirmed through a conversation he had with someone on the tour that indeed they should return to Kenya. He and his wife had agreed that evening that this was what they would do. Previously, they had served in Kenya as supported missionaries,

but they'd decided that this time they will go and serve, "on their own dime."

What came across to me in the handful of interactions spread out over several days was Tim's careful, prayerful, thoughtful, and conscientious approach to serving the Lord. I was encouraged.



I Saw a Beautiful Thing

A Beautiful Sorrow

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

His death was unexpected, though he had not been well for some months. Between the two of us, there was no extended questioning whether or not we would go. We soon had tickets in hand and were flying north in chilly February. Calling hours were to be held in a rented space, since the church building, home to the family, was far too small to accommodate the expected crowd. Soberly, we drove to meet the grieving family and to offer our heartfelt but meager condolences. After making our way through the line, I sat quietly, trying to make sense of God's goodness in this death.

That afternoon, the voices of the Oasis Chorale lingered in the stillness, the lustrous chords a layer of warmth softening the sharp edges

of this day. The hymns of their most recent release had been a solace for my friend in the months of her husband's illness, making this music the natural choice. Soaring soprano lines echoed the lofty lines of the room, and I found both music and architecture contributed to a holy hush.

A slide show of carefully-gathered photos showed many facets of our friend's life. Father, farmer, friend. Seasoned by sorrow, he relished his family and cherished the church. From my padded pew, I admired the acceptance in the face of my stalwart and newly-widowed friend. I met her sisters, and with feeling, they voiced their concern for her—the logical narrowing of her social circle, the heavy load at home—how will God

provide for her?

The next morning, I stood to the side as the foyer buzzed with people hanging up their wraps. I watched old friends meeting with joy at a sad time. The casket, placed at an angle, invited people to consider this life, now come to a close, before they entered the sanctuary. Unabashedly fascinated with people-watching, I stood in silence by the coats, and it was then I noticed her.

A young woman, heavy with child, led her little son by the hand. Pausing, she bent her small frame and hoisted the toddler to her hip. Together they looked while she whispered quiet words of explanation, such as a two-year-old can take in. I blessed this young mother who showed her child that death is not to be feared from a distance but to be approached with respect.

During the funeral service, I

continued my people-watching. I noted the gentle, attentive quality present in the adult sons. In this, they imitated their father. At one point, the son nearest his mother reached across the back of the bench to lay a reassuring hand on her shoulder. Seated between them, little sister was figuratively sheltered in this protective gesture.

There was much that was beautiful in this sorrow: an honorable life. The faithful following of a family. Honestly-aired questions. A small child, safe in a known embrace, invited to observe the still form. The reaching to comfort another across the chasm of one's own loss.

Friends, I agree with God. The death of a saint is precious. Don't pass up an opportunity to look at death so that you may live with greater certainty of your own end.



The Fear of the Lord

Maurice Graber, Bastrop, TX

Is there a difference between loving God and fearing God? Is fearing God solely an Old Testament principle?

What made a man like Hitler become so brutal? What makes a civilized nation accept abortion? What makes a 16-year-old walk into a school and start shooting? What

makes a church set aside God-based principles?

Is there fear of the Lord in an OMG culture?

What is the fear of the Lord? It's not a Puritanical concept, where we hold to a strict conduct code because we fear the wrath of God. Nor is it a buddy-buddy relationship,

where God pats us on the back and condones our sin.

Fear is a natural emotion. Terror, anxiety, apprehension, or dismay can all be part of it. The fear of the Lord is not an emotion. It's a choice, a supernatural grace.

It can have negative aspects, as in Acts 5. The judgment on Ananias and Sapphira brought great fear upon the church. This holy fear brings an awareness of the consequences of sin and drives us to our knees. Joseph displayed this negative fear when he said, *"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"* But fearing in this negative way shouldn't be ongoing and lifelong.

The fear of the Lord is positive. It is standing in awe at the infinite power of God. It is worshipping. It is amazement at His presence.

The fear of the Lord is present in heaven. Revelations 15:4 says, *"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee."*

If we properly feared God, we could eliminate most other fears: loneliness, loss, disappointments, as well as storms, snakes, and spiders.

In Exodus 1:15-22, we have the account of the Israelites in Egypt. A new king had taken rule who feared the Israelites' rapidly multiplying

population. He asked the Hebrew midwives to kill any Hebrew sons. However, the midwives chose to fear God (v. 17). Despite the risk to their jobs, families, and even their lives, they *"saved the men children alive."* As a result, God made them houses (v. 21).

