



Calvary MESSENGER

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

Galatians 6:14

MARCH 2026

Meditation	
<i>Things</i>	1
Editorial	
<i>The Hot Dog Stand</i>	2
The Bottom Line	
<i>Amish & Beachy Church Populations</i>	5
Heroes of Faith	
<i>Jacob J. Hershberger</i>	10
Who Actually Has the Advantage?.....	11
Marriages.....	14
Cradle Roll.....	14
Ordinations	16
Obituaries	16
I Saw A Beautiful Thing	
<i>Saints in the Aisle</i>	19
Stones and Stories	
<i>“Ya Hamar!”</i>	20
Observations	24
A Woman After God’s Heart	
<i>Not the Book</i>	29
Junior Messages	
<i>One Thousand Pages</i>	32
Youth Messages	
<i>Am I Doing Enough for God?</i>	34
Thought Gems	back cover

Calvary Messenger

March 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.

Calvary Publications, Inc., is a non-profit organization, incorporated in the State of Ohio, for the purpose of sponsoring, publishing, and distributing Christian literature. The board is elected, one member annually, by the ministers of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Churches, at their annual spring meeting.

Board of Directors

(Calvary Publications, Inc.)

Mark Webb, Chairman
 Matthew Raber, Vice-Chairman
 Barry Hochstetler, Treasurer
 Galen Stutzman, Secretary
 Nathan Fisher

Material for *Calvary Messenger*, marriages, births, ordinations, obituaries, and general articles—send to the *Editor*. Other material—mail to their respective *Editors*.

Subscriptions, renewals, changes of address, etc.—mail to **Circulation Manager**.

When you move, please notify the Circulation Manager one month in advance, giving your old and new address in full, so that your mailing label can be properly corrected and your credit be kept in order.

This periodical is digitally available at calvarymessenger.org.

Editor: Aaron D. Yoder
 5188 W. 825 N., Leesburg, IN 46538
 Ph: 574-646-2123; Fax: 800-956-7850
calvary.messenger.19@gmail.com

Assistant Editor: Don L. Martin
 50 Green Pastures Ln., Mifflin, PA 170858
 Ph: 717-436-9115
martins@emypeople.com

Contributing Editors:
 Simon Schrock, Aaron Lapp,
 Ronald J. Miller

Missions Editor: Tim Petersheim
 301 Jacobs Rd.
 Narvon, PA 17555

Youth Messages Editor: Ryan Stoltzfus
 369 Romie Snow Road
 Dobson, NC 27017
orthodoxyafame@gmail.com

Junior Messages Editor:
 Mrs. Mary Ellen Beachy
 11095 Pleasant Hill Rd.
 Dundee, OH 44624
maryellenbeachy@icloud.com

Women's Editor:
 Mrs. Susan Schlabach
 7184 W. Henry Rd., Ripley, OH 45167
skschlabach@gmail.com

Circulation Manager/Treasurer:
 Barry Hochstetler
 6681 Lake Rd.,
 Hicksville, OH 43526
 Ph: 419-487-0887
hochdrywall@gmail.com

Calvary Messenger (USPS 767-160) is published monthly by Calvary Publications. Subscription rates are: 1 year (U.S.) \$15.50, 3 years (U.S.) \$45.00. For congregations using the every-home-plan, \$14.00 per year to individual addresses. With a renewal at \$15.50 for 1 year, you may use a 1-year gift subscription free. Second class postage at Sugarcreek, OH. Postmaster: Send address changes to Calvary Publications, Inc., 6681 Lake Rd, Hicksville, OH 43526.

Things

Ruth Hershberger, Jesup, GA

How blessed we are to congregate
And honor thus our Lord,
To sing and worship, praise and pray,
And list'ning to His Word.

How thankful then on Sunday last—
We heard God's Word proclaimed,
How Jesus to the crowds would speak,
All this was well explained.

To seek God first, with all our hearts—
Make Him priority,
Is what will bring us joy and peace—
And that will make us free.

The birdies know God will provide—
They worry not nor fret.
They know their heavn'ly Father cares,
And He will néer forget.

Then help us, Father, like the birds,
To trust You will provide,
While working well, our job to do,
And in Your will abide.

To trust in "things" is not the way—
You'd have Your children live—
But love You with our hearts and souls,
To You, our praises give.

May we embrace simplicity,
Make it a daily art,
Then we'll not need so many "things"
And have a grateful heart.

You taught contentment is so wise
When framed with godliness,
You'll guide us to the better way,
From worry and distress.

Thank You, then, dear Lord, we pray,
You are so good and kind,
For showing us about the "things"
Where blessings true, we'll find.

[From a sermon on "Things" from the Sermon on the Mount.]

