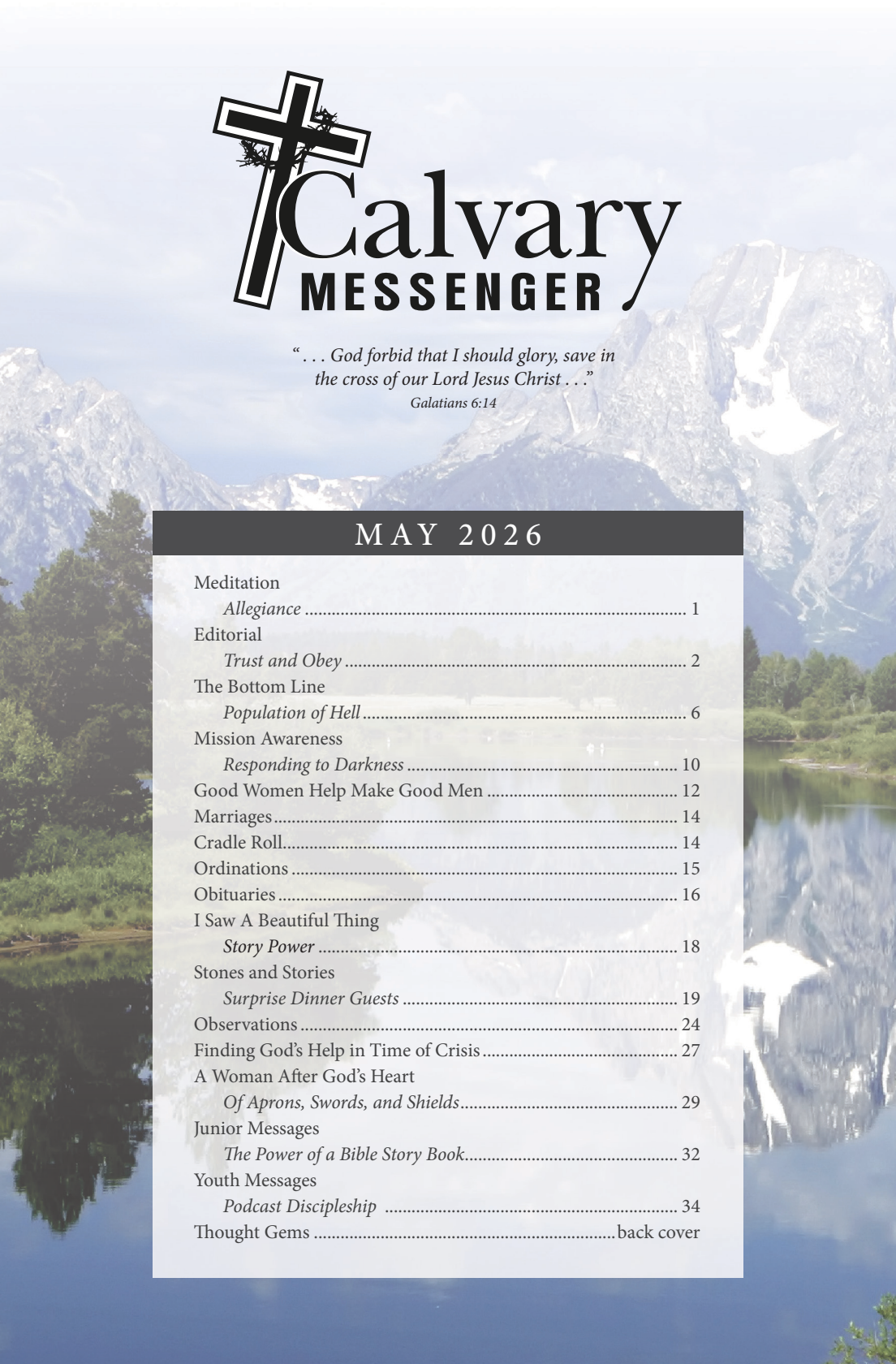




Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

MAY 2026

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Calvary Messenger

May 2026

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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Allegiance

Richard Stoltzfoos, Burgettstown, PA

We live in the United States,
But to God's reign belong,
As oil from water separates,
We join in stronger song.

Through pleasure, teach us gratitude,
That we may not require
To learn through pain that attitude,
Or learn our thanks by fire.

Lord, make us not afraid of pain,
Though we are all afraid,
And have to fleeting Pleasure's reign
Our sacrifices made.

Let us meet pain's thorn-jagged whips
With love to correspond,
A breath of song upon our lips
To Him that is beyond.

Could we, before Your final call,
Unstrap our earthly bands,
And sorrows, fears, and pleasures all
Commend into Your hands?

Trust and Obey

At a recent ordination we attended, the congregation was quietly waiting on God's leading. They had given their votes, and two brethren were sharing the lot. Whom had God chosen to be their future deacon? The tone of the evening focused on trust, obedience, peace, and sacrifice. Let's look at how these concepts work out in the daily challenges we encounter.

Peace

The first song we sang that evening was "Like a River Glorious." The author of this song, Frances Havergal, wrote of the peace of God as a flowing river, growing deeper every day. But her peace in God came from her consecration to Christ (Take my life, and let it be...), devotion to her Saviour, her love of the Bible, and her habit of prayer.¹ As the song goes, she found peace in the hollow of His hand where no foe could follow. Her confidence was that every joy or trial came from the God of love. She found that **"they who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true."** Peace doesn't come from the absence of storms or trials, but where we rest—in the hollow of His hand (her mother died when Frances was 11, and she died at age

42). The testimony of the brother who was chosen that evening—this was before the service—was that he has peace in his heart "as much as you can have at a time like this." May both of the brethren find their continued location in the hollow of His hand.

Trust

We also sang the song, "All the Way My Saviour Leads Me" that evening.² There are many things that come to God's followers that make us question God. Even Joshua, who was one of God's most faithful servants in the wilderness and conquest story of the children of Israel, questioned God. After the devastating defeat at Ai, he fell on his face before God and questioned why God would bring them across the Jordan to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites. *"Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"* (Joshua 7:8-9 NIV). Surely, Joshua should have remembered how God had led them in the past 40 years, but how do

I respond when situations disappoint me? As with peace, trust is based on our proximity to the heart and hands of God, not on making sure we have “all our ducks in a row.” It may be sin, as in the case with the defeat at Ai, but often it is the events that we encounter that seem to be out of our control. God will lead us all through life, and our trust will continue to grow as we understand more of God’s character and remember His faithfulness in the past. Our “weary steps may falter, and my soul athirst may be,” but if we seek to quench our thirst in God, we can expect the Rock to satisfy us with a gushing spring of water of joy—every day and all the way!

Obey

The chorister lead us in the song, “When We Walk with the Lord” during the ordination that evening. John H. Sammis penned this powerful poem after being sent a letter from Daniel Towner, the composer of this song. “The inspiration for the hymn came from a testimony given during one of Dwight L. Moody’s revival meetings in Brockton, Massachusetts. A young man stood up and declared, ‘I am not quite sure—but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.’ These simple yet profound words struck a chord with Towner, who jotted them down and sent them to Sammis. Upon receiving Towner’s letter, Sammis

penned the now-famous refrain: Trust and obey—for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”³

I suppose all of us have walked with a young child, whether our own or not. At times the child may take hold of one of our fingers. When he does this, he is able to let go and run at his will. There are also times when we hold the child’s hand in ours, keeping him from slipping or falling when the pathway is treacherous. But in the most dangerous times, we will pick up the child and hold him in our arms. This might be to protect him from an animal or when we sense fear in the child’s heart. As the song goes, we can be assured of God’s protection if we faithfully walk with Him, holding His hand. Which comes first, trust or obedience? Our most simple obedience shows our trust in Him, even though experience with Him may be new. As we continue to understand God, through reading His Word, our obedience will grow as we learn to understand His character and unfailing love. The best way to prove “the delights of His love” is to lay everything on the altar in sacrifice to Him.

Sacrifice

The title of one of the sermons that evening was “The Surrendered Servant.” Surrender is not only needful

for ordained men but for all of God's servants regardless of gender or age. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" While we recoil from the thought of dying for our faith, the challenge of a living sacrifice is not a one-time event. The apostle Paul said, "*I die daily.*" Paul also talked about the challenges he faced in life. He gladly wore the "marks" of this battle for the sake of Jesus. "*Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh*" (II Corinthians 4:10-11). His living sacrifice was possible because of the power of Christ's resurrection.

In his book, *Safely Home*, Randy Alcorn says we should be ready for the altar or service, the living sacrifice. "A good follower of Jesus is like the ox—ready either for the plow or the altar, for service or for sacrifice."⁵

In the daily grind of living, there is always the question of whether we should speak up or be quiet, whether we should fight or accept. For this we need the wisdom of God. The prayer

of serenity begins with this request to God. God promises His grace for the difficulties today and asks us to trust Him for all the tomorrows.