When you fear God properly, you never question what He asks of you.

Has God changed since the days in Egypt?

Applications for us today:

1. True knowledge is always found in the fear of the Lord. *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding"* (Proverbs 9:10). You must KNOW God and keep Him in His exalted place. A. W. Tozer says, "The low view of God is the cause of a hundred lesser evils." We dare not diminish God and try to bring Him down to our level.

2. We need an awareness of the constant presence of God. Jacob, in Genesis 28:16,17 said, *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not...How dreadful [awesome] is this place!"* Without a proper fear of the Lord in my heart, God's presence means little.

3. Understanding God's love brings a proper fear of the Lord. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18,19). If we really

understood the price that was paid, we would be a lot less careless with our lives. You can't just "go with the flow" or "follow your heart," you must fear and obey the Lord.

What is my duty? We can never pay God back, but we owe Him:

- Love. We must love God supremely.
- Trust. We have complete trust that God will care for us.
- Obedience. We are willing to follow God's will regardless of the cost.

Millions of Christians in America love Jesus, but they don't fear God.

A prominent TV evangelist secretly lived in adultery and corruption in the midst of his ministry. When interviewed in prison as to when he stopped loving Jesus, he said he never stopped loving Him, but he stopped fearing Him.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).

[Submitted by Charity Graber. Adapted from a message preached by Maurice Graber. Used by permission.]



A Woman After God's Heart

Joy in the Crevices

Sheryl Zeiset, Tanzania, East Africa



A few years ago, I was wallowing in emotional and physical burnout, trying to adjust to life outside the African village we had called home for eight years. Depression and fear were a regular part of my life. As I slowly crawled out of the hole I was in (a hole I never realized I had fallen into until it was too late for an easy remedy), I began to notice beauty.

In those intense years of ministry and language learning in the village, spending time on beauty seemed like a waste of time. And, honestly,

we lived in a village with very little beauty to offer, the only brightness being the vibrantly-colored clothing the women wore. The mud houses, the flat landscape, and dust everywhere were daily life for most months of the year. Though I'm a lover of peace, quiet, and beautiful things, I made very little space in my life for any of it, even the things I could have done in that environment.

We now live in an easier place; the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. Here there is fresh air and sunshine

the whole year long, flowers of all kinds, and a lovely house with smooth floors and freshly painted walls. And it's now that I realize how important beauty is to the soul and how important it is to actually notice the beautiful things in my life and create beauty at every possible moment.

Being a mother and homemaker, no matter where in the world God has placed us, is a beautiful thing in itself if we really see it for what it is. It's easy to complain about the daily mundane things that make up my life, the constant dust, or the fact that I'm cooped up in our compound week after week. But I have been surprised with joy. Here are a few things I love to do to keep life fresh and inspiring...

...Writing

I especially like to write about the goodness and faithfulness of God. True joy comes from Him, not my circumstances. I've believed that for years, but it's just recently that I've actually experienced this reality. My focus is so easily honed in on the things that I wish would be different, thinking that without the uncertainty and difficulties, I'd be happy. I now realize that difficulties have very little to do with the amount of joy found in my heart. Instead, we can allow difficulties to teach us what true joy is and where it comes from.

...Keeping a reasonably clean,

pleasant house

I try to get rid of the extras and replace the dirty, the dingy, and the ugly with something that is beautiful and lovely. Get rid of the limp, ugly curtain in the schoolroom and replace it with a fresh yellow one (yes, even if it does take a few dollars to do so, I remind my penny-pinching soul).

...Clearing off all horizontal surfaces

One of my goals is to clean off all flat surfaces in my house and leave only pleasant, tasteful things. I function so much better if my house is a restful, orderly place. Even though with five children, restful and orderly are relative terms, I'm learning that the rush and mess and noise of a family are beautiful too. It makes the clean floor all the more amazing and thankworthy because it's a rare experience.

...Doing something fun with my children

I like to plan something fun to do with my children, such as a fun science project or an outing. Our favorite is outings to the flower gardens, which are grown here in town along the roadside as a showcase to give other people ideas of how to grow and care for flowers. Tucked into corners here and there, I find all the common flowers I was used to seeing in the States. It's delightful and even more fun when

some of the children share my love for growing things.