The Hot Dog Stand

It was in January in the late 1970s in the chapel at Calvary Bible School. One of the instructors told a story about his trip home after being gone for some time. He was looking forward to seeing his dear wife again. He missed her so much and couldn't wait to be with her. But his next flight was leaving at a gate at the farthest end of the airport. He was running pell-mell through the airport, fully aware that he was very close to missing his flight. But all of a sudden, he saw a hot dog stand. Oh, he loved hot dogs and had to have one now! So he stopped and purchased one. Ahh, it was so delicious! But when he arrived at his gate, the door was closed, and he missed his flight. Well, not really.

The instructor, Christ Diener,¹ continued his talk that evening reminding us that there are distractions that can keep us from our final flight to our eternal home. It may not be sin that will make us miss our eternal home. Sometimes it's something good that will keep us from enjoying the best.

It was the same instructor who taught a class that addressed the battle of the fleshly desires and the

Holy Spirit at the same place. He often repeated part of Galatians 5:16, "*Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*"

The Greek word used for lust is *epithumeo*. *Strong's Concordance* defines *epithumeo* as "to set the heart upon, i.e. long for (rightfully or otherwise):-covet, desire, would fain, lust (after)." Obviously, we can lust after many sinful things, but I believe Satan may be satisfied as long as we're distracted enough with "un-sinful" things—things that are necessary parts of our lives—as long as we are turned away from the Light. We can be perpetually distracted and fail to do anything meaningful for the Kingdom of God.

Brother Christ also often quoted Galatians 5:17, "*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" Other translations use the word "desires" in place of "lusteth." This battle of our natural desires with the Spirit's desires for us is a lifelong struggle. What is the best way to win this battle?

A normal tendency of mankind is

to make laws and rules in an attempt to change behavior. Indeed, isn't this what the Old Testament portrayed? At least, we often think that the only thing that God desired from the children of Israel was proper behavior. However, God mentions many times that offering sacrifices without a heart of obedience is not enough.

When Saul overstepped his responsibility and offered the sacrifice before Samuel arrived, the prophet rebuked him. *“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”* (1 Samuel 22:15).

The Word of the Lord that came to Isaiah was even clearer that sacrifices from an evil heart are loathsome to God. *“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of the goats”* (Isaiah 1:11). Even under the law, God desired more than behavior modification. He longed for a heart that is turned toward Him. What is God's provision to mankind since Jesus died for us, rose from the grave, and ascended to heaven?

Walk in the Spirit

In Galatians 5:16, Paul wrote, *“Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”* Isn't this the answer? Of course, this implies that our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus, we received the Spirit of God at conversion, and are walking according to the “lusts” or desires of the Spirit for our lives. It is inherently easier to follow something that our hearts enjoy than to try to *not* do something that we really enjoy. However, the enemy has a great advantage since the things that satisfy our natural desires are right before our eyes. That's why the hot dog stand is so attractive. Our eternal destination and meeting our eternal Spouse seem far distant compared to the attractions and distractions right in front of us.

How can we make sure that our hearts are following after the Spirit of God? Several verses in Colossians give us direction and a promise:

Colossians 3:1, *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

2. *“Set your **affection** on things above, not on things on the earth.*
3. *“For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*
4. *“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear*

with him in glory.”

Jesus told us that our hearts follow our treasures. Where are my treasures? What are the things that are most important to me?

Matthew 6:20, *“But lay up for yourselves **treasures** in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

21. *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

“If God be the treasure of our souls, our hearts, our affections and desires will be placed on things above. An earthly minded man proves that his treasure is below; a heavenly minded man shows that his treasure is above. Men fix their hearts on their treasures, and often resort to

the place where they have deposited them, to see that all is safe and secure. Let God be the treasure of your soul, and let your heart go frequently to the place where his honour dwelleth.”²

Let’s use the things of this earth as tools and means to build the Kingdom of God. May we not be fatally distracted by our own “hot dog stand.” Let’s set our affections on heavenly things and keep our long goal clear: being at heaven’s gate when the final call comes to take us to meet our Saviour and Lord. It will be worth it all!

1 See his obituary in the February 2026 issue of CM.

2 Adam Clarke’s Commentary

AY



Announcement

Beachy Ministers’ Meetings

March 31-April 2, 2026

Hosted by the Pilgrim Fellowship, Bethany Fellowship, Fellowship Haven, Hicksville Christian Fellowship, Christian Mission Fellowship, and Rosewood Fellowship congregations.

Location:

Fellowship Missionary Church
2536 E. Tillman Rd.
Ft. Wayne, IN 46816

For information contact:

Glenn Coblentz – (260) 525-1041
glenncob@gmail.com

Amish and Beachy Church Populations

Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

Demographics is a big word, and a bit sophisticated to address this subject of populations. Demographics is the statistical science dealing with the distribution, density, and vital statistics of populations (Webster).