"God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever and ever in the next. Amen."⁶

May we sacrifice all of our selfishness on the altar of obedience to God's Word. We have His promise that His peace will rest upon us as we trust Him for each today! **They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.**

1. <https://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/bhavergal5.html>

2. "All the Way My Saviour Leads Me," Fanny Crosby

3. <https://hymndex.com/john-h-sammis/>

4. I Corinthians 15:31

5. *Safely Home*, Randy Alcorn, 2001, Tyndale House Publishers

6. Reinhold Neibuhr, 1892-1971



Announcement

Editor Transition

Over the next few months, Bro. Glen Bontrager will be taking on the role of editor of this publication. Glen lives in VA and attends Faith Mission Fellowship. Please send all general article submissions, along with Cradle Roll, Marriages, Ordinations, Obituaries, and general announcements to Glen at editor.calvarymessenger@gmail.com. If he gets the support that many of you have given me over the past years, he will be able to carry this work forward with joy.

Thank you, to the Calvary Publication Board who gave me feedback and encouragement and for finding able writers for the monthly columns. Also, thank you to the monthly editors for your well-written and thoughtful articles. This variety of subjects and articles ministers to the various age and gender groups within the readership. And to those who have submitted poems, meditations, and other articles, thank you! If any of the rest of you have an inspiration that has not made it past a thought in your mind and heart, please follow God's leading and accept the challenge to write! May this work continue on for God's glory!

AY

Announcement

2026 Youth Fellowship Meetings

The 2026 Youth Fellowship Meetings are scheduled for July 24-26, 2026.

Hosting communities are as follows:

Northeast - Valley View Amish Mennonite, Belleville, PA
Southeast - Montezuma Amish Mennonite, Montezuma, GA
Western - Believers Fellowship, Grove City, MN

Contact: Clifford Bontrager, 540.717.4220

Population of Hell

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

In the previous three issues of *Calvary Messenger*, we have looked at the populations of the world, of Amish and Beachy churches, and of heaven's possible population. Here now, we will try to address the multitudes that the Bible speaks of that will be cast into hell. This is not an easy subject to consider, neither is it good news of itself.

First off—How many people have ever lived here on this earth since the Creation by God Almighty? Any numbers can only be given as an estimate. Human history is roughly a duration of 6000 years. Divide that by 30 years per generation, and we are looking at 200 human generations. Three generations have been living together year by year, but often four generations in more modern times. That would give an average complete turnover every three and one-half generations. So how many might have lived in each three and one-half generational span?

This would be a great exercise for either those majoring in math, or those who have a philosophical bent in their cognitions! Another interesting twist to throw into these speculative exercises is to think of the era where some people lived to be 900 years old.

Men and women in the western

world have variously published concerns about having a fear of our planet becoming over-populated anywhere beyond a total count of 10 billion people. Serious fears are enumerated about sustainable food. Demographers keep one eye on the total worldwide population and one eye on worldwide food stocks, weather patterns, and sufficient drinking water.

The most pressing question that surfaces for this article is how many of our current eight billion are saved with a Bible-based assurance that they will be received into heaven when they die? And what about the rest of the billions who are unprepared to meet God, the Judge of the whole earth, when they pass away from this life? Out of a total world population, could it be possible that 1 billion are saved. Of course, that many could have been saved from sin, and thus be saved from hell. Jesus can save sinners unto the uttermost, from the "guttermost" to the uppermost, if they have repented from sin and believed on Jesus as the Son of God. The Bible says in Psalm 9:17, "*The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God.*"

We refer to Hebrews 7:25 for a descriptive use of the word "uttermost." "*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God*

by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Strong’s (3956) calls it a primitive word, meaning “all, any, every, the whole.” Additionally, it says its manner is to mean “always, anyone, daily, thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, whosoever.”

Saving people to the uttermost is a complete and thorough work of God, plus is available and effective for all time and to all people, even to the farthest reaches of the world. My article in the last issue, March 2026, explained and sketched the New Jerusalem, the capital center of heaven, and presented the spacious and glorious environs of the mansions promised by Christ, our Savior. God says, “Come,” Jesus says to all the world, “Come,” the Holy Spirit says, “Come to Christ, *and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth*” (unto the uttermost)! Isaiah says, “*Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord, and I will heal him*” (57:19).

If God seems to be far away, who has moved? The Lord is nigh to them who are of a broken spirit, but He is far removed from the wicked. The wicked will go to hell, those who have not believed on Jesus Christ as their needed Savior and are not sorry for having sinned.

Jesus said, “*Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] gate: for WIDE is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which*

go in thereat: because strait [narrow] is the gate, and NARROW is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13, 14). The big question that has often been asked is: who are the many, and who are the few? The many in the United States? Or in the cities? Or is it the many and the few in Europe, Asia, and in Africa? Or in a church split that was very uneven in numbers? Those in the small minority said, “Well, even Jesus said there will be many on the broad road, and few on the narrow way.”

No. None of the above. We could profit from having a better worldview of populations for various reasons. A better view would be to recognize the billions who are lost in sin, destined for hell fire, the eternal place of everlasting burning. Jesus spoke of the rich, unrepentant man, saying, the rich man died, and in hell he looked up and cried for mercy and a drop of water, “*for I am tormented in this flame*.” There is an eternal, everlasting reality for all those who are not saved from sin. This is NOT a parable, as some have said!

Jesus’ view was not of Judaism alone, but the whole world of people unto the uttermost, those far, and those near, even everyone. “*Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it*” (Isaiah 5:14). “*Hell and destruction are*

never full” (Proverbs 27:20a).

Try to visualize people, most of them being on the way to hell. Try to visualize 100,000 people going to hell. Begin to imagine 1,000,000 (1 million) doomed for hell, unless they repent. Or one thousand million (1,000,000,000), and even that is only 1 billion. Now think about this reality of up to 7,000,000,000, which is seven billion! Our planet was increasing at the rate of 82 million (births minus deaths) per year, up until 2020 or so, thus adding another billion every 12 years! The demographers saw it taper off, so that here now in March 2026, it is said to still be increasing, but at a lesser rate.

This is based on only my uninformed guess, in which about 1 billion souls might be caught up to meet Jesus in the air at the last trump. One billion would be relatively few, and seven billion being cast into hell would surely be many, as per Jesus’ teaching and warning. But will one billion be ready for Jesus when He returns for His own? To us, even only one million would seem like “many,” but in relation to eight billion, it would be few. Would it seem safe to estimate the number of the saints who will hear the last trump to be somewhere between one million and one billion? God knows all those who love Him, those whom He has secured.

There is yet another dimension to this equation. How many innocent

children will be in heaven? How many babies who die will be present with the Lord and us? Those who died at birth, or were stillborn? Or those who died in wars, or by accidents, or because of inadequate medical or nutritional needs?

What about those—the thousands, the millions—who have had life ended by abortion? (This is a huge grief to my soul.) Public information has it that currently there are an astounding 125,000 to 200,000 abortions performed every day, worldwide! At the higher number here, that would be 73 million worldwide per year! Some estimate it to be higher than that.

The heartbeat of the fetus has been detected as early as the 18th day after conception. To end that by any intended means is murder, the killing of life. Pain is registered by the killing of life, either before birth or afterwards. Sixty-one percent of unwanted pregnancies end in abortion.

The median age for all people worldwide was 22 years in 1950, and 30 in 2025. The continent with the lowest median age is Africa, at 19.5 years of age. The highest is Europe at this time, at 43.1 years. This low comes with critical implications for the near future. The median age for our Lancaster County Amish is a low of 17 years, meaning one-half of their people are older than 17, the other half are below that age. They have

large families.

One billion, 600 million, in our world are age 12 or younger. We believe that many of the world's children below that age are less accountable to God for their soul's salvation, and so are likely to go to heaven should they die. That age of accountability would likely be lower for children who were taught salvation principles. God is, we confess, fully and righteously capable to constantly and consistently judge on all these matters. All of God's attributes are equal and applicable all the time, which is a very important subject for our primary consideration.

The population of the entire United States is only 345 million, or about one-third of one billion. Or look at it this way, one percent of the world's current population is still only around 82 million people, a vast number compared to our close-knit splinter groups of Christian denominations. It takes a lot of time, energy, and resources just to maintain ourselves as believers, a maintenance worthy of our efforts, of course. What percent of our resources should go toward missions, evangelism, and seeking the lost?

The vast apostolic church beginnings in Asia spread with vitality and great Holy Spirit power, as recorded in the New Testament. However, it has not maintained itself beyond several generations. The greatly celebrated

Anabaptist movement in Europe in the 1500s served as a powerful spiritual awakening among worldly traditional religionists, but did not maintain itself on its own turf beyond several generations. We should not, however, overlook the great evangelistic efforts in Europe, India, China, Africa, and the attendant revivals and spiritual awakenings variously everywhere in the past 500 years.

It would be a big assist to greater numbers of saved persons if all those who become saved could have a higher rate of their children and later posterity who would also be in the fold of Christ. We applaud those who do earnestly put forth valuable effort to disciple their own children. May their numbers increase.

The Bottom Line is: how many customers have you won to your business, or friends in your socializing in your interchange with people on this earth? Can your giftedness from God be utilized likewise for the enterprise of evangelism and soul-winning?

God said to Moses, "*What is that in your hand?*" In thinking of our personality, resources, and spiritual gifts, somewhere and somehow Jesus calls believers everywhere, saying, "*Follow me.*" Jesus came to seek and to save those lost in sin. He calls on Christians everywhere to do the same.