...Serving food tastefully

Even rice and beans can be served in pretty bowls instead of the messy pots they were cooked in. Raid your local market and you will be surprised what you can find in glassware and other beautiful dishes that brighten your table.

...Speaking cheerfully

Speak cheerfully—to the laundry lady, the house helper, or the neighbor. I can't spend a lot of time in ministry with people other than my children, but there are always people coming around that I can touch with a smile, kindness, or any help they need. It's easy to be peeved over the fact that the produce vendor can't remember NOT to come in the morning while I'm teaching school, and her voice at the door interrupts us again. And what do math facts, bread dough, and dirty floors really have to do with joy? How does the noise of life and cantankerous personalities blend with the eternal? It's all mixed up in my heart, often with the dusty realities on top and threatening to spill over, but if I give in to peevish attitudes, that is a true joy killer.

...Spending time appreciating the beauty of nature

This rests my mind and draws my heart to God. Though I've never lived in the Garden of Eden or

places of equal beauty, there's always something to notice, something as small as a patch of green grass struggling to survive the dry season (which is a season of trial for me here in this country). It's cold (45 degrees or colder in the morning). The green growth and refreshing rains are over. Everything green is dying or has long been dead. Even the house roofs have lost their color as the dust covers every possible surface and threatens to suffocate the inspiration out of humans as well. Even the mountain in view from my kitchen window has lost its beautiful patchwork of gardens and fields. It stands bare and sober, waiting with bated breath for rain—just like my heart. But I've delighted in one little patch of earth in our back yard that I keep watered. There are peace lilies, roses, hibiscus, and other bright flowers blooming, and succulents growing in delightful little pots. I lug heavy buckets of water to that spot and sometimes take all five of my children on the city buses to visit yet another flower garden in search of more flowers. It's not a waste of time for me, as that little spot in my backyard during this dry season refreshes my heart over and over again!

...Practicing gratefulness

With a very busy husband, I don't have a lot of time with him, and he doesn't have a lot of time for carefree time with the children. However,

I'm making it a habit to notice the small things that do happen, like looking out my kitchen window and seeing him sitting on a mat with the girls, just enjoying them. I stand and watch, thanking God for that moment. It could have gone unnoticed, especially if my heart was full of peevish ungratefulness. Noticing the tiny flashes of joy throughout my day eventually makes my life seem full of joy, though in reality, my life has plenty of trials and challenges.

Yes, life hasn't brought a lot of serendipity my way. There have been a lot of tears, but that's not my focus anymore, as I purposefully bring beauty into every possible crevice of my life and delight in the surprise of joy. My quest is to allow my home and this tiny space on this earth to be a place where God's kingdom comes.

It can't be all about happy things, peace, and serendipity, because that isn't given to me. It's got to be all about something really good going on in my heart and how that affects everything that my hands touch. My heart can be declaring the works of the Lord as I see Him using trials in my life to build my faith and the faith of others looking on. In that way His kingdom comes into this small place, in this little crevice of life, in this space, empty of inspiration, except for His amazing grace, which turns trial into joy.

[This article was first published in the September 2019 issue of Earthen Vessels, a free monthly e-zine for sisters living abroad. To subscribe, send your name, address, and country to earthenvessels19@gmail.com. Used with permission.]



Dinah Learns About God's Grace

Matthew Yoder, Hartville, OH

[This is a fictional story about grace. The characters are a product of the author's imagination.]

In the land of Israel, in the time of King Solomon, there was a young girl named Dinah.

Now Dinah was not an Israelite. She was a Canaanite girl. Many years before, the people of Israel had conquered the Canaanite lands and destroyed many cities. But some

Canaanites remained in the land. The Bible says that in the time of King Solomon, he put the Canaanites to work as his slaves. He made them build cities for him.

Now that doesn't seem very fair, does it? But that's what he did. And Dinah's family was put to work just like the other Canaanites.

King Solomon had made the land of Israel very wealthy, especially the

city of Jerusalem. He built a beautiful palace for himself and an amazing temple for God. Dinah had heard all about Jerusalem, and she wanted to see it for herself. She knew the Israelites would go to Jerusalem and they could see those beautiful buildings. But Dinah's family had never been to Jerusalem. Her father said, "We are Canaanites. We are poor. We can't go to the temple. We have to work for King Solomon." And so Dinah was sad. Canaanites must not be good enough to see God's temple, she thought.