Next: "The Reality and Duration of Hell"



Responding to Darkness

Tim Petersheim, Narvon, PA

Choices. We likely all find ourselves in situations from time to time where we wish there was some way we could make a choice for another person. I recall one situation personally. My family and I had returned to Belize for a visit about a year after moving back to the US. There was a young man, that I knew very well, who had been making some poor choices. During our trip there, I went to visit him and warn him about the current trajectory of his life. I pled with him to consider the consequences of the decisions he was making. This young man did not profess to be a Christian. Although Christianity was appealing to him in a lot of ways, the surrender and sacrifices that came with giving his life to Christ felt too burdensome and restrictive to him. I remember having a good talk together, and he acknowledged he wanted to do better. Sadly though, he failed to take my advice. A few weeks later there was a shooting in the neighborhood, and this young man was charged with murder. He has since been convicted and is currently serving a life sentence in Belize Central Prison.

Every day we make choices. A

lot of the choices we make are inconsequential: the color shirt I choose to pull on in the morning, the kind of meat my wife cooks for dinner, or the make of the vehicle I drive. But a lot of the small choices that we make in life add up to become attitudes and mindsets that impact the kind of persons we are and continue to become. Ultimately, it's our own choices as humans that lead us either to or away from God.

Jesus made this very clear to Nicodemus when in John 3:19, He expressed the sad reality that “...*light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*”

You don't have to be very aware of national and international news to know that there is a lot of pain and evil happening in our world today. We're only a few months into a brand-new year, and already we've seen so much turmoil and destruction happening. The reality is that we live in a broken, sin-cursed world. Most people in our world today are living in darkness, and we can expect dark things to happen when darkness is what influences people.

As “little Christs,” our response to injustice and wrongdoing looks very different from that of mainstream society all around us. Humanity is accustomed to responding to darkness with more darkness. By contrast, we as Christians respond with the light of Jesus. Light brings hope and warmth. It brings clarity. Light has a drawing effect. The light of Jesus is the antidote to the darkness of the world.

Instead of being discouraged and dismayed by current events, or the poor choices of loved ones, acquaintances, or even world powers, we must constantly remind each other that through Jesus Christ, we have the answer to the world's problems. Philippians 2:15 exhorts us to be: “.. *blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*”

As we shine our lights, there will always be people who turn away from the light and are blind to it (II Corinthians 4:4 “...*the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...*”). But even blindness can be cured through Jesus Christ.

- “...*He has sent Me [Jesus] to proclaim liberty to the captives and **recovery of sight to the blind***” (Luke 4:18).

- “*In Him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. **The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it***” (John 1:4-5).

- “*I [Jesus] am the light of the world. **Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life***” (John 8:12).

While Jesus was here on earth opening people's eyes, both physically and spiritually, He faced lots of opposition and adversity. We too should expect opposition. Christianity is often mocked and demeaned, because light doesn't only bring warmth, it also exposes truth. It uncovers and convicts. For this reason, it makes a lot of people uncomfortable.

But remember that people tend to change as circumstances around them change. Just because someone is closed to the light of Jesus right now doesn't mean that they will always be closed. Tragedy, death, sickness, and aging have ways of changing people's perspective and softening their hearts at times. When we faithfully and consistently let our lights shine, I believe the light will find occasions to shine into even the hardest hearts and beckon them to the light of Jesus.

“*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:16).



Good Women Help Make Good Men

Alfredo Mullet, Chilton, TX

Our Creator designed men to be protectors, providers, mentors, counselors, teachers, shepherds, fixer-uppers, great husbands, good fathers, etc. Simply stated, we have an extensive multi-tasked role to fulfill. Now, as God-honoring men, we long to be faithful in our calling; to bear our responsibilities with Christ-like grace and dignity.

These are the kind of men godly women desire and admire; this is what they want in a husband for themselves and in a father for their children. However, after several years of marriage with the added responsibility of raising children on top of maintaining a healthy marriage, a man can become overwhelmed. He is expected to continue to fulfill his multi-faceted role consistently and perfectly.

What women may so often forget is that although we desire and aspire to be all that God has designed for us to become, we are human just like you, with deeply personal needs and wants. You want to be cherished, appreciated, and affirmed by your husband; as husbands, we need the same. When you have your inner

needs met, you can more effectively fulfill your roles; the same is true for us men. You want an understanding heart and a listening ear when you feel too burdened to go on. We do too.

My point in all this is that as men, to a certain extent, we help to make the kind of wife we want and have. It is no different for women. As a woman, you bear a responsibility for the husband you help to create. Thus, you will get out of your husband only as much as you have invested in him; yes, marriage is an investment program!

Now, what do men really desire and need most of all? I believe that these two things, respect and gratitude, are the best gifts we can receive for all our dedicated efforts to fulfill our God-intended vocation as husbands and fathers. Certainly, we know we are not always in perfect tune with our divine calling, so please do not add to the pressure by constantly complaining about our lacks and inefficiencies. This type of behavior will only add to your frustrations and traumatize your children. What you would be doing is undermining our chances at successful masculinity and

sabotaging your own dreams of an ideal and happy family.

If you would accept our God-ordained authority and express appreciation for our well-intentioned, though often feeble and imperfect attempts at Christ-like manhood, perhaps there would be a few less men who may need to patronize counseling centers. Yes, a little more sincere respect and genuine expressions of gratitude could ease our troubled hearts and instill within us a renewed passion to nobly shoulder our manifold responsibilities. I will let you in on a little secret; we men thrive on feminine affirmation! Here is another secret; if we sense your sincere respect and genuine gratitude, we are much more likely to receive your

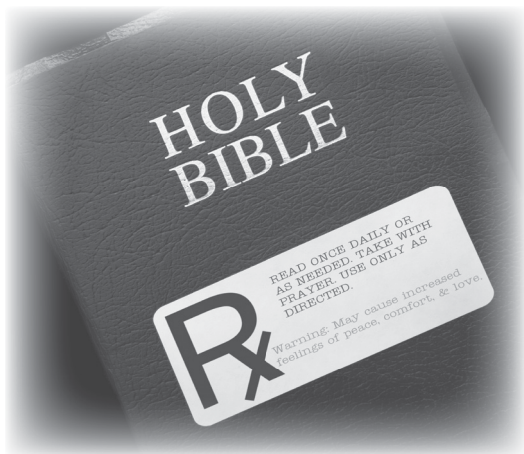
rebukes, corrections, and criticisms gracefully because we know you are doing it so that we can become better men.

In closing, I need to issue a caveat: these are general truths and not to be taken as a foolproof guarantee that if you do your best to respect and thank your husband, he will automatically transform into a lovely prince. You are not responsible if he refuses to assume his divine calling; he must personally choose to submit to Jesus Christ. However, you can rest assured that God will honor your consistent efforts by giving you a clear conscience and blessing your children with a godly example to help offset the detrimental side-effects of an unfaithful or negligent man-of-the-house!



Be glad for all God is planning for you.
Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful.

Romans 12:12



Our choices create the
path
that determines our
journey.

marriages

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

Gerber-Gerber

Bro. Joshua, son of Karen and the late Glen Gerber, Gadshill, ON, and Sis. Kayla, daughter of Joseph and Rhonda Gerber, Linwood, ON, on February 7, 2026, at Faith Mennonite Church for Fairhaven A.M. Church by Arnold Jantzi.

Stoltzfus-Fisher

Bro. Ryan, son of Nathan and Martha Stoltzfus, Mifflinburg, PA, and Sis. Rachel, daughter of Daniel and Lydia Fisher, Mifflin, PA, on March 14, 2026, at South Juniata Baptist Church for Shade Mountain Christian Church by the bride's father.



cradle roll

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

Beachy, Neil and Kathy (Kaufman), Millersburg, OH, second child, first son, Patrick Liam, February 28, 2026.

Byler, Reuben and Dora (Hostetler), Carlton, PA, fourth child and son, Javian Cole, March 4, 2026.

Fox, Nick and Karla (Horst), Harpursville, NY, first child and son, Elijah Quinn, March 21, 2026.

Gingerich, Micah and Maria (King), N. Lewisburg, OH, second child, first daughter, Emma Faye, March 19, 2026.

Klippenstein, Noah and Brenda (Glick), Dundee, NY, first child and son, Carmon Jude, July 5, 2025.

Knepp, Gerald and Jennifer (Stoltzfus), Whiteville, TN, fifth child, fourth daughter, Zayla Brooke, March 10, 2026.

Lehman, Jaran and Leanna (Stoltzfus), Concord, AR, fourth child, second son, Gatlin Chad, March 2, 2026.

Overholt, Josiah and Hannah (King), Vanleer, TN, fourth child, third daughter, Elliana Elizabeth, March 7, 2026.

Peachey, Josiah and Cynthia (Smith), Dundee, NY, first child and daughter, Kiana Nichole, August 26, 2025.

Penrod, Weston and Ranita (Zimmerman), Geneva, NY, first child and daughter, Brynleigh Chantelle, January 23, 2026.

Petersheim, Andrew and Marjorie (Stoltzfus), Gap, PA, sixth child, fourth daughter, Victoria Grace, March 16, 2026.

Reiff, Kody and Sarah (Martin), Rushville, NY, second child, first daughter, Shiloh Bryn, October 22, 2025.

Schlabach, Marcus and Alyssa (Miller), Beach City, OH, third child, first daughter, Brooklyn Elise, February 21, 2026.

Schrock, Matthew and Eva (Beachy), Coshocton, OH, third child, second son, Kyler Matthew, February 25, 2026.

Schrock, Mervin and Ashley (Zook), Vanleer, TN, third child, second son, Eric Timothy, February 2, 2026.

Stoltzfus, Bryan and Lori (Wengerd), Greeneville, TN, second child, first daughter, Eviana Grace, April 3, 2026.

Stoltzfus, Joseph and Courtney (Garman), Coatesville, PA, first child and daughter, MaKensie Reese, March 4, 2026.

Stoltzfus, J. Wendell and Kaylene (Bontrager), Millersburg, OH, sixth child, second daughter, Claudia Rose, March 2, 2026.

Weaver, Darrell and Vanessa (Riehl), Penn Yan, NY, first child and son, Blake Owen, July 1, 2025.

Yoder, Justin and Missy (Good), Henderson, NY, eighth child, second daughter, Ivy Brynn, March 3, 2026.

Zehr, Dylan and Rosina (Jantzi), Millbank, ON, second child and daughter, Kinsley Brynn, March 12, 2026.



ordinations

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

Bro. Allen Ray Fisher, 40, (wife, Sarah Esh), Mohnton, PA, was ordained deacon for Pequea Amish Mennonite Church, Narvon, PA, on March 22, 2026. Preordination messages were brought by Jonathan Martin and Manny Glick. The charge was given by Ben A. Stoltzfus. John Esh, Tim Petersheim, and Andrew Petersheim shared the lot.

Bro. Gary Knepp, 34, (wife, Sarah Raber), Corydon, IN, was ordained minister for Anchor of Hope Mennonite Church on November 23, 2025. Preordination messages were given by Leon Wagler. The charge was given by Milt Kinsinger, assisted by Floyd Lengacher and Joshua Yoder. Nelson Lengacher shared the lot.

Bro. Aaron Miller, 40, (wife, Martha Yoder), Baltic, OH, was chosen by the church and ordained minister at Wellspring Amish Mennonite Church on February 15, 2026. The charge was given by Paul L. Miller, assisted by Javan Miller and Bobby Miller.

Bro. Edward Zimmerman, 33, (wife, Jayna Zimmerman), Penn Yan, NY, was ordained minister for Crystal Valley Mennonite Church on October 26, 2025. The charge was given by Lester Glick, assisted by Floyd King. Chad Stoltzfus shared the lot.



Miller, Ervin H., 77, of Titusville, PA, passed away peacefully at his home surrounded by his family on March 5, 2026, after an extended period of declining health. Ervin was born on June 10, 1948, in Dover, OH, to Henry and Erma (Yoder) Miller, and moved to PA in 1974.

He was a dairy farmer and a brickmason in his early years. He accepted Christ into his heart in his youth. He was a faithful member at Plainview Gospel Fellowship and served there in the ministry for a number of years. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

He will be lovingly remembered by his wife of 51 years, Ruth M. (Schrock); six children: Steven (Anita), Lott, TX; Jason (Esther), Titusville; Regina (Michael) Peachey, Centerville; Delilah Miller, Titusville; Naomi (Joe) Schlabach, Cochran, TX; Tim (Lisa), Townville; 18 grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, sister, Esta Miller, Sarasota, FL; and nephews: Fred Miller, Fredericksburg, VA; Andre and Vahlyn Miller, Sarasota, FL. He will be greatly missed by all.

He was preceded in death by his parents, sisters: Betz Miller, Mary Miller, and grandson, Vincent Peachey.

The funeral was held on March 8, 2026, at Plainview Gospel Church, Guys Mills, with Roy Hershberger officiating.

Schrock, Catharine Joyce, 72, of Grantsville, MD, died on March 12, 2026, at Ruby Memorial Hospital, Morgantown, WV. She was born July 18, 1953, in Meyersdale, PA, to the late Simon and Ruth (Hershberger) Tice.

She was also preceded in death by her husband, Martin Dale Schrock, on January 29, 2022. Marty and Joyce were married July 4, 1981.

Joyce was a member of the Mountain View Mennonite Church in Salisbury, PA. She traveled with the church chorus, The Mountain Anthems, for over four decades. She adeptly handled all record sales, including filling and shipping orders. Joyce had a special way of connecting with children and cared for other chorus members' children during concerts. Many of those relationships lasted beyond chorus days into the present.

Joyce was very active in serving in various capacities of ministry, including the sewing circle, thrift store, teaching Bible class, organizing charity meals, and serving on the church food committee. Joyce didn't know a stranger, and her love for God motivated her to extend kindness and acceptance to many who crossed her path.

Joyce is survived by four sisters and two brothers: Marilyn Tice, Mark Tice, Ella (Jerry) Yoder, Patty Michaels, Steve Tice, Candace (Fred) Knox, all of Grantsville, MD; one son, Steve (Amber) Tice, II, Springs, PA; two grandsons: Felix and Griffin, and five nieces and nephews.

The funeral was held at Mountain View Mennonite Church on March 16, 2026, with Terry Yoder and Derrick Bender serving. The burial was in the church cemetery with Michael Yoder having the graveside service.

Yoder, Rosa Mae, 89, of Arthur, IL, passed away peacefully on January 17, 2026, at Haven of Care surrounded by her family. She was born on August 7, 1936, in Arthur, IL, to Noah and Lucinda (Bontrager) Beachy. On October 23, 1958, she married Mel Yoder. He passed away on May 19, 2019, after 61 years of marriage.

She was a faithful member of Pleasant View Church, Arcola, IL.

Rosa was the mother of six children: Wesley (Wilma); Mary Beth (Rick) Hostetler, both of Arthur; Bill (Ruth), Sarasota, FL; Phil (Sheryl), Harrison, AR; Cindy (Phil) Kauffman, Bee Branch, AR; and Gloria (Moisés) Guadrón, Valparaiso, IN.

She is survived by 20 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, brother, Freeman (Bertha) Beachy, Arthur; and a sister, Mary (Lester) Miller, Arthur.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Mel, her parents, sister, Nettie Beachy, and a great-grandson, Malachi Schubkegel.

Rosa's life was lived by moments woven together through love, learning, and a heart always open to others. She was dedicated to God's Word and expressed her love through her hands. She was talented and loved gardening, sewing, and creating quilts. These were not hobbies but expressions of who she was. Teaching others came naturally. She was willing to share what she knew—gently and without pretense—making others feel capable and welcome.

The funeral was held at Pleasant View Church on January 24, 2026, with Matt Bontrager, Duane Kuhns, and Paul Plank serving. Burial followed in the church cemetery.



The difference between
life and death
is the source.

-Ministers' Meetings 2026

Some of us lean left or right;
it's important to remain upright.

-Ministers' Meetings 2026

Story Power

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

Call me slow, but I'm finally waking to the power of story. Recently, I was reading through the book of Joshua and was fascinated to mark how stories handed down the generations shaped responses to life. The tale of the Red Sea miracle trickled 150 miles over the desert sand to Jericho. Forty years later, a foreign people remembered the story, and their hearts melted in fear.

When word of Jordan's dry-ground crossing flooded into Canaan, heathen people who loved their idols told and retold that story. Is it too strongly stated to say the power of story helped to pave the way for the conquest of Canaan?

I began to listen to the stories of friends and acquaintances with new ears. And also to myself; what stories am I telling? What is amplified in the yarns we spin? (Listen at open mic time at the next wedding for a clue.) Could we better harness the shaping power of story to spread truth and goodness?

When we were dating, Stan mentioned an ideal, and one (should marriage follow dating) he hoped to live out as a family.

That ideal was storytelling at the supper table: specifically, unhurried minutes for children to rehearse the events of their day. In our days of homeschooling, this was prime time to recount scientific discoveries made that day, whether in textbook, watery ditches, or anthills. (Did you know kitchen tools are useful for catching tadpoles?) Sometimes, the telling became an oral book report as they traced the storyline of an audio book that eased the tedium of capping strawberries or snapping beans.

Long winter evenings can be made cozy with great stories. I prize the evenings when the girls clear the table and put away food while Stan washes dishes. Me? Perhaps I'm kneeling on the floor of the dining room, resting book and elbows on a chair as I warm my toes on the register and read aloud to the family. More than once, I have heard them snicker as my tongue slowed and my voice trailed slowly away...the power of story overcome by the power of drowsiness.

Don't overlook the fact that telling your story can be a way of letting others know you and to make God look good. Has someone moved into

your congregation from out of state? What could you learn from their story if you gently asked interested questions? If they are guarded, perhaps offering your own history is a gift that will open the door to a long friendship. This is especially effective when we bravely and honestly name the messy parts, willing to be seen in our imperfections.

Last week, I went on a walk with a lovely young woman I'd just met. On a balmy afternoon in Arkansas, we tramped the red-orange ruts of CR 73, and I told her bits of my story. After a brief pause, she turned to me and asked, "Do you want to hear my story?"

It was not a pretty, put-together and polished piece, but betrayal, heartache, and bewilderment.

Grievous losses strung together and unresolved. Her freckled face was open, and brown eyes sad with knowings. But what was conspicuously and wondrously absent? Neither in word nor attitude did I detect the sharp shards of bitterness and self-pity. Intrigued, I leaned in close and asked, "Where did you find the courage to believe in the goodness of God?"