There were Israelite men who were in charge of the work. Some of them were compassionate and felt sorry for the Canaanites whom they were in charge of. One of them was named Nathan. He was a man from the tribe of Judah and lived in a town called Beth-zur.

When Dinah was seven years old, her mother got sick and died. And when she was 10 years old, her father had an accident while he was working. A large stone fell and hit him in the head, and he died. Dinah was left without a family.

Nathan felt sorry for Dinah. Nathan and his wife, Judith, only had one older son, and Nathan decided to adopt her into his family. That means that Nathan and Judith became her new mother and father. So Dinah

went to live with them. It was a hard time for her, but Nathan and Judith were kind, and she began to feel like she had a home again.

Dinah told Nathan that she had never been to Jerusalem. So Nathan decided that they should go on a family trip to Jerusalem to see it. Nathan had brothers who lived in Jerusalem and worked for King Solomon. So Nathan said they would go and stay at one of his brothers' houses.

Dinah couldn't believe it. She wasn't good enough to go to Jerusalem. She was just a Canaanite. In the month before they were to go on their trip, Dinah didn't behave herself very well. One day she stole food when she could have just asked and Judith would have given her some. Some days she lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She insulted her friends and fought with them. She disobeyed Judith and stuck out her tongue at her. Finally, a couple days before they were to go on their trip, Nathan sat her down to talk about the latest bad thing she had done. "I know what you're going to do," Dinah said, sniffing. "You're not going to take me to Jerusalem, are you?"

Nathan hadn't thought about that. But suddenly, Dinah's behavior started to make sense to him. She

thought she wasn't good enough to go see Jerusalem. So she was proving that she was so bad she shouldn't be anywhere near the city of God.

Nathan said, "Are we going to Jerusalem as a family?" Dinah nodded, her brown eyes wide and her face streaked with tears. "Are you part of this family?" Nathan asked. She nodded again. "Then you're going too," Nathan said. "There will be consequences for the bad things you do, but you're part of this family and we're going together."

Dinah didn't improve her behavior right away. She did more bad things until they got to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, they saw the strong walls surrounding the city; they saw many nice houses. Dinah was used to houses made of rough stones or bricks, with floors of clay dirt. But in Jerusalem the houses were made of polished stones, with wood paneling on the walls inside the houses, and the floor was made of large smooth stone slabs. They went to the temple, which gleamed with gold paneling on the walls, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord on the altar.

That evening, at her uncle's house in Jerusalem, Nathan prayed with Dinah before her bedtime. She was very different from how she had been acting before. She was tired and quiet, but he could tell she was thinking about something.

"So, how was your day in Jerusalem?" he asked her.

Dinah said, "Father, I finally got to see all the wonderful things in Jerusalem. But it wasn't because I was good. It's because I'm yours."

Now this is a story about grace. Dinah knew she didn't deserve to see the beautiful city of Jerusalem. She didn't deserve to be part of Nathan's family. But Nathan loved her and accepted her as part of his family anyway. That is how God loves us. We don't deserve to be part of God's family. But if we repent of our sins and let Jesus into our hearts, God makes us His children. It's not because of anything good we did to earn it, but because He loved us and made a way for us to live with Him forever.

[Written for a school devotional.]



The trouble with being
punctual is that nobody is
there to appreciate it.



Dear Passionate Children

RoseAnna Stalter, New Concord, OH

Introduction: The Scripture below has puzzled me for years. I couldn't see why Jesus could think we should be like children when the Bible also says, "Grow up!" in I Corinthians 13:11, Hebrews 5:12-14, and I Corinthians 14:20, to name a few references.

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a LITTLE child unto him and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as LITTLE children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this LITTLE child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such LITTLE child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these LITTLE ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:1-6).

Have you any idea what a millstone is like? Imagine the speed at which you would travel and the pressure of the waters. You would be dead before you reached the ocean floor. If such

a punishment is meet for an offense, indeed, children are precious!

Why?

Well, that is not the point of this parchment, but it may enhance it so I will share my passion.

- Children are very impressionable, and not just probably! You noticed the word "little" in the quoted Scripture? The Roman Catholic Church says, "Give us a child until he is seven years old and you may have him the rest of his life. He will never depart from what we taught him." Communists say, "It is illegal to teach any religion to anyone under 18."

Are we teaching children as seriously as we should? Do we have them taught so securely by age seven that they will never depart from it? Can we? Should we?