Her answer was straight-forward and simple. "I watched my mother."

This, friends, is the power of story. A story lived aloud, visible, and vulnerable. Their grief is not done, the struggle toward wholeness is a long one. But a mother's living faith is the story this daughter heard and took to heart.

Oh, what a beautiful thing!



stones and stories

Surprise Dinner Guests

Chris Stoltzfus, Lancaster, PA

Communicating cross-culturally allows much space for miscommunication. Once, when I messaged a friend, he responded with a threat to kill me!

I had simply texted: "If you want to work, I have a small job for you." He had often been available to do small projects when I was remodeling. His

response made me laugh!

"I came from the doctor so I will kill you..."

"Please don't kill me!" I replied.

"Ok, no problem, I will text you!"

We all make such mistakes on text messages! It was clear that he meant that he would call me, not kill me!

Another time, miscommunication

happened when inviting dinner guests. When Sylvia invited them, they replied “I will come if I am not busy.” In a lot of Middle Eastern cultures, we would assume that means they will probably not come and this is an indirect way of saying so. On that occasion we were in for a surprise!

Knock, Knock...Surprise!

Evening meals are a highlight for our family where we often spend an hour around the table, chattering, laughing, and joking. At times it's a bit chaotic but also a very special occasion to connect and talk about the day.

This particular evening, we had soup made with freshly procured pork sausage. Only a few days before I picked up boxes full of sausage, bacon, and ribs from the butcher shop. Our friends had raised the hog on their farmette and were looking to split the meat 50 / 50 so we took them up on the offer.

As we enjoyed our pork sausage soup around the table set for six, we suddenly heard familiar children's voices outside the door. Who could it be, we wondered? I looked at the door latch, and it started to turn. The door was bolted but someone was trying to come in the door.

I thought about Halloween and how we usually pull the blinds on that night so as not to invite trick or treating in our city neighborhood. But it was December and the voices and laughing sounded familiar.

We went to the door and opened it only to find our Sudanese neighbors with food in hand coming for supper!

“Come in!” we said as they stepped out of the cold December night air. Mother, daughters, and granddaughter stepped into our house to a cackle of talking and laughter.

“Sorry we are late,” Khadeja chimed with a huge smile in her accented English.

Among the hugs and smiling, we welcomed them inside. My mind was swirling as I tried to think of an emergency plan for putting food on the table. I peeked into the pot on the table and it was nearly empty! Plus, it included pork, something we never serve when our Muslim friends come over as it is considered very unclean to Muslims.

Cultural Tip: In our experience, even nominal Muslims tend to avoid pork. They may drink, smoke, or even live immorally, but they will not eat pork!

I had no idea what to do as Sylvia is the queen of our kitchen. It is amazing what she can pull together on short notice, but this was taking it a step further. We had no food prepared for them and no suitable leftovers to pull out and quickly prepare!

Finally, my wife blurted out with a laugh, “We didn't know you were coming!”

Everyone, including our friends, laughed at the awkward moment.

I gathered my wits and said, “Come over here,” motioning them to move into the living room. The couch was uninhabitable because Jaxon had made a fort for Daisy (our puppy) on the couch. I cleared away the cushions, positioned them on the love seat so they could sit down, and we were soon busy chatting.

Flurry in the Kitchen

As we talked, my eyes darted back and forth to the kitchen as I wondered what was going to happen. Our son, Chad, soon came up from the basement with a basket of food items. I couldn’t see what was in there, but it seemed like something was in the works.

Our four children scurried around the kitchen and dining area as they cleared the table from our first supper, then extended the table for the next round. They pulled out a board and inserted it into the table to make space for our guests, then replaced the table cloth and began setting the table.

As they set the table, Sylvia poured fried meat into a big pot on the stove. She added beans, corn, and tomatoes—one thing after another was dumped in. There was no time to find a recipe and make sure the right amount of each was put into the pot; we needed food very soon! The gas stove sparked and the soup was soon simmering as the table was getting its finishing touches with paper plates and bowls from the china closet.

“Muhammad Killed People”

Meanwhile, I sat in the living room with our guests, trying to pass the time. The war in Sudan over the previous year had deeply affected our neighbors. For weeks, when we met Mariam, a sadness was etched on her face as she worried about her parents. She had not heard from them for weeks after they were forced to flee their homes for safety. Were they safe? Were they alive, she wondered?

She had that stress, combined with her son’s vehicle being stolen in the middle of the night. Our security camera caught the theft of the car on video, so we submitted it to the police. It was their only shred of evidence. The car was later found, but rendered totaled due to an accident.

Mariam had also been involved in an accident, putting her car out of commission. We offered her our second vehicle, so she could go back and forth to work and take care of her family.

I asked about their country and how the family was doing in Sudan.

Khadeja spoke. “It is terrible. No one can go outside in the evening.” Her hands motioned as she explained the awful killing, constant fear, and instability.

“There is no government. They kidnap young boys and force them to fight...” On and on they went, describing the horrors in their country.

“What I love about Jesus,” I inserted,

“is that He never killed and He asks us to follow Him!”

I was sitting at the edge of my seat, excited to talk about Jesus and His contrast to Mohammad.

“Yes, He healed people...” Khadeja and Mariam agreed. We talked about how Jesus not only refused to kill, He healed and raised people from the dead.

At one point during our living room dialogue, Khadeja inserted that those who are fighting are not real Muslims.

“No,” I objected, “they are following Muhammad; he killed many people! If they are killing people, they are following their prophet!”

I was surprised when they agreed that yes, Muhammad killed, and in stark contrast, Jesus brought peace. We continued and I emphasized, that “No one can follow the example of Jesus and kill someone.” I raised my voice for emphasis. “It is impossible!”

They talked about how Christians bring peace and reflected on those who have been involved in bringing hope and blessing to their lives. Clearly, they recognized the difference between Christians around them and Muslims in their own country who kill and fight for the sake of Islam!

Time to Eat!

When the soup was ready, Sylvia called us to the table. We bowed our heads to pray and thank God for the food, and our conversations continued from there.

“Did you read my book?” Khadeja asked.

“Yes, I did!” I replied.

Some months prior, someone had introduced us to the book, *The School I Deserve*, by Jo Napolitano. It shared the story of Khadeja and other refugees in Lancaster and a lawsuit that forced Lancaster City to allow them to study in the normal high school. The author described the challenging experiences of refugees coming to Lancaster amid the years of Donald Trump’s first term and refugees being barred from entering the USA.

“Your landlord sounded like a nice person,” I said with a smirk. “I would like to meet him.” We all laughed.

In the book her landlord is described as “devoutly religious,” and that he “bought the property not to turn a profit, but to help those in need.”

When Mariam first met him and he offered her the house, her caseworker thought it must be a scam. Strangely, the price was very low, but it offered all Mariam had hoped for. It seemed too good to be true. Folks had warned her that she would never find a suitable home for her family in her price range; she would have to settle for less than ideal.

“Please tell me you didn’t give them any money,” the caseworker said, worrying that Mariam had fallen into a trap. However, after she sent the caseworker a photo of the landlord, whose name was Chris Stoltzfus, her

tune changed.

A Broom Stick as a Weapon

As we enjoyed the meal, they shared stories about their entry to the USA. They lived on the other side of town where drugs and crime were rampant. Once, there was a shooting, and Mariam was stunned, thinking she had left that behind in Sudan!

Neighbors would harass them and cause trouble. One day, Khadejah excitedly explained, she became so angry at a boy who was harassing them that she grabbed a broom, ran after the boy and broke the broom handle over him!

He came back with a metal bar and was wanting revenge when the police arrived to handle the situation. They had much less trouble after that! We laughed as they told the stories of their early life in America.

The effect of living in such fear impacted their family so much that the three-year-old daughter had not learned to talk. The trauma and fear of the old neighborhood seemed to have stunted her growth. With the move to a quieter neighborhood, she soon began to speak even without therapy.

Saying Goodbye

Before saying goodbye, we talked about Rania, the 11-year-old. "She is the same age as Chad," I remarked, but also noticed she seemed much older. "When is her birthday?" I inquired.

"January," came the reply, "but she was born during the harvest,"

remembered Khadejah.

Obviously, the harvest in the USA is in the fall and so it is in Sudan. We asked how Rania could have a birthday during harvest but it is in January? "Are all your birthdays in January?" I asked, knowing that many refugees have their birthdays on January 1.

"In our country, a birthday is a reminder that you're one year closer to death," Khadeja chimed. Hence, a birthday is not something to be remembered. Since that day is not important, when they are processed through the refugee system, most of them end up with a January 1 birthday.

With the meal over and lots of laughs behind us, the family soon gathered and stepped out into the cold December air to walk to their house on the next block. We collapsed on the couch with exhaustion, reliving what had just happened and grateful for an opportunity to host surprise dinner guests and engage in very significant conversations about Jesus.

NOTE: When I have traveled in Muslim countries and even in the USA, a quick engagement with a Muslim has often ended with a tea or dinner invitation. Hence, it is not strange to invite them to a meal in our homes. When you meet a Muslim in your town, try inviting them to your home for a meal!