- Children have a longer future than we do. What a purpose for passing on our faith! They will be effective long after we are gone. That is what well-meaning people mean when they say, "My children are the only thing I can take to heaven with me." I thought only God can take people to heaven. I thought our ultimate purpose for being here was to glorify God, to be Christ to people, and to "keep Christ" on the earth. We

cannot take anyone to heaven.

So... we all believe children are precious and now you know my reasons for believing so. I studied children a month, to observe how and why Jesus should want me to be like children. Here are the results of my study.

1. Little children are soft sponges, yes, even the toughest of them. (Or maybe my world/experience/knowledge is only a drop in the bucket compared to what is out there.)

Are you willing to be soft and fleshy even when it means that you are vulnerable and obviously open to pain? Or would you rather be a heart riveted with overlapping steel plates?

2. Little children offer their best without embarrassment. Misspelled words are written south-south-east on a recipe card for an apology or a thank you note. You might get a cracked plate, or a fistful of stressed flowers. "Here, Annie, I picked these for you!" One of them sang a song I badly needed—off key—and then she said, "That song was for you, Annie." They try to talk and walk even though their talk sounds childish and their walk looks hilarious (NOT making fun here). Because of this they're at a great place to learn because they're not afraid of messing up.

Can we give our simple pleasures

and gifts without apology?

3. When children are rebellious and disobedient, their parents are very sad and maybe even hurt.

Do we know what it feels like to be in a place of authority over individuals who care for nothing but themselves? Do we realize that God feels the same way toward us at times? Can we imagine that? Do we give them as many chances and keep forgiving them and staying firm with them as many times as God does for us?

4. Children don't worry about whether they deserve something or not; they just accept it.

Can we?

5. Children need someone else to guide them, someone else to show them right from wrong, and someone else to point out that they are in the wrong just as much as the next person.

Do we allow someone else a voice?

6. Children rest. When they are all asleep in their beds at night, the house may be in havoc, but they're at peace.

Do we know how to leave the care of this house in the warm, workworn hands of our Jesus? Do we know that it's wrong to worry?

7. Children are so real. They tell you interesting things whenever they feel like it, no matter who's

listening. Two weeks ago, a mother was combing her daughter's hair and telling her all about heaven. She said in heaven we will sing all the time. The five-year-old piped up with great conviction, "Annie will go there someday!" (because I like to sing). That day I had been very confused. Every path seemed to have too many potholes. Besides, I felt way too little and lonely and scared to be driving my own car. I wondered where the foot of the Cross was, and I wondered if I was there yet. It's not like I didn't have a good map. A little child prophesying my singing in heaven melted all the ice on the

road. Everything will be okay.

Are you doing okay, child? And are you real enough to give such encouragement as this to your friends?

8. Children are changed and made comfortable by a smile. It shows in all their body language. I have seen that a lot in teaching school. I see children looking at me with big eyes. So, I am sure to make eye contact and smile, and they visibly relax.

We need reassurance often, right? And no, people will not always be there to give it to us. So tune in and listen for God's smile. A Holy Spirit smile is audible in the heart!



Contentment is not
the *fulfillment* of what
you want, but the
realization of what
you already have.

CAMBODIA, Chhom's Life Story (Part 2)

Friedrich Miller, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Through working on the well-drilling team I became acquainted with Ken and Jonathan Gingerich. They wanted to learn how to drill wells, and followed our well-drilling team. I noticed that they bowed their heads and prayed before they ate. It seemed strange. But I thought Christianity was only a foreigner's religion. I heard that Christian children don't respect their parents, but Larry Gingerich's family was nice. I pitied them because they were far from home and different with their religion and wore that strange veiling on the women's heads.

I spent more and more time with the Gingeriches. We started drilling wells for poor village people as we had the funding.

Davy and I fell in love and were married in her hometown in 2011. Our wedding cost \$2,500. I didn't have much money. To pay for the wedding, my parents sold more land and took out a bank loan. Davy and I got married three months before leaving the Trailblazer Organization to work for the Gingerich family.

Neither of us knew Jesus. When Davy was pregnant with our first

child, we thought we didn't have enough money to pay for renting a house, so we decided she would move in with her family. I would stay in Siem Reap to continue working. This wasn't a good plan. I was staying in a house with ungodly men. When Rachit was born, Davy needed to have a C-section, and my family stayed with the Gingerich family during the recovery. Following this, Davy and I stayed together and rented a house for our family in Siem Reap.