[If you wish to share a response to the story, please text (717) 333-4104 or email chris@happyfarmer.store.]



Ira L. Wagler, Lancaster, PA

Easter is an important day of remembrance for Christians. It is a moveable feast, which means it is on a different day every year. Easter is officially on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. It can be as early as March 22 and as late as April 25. Many Christians participate in communion services around the time of Easter. This sacrament or ordinance is an important part of the Christian faith.

The idea of a communion service comes from Jesus eating His last meal with His disciples. At that meal they ate bread and drank wine, and John records that Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Jesus told His disciples to keep doing these things in remembrance of Him. Jesus then died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. The early church began holding communion services soon after Jesus' death. It seems that initially they may have had communion whenever they gathered. Through the centuries, beliefs and practices changed some. Eventually the church believed in transubstantiation, which means that when the bread and wine enter

a communicant's mouth they turn into the physical flesh and blood of Christ. This may seem silly to us today, but it was the official Christian belief for over a 1000 years and is still the position of the Catholic Church.

Martin Luther believed in a form of transubstantiation. Ulrich Zwingli believed the bread and wine were merely symbolic, not the actual body and blood of Christ. Their only meeting, at Marburg in 1529, was to debate this. Both left the debate thinking they won, but Zwingli's position became prevalent among Protestants.

Churches almost all hold some type of communion service where they commemorate Christ's suffering and death. There are similarities, such as using a type of bread and a grape drink to do this. There are also differences. Some churches see communion as a celebration while others see it as a somber remembrance of Christ's death. In his book, *The Bread and the Wine*, Dale Yoder gives a good account of how churches observe communion. He sent questionnaires to all 109 church denominations in the United States with over 5000 members, and

about half responded. His questions were: How often is communion held, what type of bread is used and is it significant, is fermented wine or grape juice used, and do you wash feet? He then records the answers along with some information about each group.

The differences in communion are not always backed with biblical reasons but are often practices and traditions arrived at through the centuries. Frequency in communion varies from weekly mass held at traditional Catholic and Episcopalian churches to quarterly among many Baptist churches and once a year among Moravians. One striking detail of Yoder's book is the number of Christians and churches that there are in the United States. There are over 70 million Catholics in 18,538 parishes. Second are the Southern Baptists with around 20 million members. Total Christians in the United States are around 250 million. In recent years the old mainline denominations have been losing members while evangelicals and Pentecostal-type churches have been gaining. Anabaptist churches are a fairly small number with about one million members when combining all Amish and Mennonite Churches.

The type of bread and wine, or Eucharist, used in communion varies.

The reason for unleavened bread is the belief that Jesus and His disciples ate unleavened bread at the Last Supper because it was the Passover meal. There is an alternative belief that the Last Supper meal was not actually the Passover meal, but the meal on the night before the Passover (see John 13:1) and so the bread would have had leaven. Anabaptists traditionally used leavened, or raised bread, and real wine for communion. Today, about half of denominations, including most Mennonites, use grape juice. The Old Orders still use real wine which they usually drink from a common cup.

Foot washing is sometimes practiced at communion. According to *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, the church did it some through the Middle Ages, and it was common at coronation of kings. Today, the main groups that wash feet are Anabaptists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Brethren, along with some individual Baptist and Methodist churches. Some Episcopal churches wash feet on Maundy Thursday. The Brethren are interesting because they are similar to Mennonites in faith and practice, but they came out of the Pietist movement in the 1700s. They emphasize baptism by immersion and a personal salvation experience. Part of their communion service

consists of a love feast or actual meal. For foot washing some of them use large towels that they tie behind their backs.

The Beachy Amish (8544 members according to 2026 Christian Light Directory) are noted for their differences in communion among churches. Stephen L. Yoder, a former bishop, said that in his 35 years of serving communion, he served leavened bread, unleavened bread, matzo, biscuits, and unleavened crackers. He also served real wine and grape juice, in accordance with the practice of particular congregations. Most Beachys see the symbolic nature of the Eucharist as more significant than which emblems are used. In recent years, more Beachy churches have switched to unleavened bread and probably all use grape juice. Beachy groups see foot washing as an important part of communion because it signifies accountability to a church brotherhood. Most Beachy churches observe close communion, which means members only. This is rare among other American denominations.

On a personal note, I have shared in communion about 40 times and have found it to be meaningful and good. Most have been in Anabaptist churches, except for once when I took Mass at Notre Dame Cathedral.

I found that to be meaningful, but I missed the brotherhood aspect. Several interesting traditions I have observed are participants bowing slightly after receiving the emblems, children eating the leftover bread and wine after the service, and the remarkable efficiency with which one church conducts its communion service.

The Easter season is a time to think about Christ's death and resurrection. Participating in communion is a privilege many of us experience, and it is good to remember why we do it the way we do. It is a blessing to commune as part of a healthy local church and as part of the global church of Jesus.

The Iran War

Here are a few thoughts on the Iran War. As a nonresistant Christian, I am opposed to war and violence. However, I acknowledge that governments were put in place by God and will at times wage war. As a United States citizen, I care about the country and how its actions affect the world as well as my family and community, but I don't think it's in my place to protest war.

Bombing Iran was in line with past US foreign policy, but President Trump had been opposed to starting new wars. Some reasons given for the war were: destroying Iran's

nuclear program, regime change, and retaliation for past wrongs. The goals of this war have not been clear. While Americans were almost evenly split on bombing Iran, they are against any kind of ground war. This is mostly due to recent lengthy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Iran's ability to affect the world economy by closing the Strait of Hormuz has complicated matters. While in the past, wars took months or years, people don't have that kind of patience today. If the war drags on, more soldiers die, and as Americans continue to pay more for things it could become very unpopular.

It can be difficult to know how to talk and think about something like this war. Opinions vary. I would encourage talking to colleagues who are interested in the topic and to avoid giving the war outsized eschatological importance. I find it helpful to step back from the daily news cycle and not listen to online voices too much. The long-term effects of the war could take years to

see, so it is better not to jump to quick conclusions.

World Happiness

The World Happiness Report recently published its annual list of happiest countries. Finland came in first, followed by Iceland, Denmark, and Costa Rica. The United States ranked 23rd. The report is based on asking people to evaluate their own happiness, as well as factors like freedom and social support. One gloomy finding from this year's report is that young people in western countries are less happy than 15 years ago. This trend is not global, and the report linked it to social media use. Anecdotally, I find young people around me to be happy. Although they face some of the same pressures as all Western youth, Amish and Mennonite youth may be somewhat insulated due to strong home, church, and community support. For the full report visit worldhappiness.report.

-I welcome your comments and suggestions. Send them to cmobservations@proton.me.



Finding God's Help in Time of Crisis

Marvin Joel Eicher, McArthur, OH

We are facing great spiritual pressure these days. Yet, God has promised to be with us, "...for he hath said, I will

never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

Recently, I was impressed with God's defense of His people in Isaiah

37. As you may recall, Rabshakeh had come up against Jerusalem with lofty, demoralizing words. The Assyrians had conquered many neighboring countries. Now, their intent was to conquer Jerusalem.

Hezekiah was in a terrifying spot. He knew that he needed help. Let us study some details in his exemplary response.

1. *Expressing humility.* Hezekiah rent his clothes and put on sackcloth, signs of great distress. He humbly admitted his need (verse 3): *“For the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.”* Hezekiah knew where his true strength came from. It came from God.
2. *Requesting help from godly authority.* Prophets represented spiritual authority in that day. Hezekiah immediately appealed to Isaiah. Isaiah went to God, and God sent words of encouragement. *“Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me”* (verse 6).
3. *Identifying a cause.* Instead of being intimidated, Hezekiah identified a possible reason for God to come to his aid. *“It may be that the Lord...will reprove the words which the Lord thy God hath heard”* (verse 4).
4. *Identifying truth.* Instead of being deceived, Hezekiah separated

truth from lies (verses 17-19). He admitted that part of what Rabshakeh had said was true. But he clung to the fact that his God was alive.

5. *Finding a sanctuary.* *“Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary”* (Psalm 77:13). Hezekiah went up to God’s house and spread Rabshakeh’s letter before the Lord. He took time to be with God and to lay everything before Him.
6. *Praying fervently.* Hezekiah’s prayer in God’s sanctuary was fervent and effectual. He reminded God that the gods of the other nations *“were no gods.”* He pled with God to save his city so *“that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only”* (verses 19-20).

God’s response was amazing. He proclaimed through Isaiah that Sennacherib would not enter Jerusalem or even shoot an arrow there. Next, He sent His angel in the night and slew 185,000 soldiers! The crisis was over. Sennacherib had no choice but to return in shame by the way he had come.

May this true account from God’s Word encourage us to follow Hezekiah’s example. God always defends His faithful servants.

“And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).



Of Aprons, Swords, and Shields

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



After God repeatedly announced perfection in Genesis 1, He stated in the next chapter that something wasn't good. This not-good-thing was Adam's aloneness. He needed a helper. God's solution to Adam's need is a word used to describe Himself in later Scriptures as Israel's Rescuer, Warrior, and Defender: Ezer.

In Genesis 3, we see Adam's new "ezer" warrior, defender, supporter Eve, turned defeated and vanquished. Instead of helper, she becomes his stumbling block. The way in which Eve upsets God's design should inform us as we define our responsibilities toward the men in our lives. Where do you and I fit in this picture?