One Saturday evening, I was confused why Ken didn't want us to finish the well project on Sunday. Ken said they always rest and worship on Sunday. He challenged me to join them for church that week. I obliged mostly out of curiosity. Also, since I love music, I wanted to hear the singing. I went to church with the Gingerich family. Pastor Gong and Teacher Pheng kept in touch with me from that Sunday forward. One of them would usually call me on Saturday evening to invite me to come to church. I tried to make excuses, but I knew if I wouldn't go to church I would just end up

drinking beer and hanging out with the wrong crowd. They invited me to join a Bible study. It was all so new and unfamiliar. They persisted and kept encouraging me to come back.

As I drilled wells, I asked a lot of questions, and Ken patiently explained things to me. Eva gave me my first brand-new Bible. The Gingerich family left when Allen Helmuths came. I continued to learn about singing and worship, how to be a good husband, and so much more. I learned more English with Matt Schmidt.

Eventually, I was baptized in Pastor Gong's church. There were still many things I didn't understand about living a faithful Christian life. I still spent time with my bad friends and drank beer occasionally. I saw the Christians' example, and thought it was good. I had friends who would call me to come join their parties and who would also come to our house.

One evening, my friends came over to our house, and as usual I asked Davvy to get some food. She dutifully killed and prepared a chicken while we kept on drinking. I was very surprised when Allen Helmuth came to pay us a visit. As he came to our little group, my friends welcomed Allen to join and have a drink as well. Allen had tears in his eyes as he addressed us, saying that this isn't

good that we drink beer. He told them that I was now a Christian, and that I shouldn't be drinking. Then right in front of me he also asked my wife if she likes when I drink like this. She confidently spoke up and said, no, she does not like it.

This really got my attention and made me think deeply about what direction I wanted to go in life. What was I supposed to do? Did I have to leave all my friends, or what? I slowly stopped drinking so much, and got rid of my police radio. Then I started noticing that if I don't drink, it saves money. As I stopped drinking, my family could eat good food, and my wife started trusting me. She could smell my breath if I did drink. When she saw me change, she went all the way with God too. She told her family to not call us anymore when they gathered to do Buddhist rituals. We were on the other side now, and God was changing us. Her family still appreciates Christianity, as Jesus made us become better people.

My own mom and dad denied Christianity. I had been a "manuuu kohit" (bad person), because earlier I drank and didn't help them financially.

They said if they could get freedom from the evil spirits, they would give their lives to God. Sometimes they would see a shadow coming and then

they would shake with fear. As a first step, they burned all the items in or around their house that had anything to do with Buddhism and spirit or ancestor worship. Shortly thereafter, a spirit came again. This time they prayed, and the spirit left.

After this, my mom believed in Jesus, and my dad followed. Mom was able to read slowly. She started reading the Bible. They learned more with Elton as he came to SALT groups in their area. We had happy times together at Elton's house, singing, praying, and studying the Word.

When I started following Jesus, I lost friends, but now I have many good Christian friends in our church and in Arising Light Organization. I

still run into some of my old friends. I see what a bad path I had been on. Many of them are divorced with broken relationships or are addicted to alcohol. I want to invite my old friends to come and show them the right way. Last year one of these friends, Dy, reached out to me and said that he committed his life to the Lord. He believes that we can help each other witness to our old friends and show them a better way.

I have a goal to be the very best dad that I can be. I want my whole family to know and believe in Jesus. God called me to be a pastor. It's a big responsibility. I am still learning and growing. I want to give my best for Jesus Who died for me.



youth messages

God Needs Faithfulness, Not Rizz

Ryan Stoltzfus, Dobson, NC

Every Sunday morning, while my small church is setting up chairs at the local community building in Dobson, NC, scores of church employees are preparing for a crowd of 1,800 an hour south of us. Janitors make the final cleaning round, the musicians practice for worship, and greeters prepare to welcome guests. Then at 9:30 the

doors swing open and hundreds flock in. After the people settle into their seats, the band hypes the crowd with worship music, playing hits like “Won’t Stop Now,” “Do It Again,” and “LION.” Then the music is over and the pastor walks onto the stage, sporting designer clothes and a casual persona. He delivers a sermon reminiscent of a TED talk

and littered with jokes and pop culture references.