Our culture and many other cultures have taken the creation verses in Genesis 2:18 and 20 and coined the two separate words into a single one: *helpmeet*. With that odd coinage, we have shaped a woman's title into more of a value or position instead of a role. When we say "helpmeet," it describes someone like

the teacher's aide who wipes up the spills at lunchtime.

By contrast, let's explore the sense of the original word by looking at other references where it is used. Ezer appears 21 times in the Bible, twice in reference to Eve, three times when referring to nations to whom Israel called for military help, and the rest of the times when describing God.

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an 'ezer' meet for him" (Genesis 2:18).

"And the name of the other was Eli-ezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help" (Exodus 18:4).

"Our soul waiteth for the Lord: He is our 'Ezer' and our shield" (Psalm 33:20).

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my 'Ezer'" (Psalm 121:1).

Research all the verses that use this word to help find your identity, my ezer-sisters! God says, I'm coming to your rescue, I'm coming to protect you and fight for you. I am your Ezer. He speaks from a position of strength

and honor. I am humbled beyond words when I see the Creator God stooping to draw a picture (in me) so that the world can see the Ezer part of Him. Ezer—helper, rescuer, defender—shows us His ideal for women relating to men.

Women are born with the God-likeness of being an ezer whether married or not. Think about the big story in Exodus. Whose name do you think of when you think about the Exodus story? Moses, of course.

However, think about all the ezers, the influential helpers, who rescued, delivered, ministered to, cared for, and fought alongside Moses. Note that only one of these women was married to Moses, yet they were all ezers to him. The Hebrew midwives, Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter all risked their lives as they fought for this child. Later, Zipporah, Mrs. Moses, stepped between Moses and God's sword when she obeyed God's forgotten command. (Exodus 4:25)

Ezer carries with it a hefty job description. It bears broad responsibility and influence. An ezer is honored to wear an apron and carry a towel (Philippians 2:7), even while carrying a figurative sword. It celebrates his victories, defends him, and fights for his good. Ezer indicates teamwork, not competition. Together, an invincible, formidable

front bars the enemy. Apart, the enemy finds easy access to the men on the front lines.

The suggestion has been given that Adam needed an ezer to complete his job in the garden because there was an enemy on the loose. That's a theological matter I'm not prepared to explore. But we know that Adam needed an ezer to complete his divine assignment of reproducing and of managing the rest of creation. Adam needed a helper not to take over his role, but to stand beside him in carrying it out.

Ezer shows us God's ideal for women relating to men. This brings us to the term, *kenegdo*, translated *meet* in the KJV. *Kenegdo* guides the ezer in telling how or where to help and defend. Other versions translate *meet* as suitable, complimentary, corresponding to, like, facing, or before him. Think of mirroring the man, standing in front of him. We are the men's *kenegdo*, like two hands complement each other. Look at your right hand and your left hand, side by side. They are same yet different. They work hand in hand, yet sometimes they accomplish a good work by countering each other even like two hands twist a dishrag. This is *kenegdo*. Fighting alongside or for someone means having his back, at his side, or face to face. When I stand face to face with him I can

see what is sneaking up behind him.

With *kenegdo* only appearing once in Scripture, we can't turn to other verses for definition. We can find stories, though, of *ezer kenegdos* who fought for and rescued the men in their lives, like those in Moses's story.

We are born *ezers*, with or without marriage. I have seen some men's employed assistants or secretaries live out a compelling definition of *ezer kenegdo*. Consider the secretary who guards her boss's time by screening out the unwelcome salesmen. Or the assistant who organizes a complex calendar, travel logistics, and communication priorities so that he can use his time for other matters.

An added significance to *ezer kenegdo* is how we get to mother and shape the little arrows that contribute to the defense and safety of God's Kingdom in our homes and world. It makes me a bit quiver-y when I note this well-thought-out military operation. (Psalm 127:4, 5)

While I cringe at the saying: "*If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy!*" there is obvious and ominous truth in those words. We see it in our men's faces when we are having a bad day. We see it in their eyes when we lash out in criticism or correction. We hear it in their sighs when we make unreasonable demands. We carry the power to build them up or tear them down. I suspect that most of us are

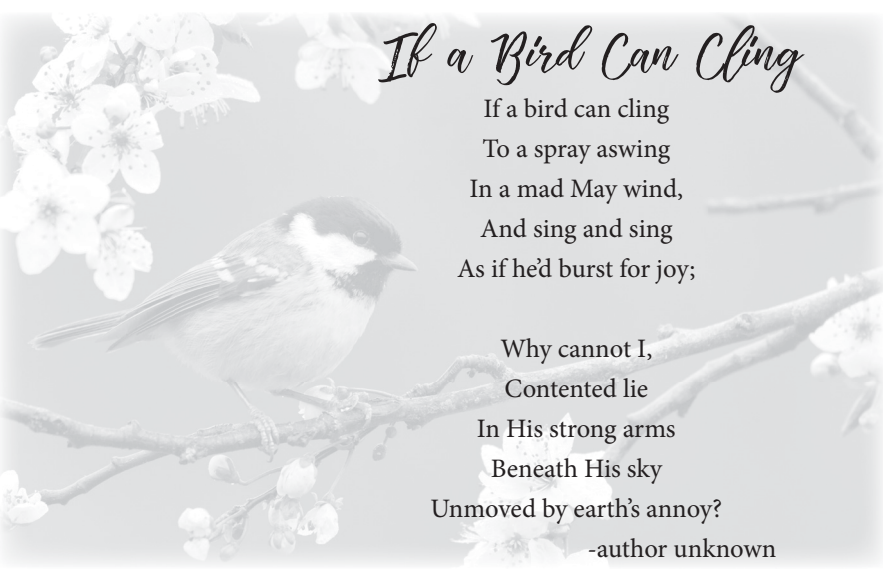
not aware of the weight our influence holds. We carry responsibility for our own emotional and spiritual health. If we aren't healthy women, our relationships will not be healthy. Our marriages, our homes, our circles in our churches, and our communities will pay the price for our lack of wholeness.

Eve turned this definition on its head when she failed to be all that she was intended to be for Adam. First, she listened to the tempter's offer. Then, she desired, took, and gave, drawing Adam into her snare.

No one can support, pray for, defend, and fight for our men better than we can. And no one can take them down faster than we can. With God as our *Ezer*, we can be *ezers* to our men. As women, married and unmarried, we carry this weight of influence and inspiration. Ours is a holy calling, representing God to the world. Will we send our men to the front by themselves?

As *ezer kenegdos*, we must never cave and pick the alluring fruit. We use our eyes for lurking dangers. We get to agonize for our men in prayer. We don't speak critically about them or to them. As they fight hard battles, we encourage and stick up for them. We are honored to be their helpers (meet) alongside them. We are *ezer kenegdos*, loyal companion warriors.





If a Bird Can Cling

If a bird can cling
To a spray aswing
In a mad May wind,
And sing and sing
As if he'd burst for joy;

Why cannot I,
Contented lie
In His strong arms
Beneath His sky
Unmoved by earth's annoy?
-author unknown

junior messages

The Power of a Bible Story Book

Mary Ellen Beachy, Dundee, OH

[Adapted from M.Z.L. Ministry News Update, August 2017]

Peter's eyes were red and bloodshot. His head hurt so horribly. He staggered up the steps to his house and grabbed the handrail so he wouldn't fall.

"Welcome home, Papa," his five-year-old daughter, Oksana, called out as she held open the door.

Peter saw the blurry form of his youngest child as he wobbled past her. He did not see the hurt and sadness in his daughter's eyes.

He sat down heavily in the nearest chair. There he sat dejectedly with his head on the table.

Oksana stared at her papa and then fled to her room. She felt so disappointed and hurt. Why did Papa drink that stuff that made him act so strange and bad? She thought back to Sunday School. The teacher had said, "Jesus can turn bad people into good people."

Oksana had gone to church only a few times. She had never prayed, but there she heard people praying to Jesus. Her heart was touched. She lifted up her face toward heaven and prayed, "Jesus, please make my papa stop drinking. Make him a good man. Amen."

Awhile later, Oksana timidly

approached her father at the table. She was clutching the thin Bible story book the people at church had given her. “Papa,” she said. Peter lifted his head. “Papa, this book tells about Jesus Who makes bad people good. I asked Him to make you good. Look at this picture of a shepherd on the cover. The people at church said God wants to help us and be our shepherd.”

Peter looked. The picture of the shepherd cradling a small lamb gripped him. In his heart he longed for love and security. When he was drunk he felt confident, but after the effects of drink vanished, he felt worse than ever.

“Will you go with me to the evangelical church tomorrow? They can tell us more about Jesus,” Oksana pleaded.

Peter sat there thinking. He was sad and troubled. He was a slave to alcohol. He had allowed his daughter to go to church, but how could he go?

Peter looked at his daughter’s pleading eyes. A desire to make her happy flooded over him. “Yes, Oksana,” he replied, “I will go with you just one time; only this Sunday.”

Oksana clapped her hands, “Oh goody, tomorrow we go, tomorrow we go,” she sang out.

The shattering glass bottle broke the stillness of the next afternoon

with a crash. Peter stared at the dark liquid seeping into the ground. A look of determination rested on his face. The drawing of the Holy Spirit had broken his proud, sinful heart. He had repented. He had prayed and confessed his sins. He was no longer a slave to sin and alcohol. Jesus was now his Shepherd. Never before had Peter experienced such peace and such a sense of love and care.

In time, Peter was baptized and became a member in the local evangelical church. Oksana was thrilled to have a Christian daddy. It made her so happy to go to church together.

Peter started raising produce and had a small apiary. God blessed the work of his hands. Peter shared small jars of honey at church. One day he gave out watermelons. Oksana was so happy they had enough food to eat and enough to share.

Peter thanked God every day for saving his soul. He was grateful for his daughter, Oksana, and grateful for the Bible story book she was given at church and had shared with him. Peter was so grateful to be washed in the blood of Jesus and rejoiced each day with his Good Shepherd.

How many of the 25 *FAVORITE BIBLE STORIES* books have touched and changed hearts for Jesus as this true story from Ukraine shows us?



Podcast Discipleship

Ryan Stoltzfus, Dobson, NC

How Political Influencers Distract Christians and Distort the Gospel

How did you determine your view of the war in Iran? Was it a knee-jerk response, your own well-thought-through opinion or . . . the perspective of your favorite podcaster?

Since their rise in popularity in the mid-2000s, podcasts have become the default news source for many of us. We don't walk out to the mailbox to get the humble local newspaper anymore; instead, we listen to a podcast while driving to work or cleaning the house. Podcasts are our window into what's going on in the world.

A unique aspect of the podcast revolution is the intimate bond often created between viewer and host. The personal podcast style offers a personal feel; the viewer gets to know the podcaster's communication style, humor, and quirks. A nationwide survey showed that 80 percent of podcast listeners say the host is key to their favorite show, and 59 percent said they would either listen less or stop listening if their host left the show. This "relationship" creates a trust bond that allows the podcaster to shape a person's view of the world

and reality.

In this way, people become disciples of their podcast hosts.

Every day, millions of people are disciplined by influential podcasters like Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, Ben Shapiro, Matt Walsh, Megyn Kelly, and others from both the political left and right. Every day, listeners are disciplined by these people's views on war, sexuality, immigration, and what it means to be "Christian" in a secular world.

While depending on political pundits for news can be fine in moderation, there are three risks with becoming a regular listener and devoted disciple of a political pundit.

Lies and Half Truths

A big reason that many go to political podcasts for their news is because they no longer trust mainstream media. They believe mainstream media is biased, pushes an agenda, and is not interested in truth-telling.

Too often this is true. Mainstream media outlets have, more often than not, a specific way they want their readers to see the world, and they shape their stories toward that end.

But bias is not only a problem for mainstream media. Everyone is biased

in some way, and that affects how they view and share information. This is all too obvious in myself when I really want to buy something that barely fits into our budget, and I go to great lengths to build a (very biased!) case to my wife for why I should have it.

Political podcasters across the entire political spectrum, from left to right, are all susceptible to an agenda. Just like the political pundits in mainstream news, they are fallen and tend to be driven by money, sex, and power. Too often they are motivated not by truth, but by self. The fact that both political conservatives and liberals appear in the Epstein files is unfortunate evidence of this.

As Gary Miller says in his book *Truth Matters*, “blaming the world’s woes on some left-wing social movement or particular political party is much easier than acknowledging the ubiquity of human’s sinful tendencies.” The point is that we must be equally discerning of all news sources, both right-wing podcasters and liberal mainstream news outlets.

Practicing discernment is hard to do with sources that agree with opinions we already have, but it is a necessary step for the responsible Christian. We need to ask the following questions about all news sources, even the ones we like:

1. Are the claims they make backed by evidence? Do they cite their sources and provide ways for

readers to fact-check their claims?

2. Are they willing to let their audience know about evidence that does not support their claims or that seems to contradict it? Because all news stories and world events are messy, it is inevitable that evidence will appear that doesn’t support a black and white claim. Does your favorite podcaster recognize this?
3. What motivates them to make the claims that they’re making? Are they reacting to other news sources? Are they gaining money or power by saying one thing or the other?
4. What is the character of the podcaster? Are they known for being deceptive? Are their personal lives marred by scandal in ways that could affect the way they portray reality?
5. Does the podcaster ever admit to being wrong? This is perhaps the most important question. Since everybody is fallen, all reporters will be wrong at some point. Do they ever admit to making mistakes?

The Trivial

The second way that these political pundits shape their worldview negatively is to make us obsess about things that simply don't matter. Even if some of the conspiracies peddled by the podcasters mentioned above are actually true, what ultimate significance do they have for our lives

as followers of Jesus?

One example of this obsession over the unimportant is the debate surrounding Charlie Kirk's assassination. Since his death, a wide variety of theories have emerged, some claiming that Kirk's closest friends and family had a part to play in his murder.

Even if one of these wild theories was true, what difference does it make for us? What value does it add to our lives? How will it change our lives as committed followers of Jesus in our home communities?

Scandals and conspiracies might seem important in the moment, but they're often just clickbait produced by podcasters hungry for more views and subscribers. When I took a news fast a few months ago, I was surprised that, when I came back to reading the news after a month of being off, little had changed. The political drama that I had followed before my fast was either unsolved or had disappeared to make room for the next outrageous scandal.

Political drama has always been around, and it was alive and well in Paul's time in the Roman Empire. The emperors in his day were involved in corruption and depravity that make U.S. government drama seem minor. But in Paul's letters to the churches, we don't hear him telling people to believe in this or that political theory. He was concerned with the One Big

Important Thing: Christ crucified.

Would Paul have spent hours every week listening to a podcast about political conspiracies and suspicious activity in Nero's court? Would he have exhorted his fellow Christians to "go therefore, and listen to the Philemon Podcast, and learn about the evil in Nero's court?" I doubt it. He had too much to do in Christ's Kingdom, and his one driving passion was to preach Christ crucified.

Shifting Beliefs

The third, and perhaps most significant, risk is that they subtly change our beliefs and attitudes. As we saw earlier, following a favorite political pundit closely is a form of discipleship, and extended exposure to their views will inevitably shape our own.

God didn't want the Hebrews to live with and listen to the people of Canaan because He knew that constant exposure to another set of beliefs (that often looked more attractive!) would influence His people. We are not exempt; the things we watch and listen to will eventually influence our beliefs.

Sometimes I wonder: Is it possible to be a disciple of someone like Ben Shapiro, and still have a Christ-like attitude about immigrants? Or closely follow Tucker Carlson, and not develop a negative attitude toward Jews?

As conservative Anabaptists,

we often attempt to maintain our Christian beliefs by having a “Christian conviction” and a “government opinion.” For example, a person might say when asked about Iran: “As a Christian, I don’t believe in war (Christian conviction) but I sure do support Trump’s takedown of the regime (government opinion).”

Now, there does seem to be room for opinions about how the government should operate. After all, government does have a distinct role, separate from the church. It’s not wrong to observe what types of government more closely follow the pattern laid out in Romans 13. Neither is it wrong to study the inner workings of government.

However, there is a real danger that, when we get caught up in the power struggles of government and become devoted disciples of political pundits, our Christian conviction fades into the background and our government opinion takes center stage. In other words, we spend far more time gloating over the impressive power of the military than we do glorying in the Kingdom of Christ and His people.

At this point, I sometimes wonder: does the statement “As a Christian, I don’t believe in war, but...” become just a good thing to say before we get into our real feelings about the country and the conflict? Is it similar to a southern person saying, “bless

their hearts” before stating their real (often negative) opinion about the person in mind?

Perhaps a good way to test our Christian conviction is to think of what comes to mind when we see a Muslim immigrant in town. What are our first thoughts? Is it “I want to love and accept those people like Jesus” or is it “Here they come, ruining our culture and terrorizing our people?”

If your answer is the latter, then it might be that you’ve been listening to your favorite podcast too much.

Our commission from Christ as Christians is clear, direct, and not difficult to understand: we are to love our enemies and bless those who curse us, to show love and show mercy to everyone, whether it is a foreigner or a baby in the womb. As for vengeance, that is God’s responsibility; He will repay it.

While political podcasts aren’t necessarily a bad thing, they can quickly cause us to believe half truths, obsess over the unimportant, and shift our allegiance away from God’s sacrificial Kingdom. We must be discerning as God’s people. Let’s recognize that everyone has biases, diversify our listening to hear multiple perspectives, and refuse to become a disciple of any podcast host.

And most of all, let’s root ourselves in the community and Scriptures of a Kingdom that will last forever.



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An ounce of mother is often worth more than a ton of clergy.

• • • • •

People seldom lose their religion by a blowout; it's usually a slow leak.

• • • • •

Lend a man your ears and you will immediately open a pathway to his heart.

• • • • •

There's no ideal place to serve God except the place He sets you down.

• • • • •

God's greatest problem with laborers in His vineyard is absenteeism.

• • • • •

Hold to God's hand; He will do the holding if you do the trusting.

• • • • •

The closer you get to Christ, the closer you get to others.

• • • • •

Compassion is the capacity to put love into action.

• • • • •

Beware of the musty, dusty, and crusty Christian.

• • • • •

Easy street is a blind alley.