This is Elevation Church, a multi-campus megachurch started by celebrity pastor Steven Furtick that sees a weekly attendance of over 17,000 across its 19 locations. The church is widely known for its worship band, Elevation Worship, and the worship music they produce that is sung by thousands of churches worldwide.

Why do so many people attend Elevation Church? I'm sure there is no one reason. No doubt the Grammy-winning music team attracts many people. Others might like the festive party atmosphere. Still others may be genuine seekers.

But I can guess another significant reason: Steven Furtick himself. Energetic, engaging, charming, the church is clearly built around his dynamic personality. He can preach well, he's dressed in the latest style, and he walks the stage with an air of relatability.

The personal charm that surrounds people like him is coveted by many and is something we call charisma. While it's difficult to define, it's generally known as a personal magnetism or charm that arouses enthusiasm, passion, or devotion in others. People who have charisma can influence and galvanize people

to action, convincing them to invest in something larger than themselves. Charisma makes a person interesting and engaging.

Charisma can be used for good or ill. In Acts, Luke describes Apollos in a way that would surely identify him as one with charisma. Other leaders in both the Old and New Testaments were charismatic and persuasive. Yet the same personality traits that enable someone to convince people to do good things can also enable that same person to convince others to do incredible evil. Charisma has enabled people like Adolf Hitler to manipulate individuals, crowds, and entire nations.

People have always desired charisma, but it seems to have become even more admired and sought after in recent years. In 2023, the Oxford word of the year was rizz, a shortened form of charisma. Largely because of social media, appearance, style, and stage presence have become essential to being someone of significance. You will become famous much faster by looking good onscreen than you will by being humble and kind.

This gets to the core of it: contemporary culture teaches us to value charisma over almost everything else. It's a mindset that's easy to adopt; I am often envious of those who are better at speaking

and writing. I wish for a magnetic personality like other people I know. I want to be able to make friends and influence people, to be somebody whom others admire.

In the middle of the culture's swirl of influencers and celebrity, it's easy to forget Jesus' thoughts about it all. While He uses charisma in His Kingdom, the people with charm aren't the ones who are praised in Scripture. In fact, Jesus makes it pretty clear that He would rather work with people who are completely the opposite of the charming, attractive ideal.

It's bad enough without social media; Jesus' disciples struggled with this upside-down concept even without TikTok. Matthew records the disciples asking who will be greatest in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus' answer was simple and straightforward: become like a child. He uses people who appear to be small, weak, and insignificant. Familiarity with the words of Jesus has jaded us to how shocking the Sermon on The Mount really is. Blessed are the poor, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who are persecuted.

We see the principle of the last being first woven throughout the entire story of the Bible. God bypasses the strong, charismatic types and reaches for the weak people, the

people who are—as Tim Mackie calls them—“powerless nobodies.” They are the people who may not have a trace of charisma but humbly recognize their problems and choose to follow Jesus. We all know this, but it's hard to believe and easy to forget.

I have several distinct memories of going to church when I was young, one of them being of the church janitor. The janitor and his wife always arrived at church early, making sure the lights were turned on, the thermostats were adjusted, and the pews were clean. It was a job that took ongoing time and dedication and probably went unnoticed by most of the church members.

Yet, according to every metric in the teachings of Jesus, the humble services that this janitor and his wife offered the church were every bit as important as Billy Graham's crusade in Seoul, South Korea, in which 1.1 million people gathered for the final evening. God uses what we have to offer, and that is enough.

Charisma is vital to the world, but not to God. At the end of the day, He wants faithfulness more than fervor, godliness more than giftedness, childlikeness more than charm. God uses charisma, yes. But He much prefers faithfulness. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise.



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A smile adds a great deal of face value.

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Health is wealth, and it's tax free.

• • • • •

It's all right to hold a conversation, but let go of it now and then.

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An ounce of don't-say-it is worth a pound of didn't-mean-it.

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Doing what you like is freedom. Liking what you do is happiness.

• • • • •

A man about to speak the truth should always have one foot in the stirrup.

• • • • •

There's plenty of room at the top. There's just no room to sit down.

• • • • •

We need some clouds in our lives to make a beautiful sunset.

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Love is a game that two can play—and both can win.

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Rust ruins more tools than overuse does.

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A goal is a dream with a deadline.

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Never let yesterday use up today.

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Don't expect applause—deserve it.

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Blessed are those who give without remembering and receive without forgetting.