We will begin with our Lancaster County, PA, Amish. They might have the distinction of being a church group that has experienced the least change in dress, doctrine, preaching style, and church services of many Anabaptist groups. Currently, there has been only one branch of Amish in Lancaster County, PA, who branching out from Lancaster County, now reside in nine counties contiguous to Lancaster County and in seven other states. They have over 600 church districts. Lancaster County Amish numbered 37,700 people in 2022 (Google). These have all stemmed from the Lancaster Co. Amish who settled here from Europe, beginning approximately in the mid-1800s, with a smaller group that came in the mid-1700s.

College-educated Stephen Nolt said in his study around the year 2000, that the Amish in Lancaster

County double their numbers every 15 years! At that time, he said, they were the fastest growing plain group that he knew of. Indeed, they grew from only six church districts in 1910 to 600 districts in 2025, or 115 years later. They have had one standard “ordnung” in that time, with few exceptions being tolerated.

Lancaster County land area encompasses 984 square miles and has a total population of 555,000 people (2024), or 564 people per square mile. By comparison, Holmes County, OH has a total population of 44,500 people with an area of 424 square miles, having 105 people per square mile. The Holmes County Amish are spread over more than one county, even as are the Lancaster Amish. However, the Holmes County Amish constitute many separated groups, some of which do not fellowship with each other. Up until now, the entire Lancaster Amish have all been under one church umbrella.

Thus, Lancaster County has a bit over twice as much land area as Holmes County, but a bit over 12 times more people. No wonder

our church people visiting us say our county is so full! True. And our roads are woefully inadequate. Holmes County Ohio Amish are also as widely scattered, and number close to the same total as do the Lancaster Amish.

My wife, Esther, came from St. Joseph County, Michigan, which has 521 square miles of land area, with a total population of 60,000, or 115 people per square mile (Google). That county in lower Michigan borders northern Indiana. The Amish are also increasing rapidly in Michigan, and elsewhere.

Some of our people have had interest in Muslim evangelism. There have been some interesting and surprising conversions to Jesus Christ among them. They can be a powerful witness for Christ, as are also many Jewish converts to Christianity. Somewhat like the Apostle Paul, they are speaking for Christ with fearlessness and boldness.

The Muslim share of the total world population was an astounding 2 billion in 2020-2021, out of eight billion total. That is one-fourth of the total world population. They are the second largest religious group in the world, also having various factions as subgroups, and many varied ideologies with strong

political fervor. Their religious and political feuds lessen their potential military and political dominations, at least currently.

There are six million Muslims in North America, which represents their fast growth rate, as they take advantage of our civil and social freedoms that are far above and beyond that of the various countries where they have total control. They also have the severest and strictest religious ban for any adherents who leave their "faith."

They are the fastest growing religion in the world, increasing in population twice as fast as the rest of the world, perhaps even more so.

In 2004, we fellowshipped with the church in Okmulgee County, OK, near the town of Morris. Their county has 702 square miles, with a population of 37,000, or 53 people per square mile. Interestingly, imagine all the Amish in Lancaster Co. (37,000) being the only people in that whole county!

The brothers there told us their county has one of the highest crime rates in the United States. Investigated crime there involves 35 people per 1000 persons, or 1 for every 28 persons! It is worse per capita than some large U.S. cities, they said. Hard to believe, or mentally digest.

May God abundantly bless their witness, which already has brought one man to faith in Christ and fellowship in their church, as noted in my article in the January 2025 issue of *Calvary Messenger*.

A nationwide survey in 2010-2015 found Amish in 34 of our 48 contiguous states, totaling 350,000 people. By their and other projections, that total could be at 500,000 in this year, and could exceed 1 million before 2050, as it currently doubles itself every 18-20 years. A new Amish district is formed every three and a half weeks, on an average, they say (Elizabethtown College, PA).

Nolt said the Beachy churches, and those related, double their numbers every 25 years (1985-1990 survey). I would suggest that by now it could be perhaps every 27-28 years, or one generation, which would still be remarkable. He noted that rate of increase to be more than all other conservative Anabaptist churches, excluding the Wislers and horse and buggy Mennonites, which are not a part of this study. His study showed, with hard data as evidence as he also tabulated the more liberal Mennonites, that their growth rate kept dropping lower and lower in tandem with their liberal interpretations of Bible doctrine.

He himself was a liberal church Mennonite, and simply said that the more liberal a church conference became, the faster it decreased in their membership growth. He said some conferences are near zero, one being minus zero in membership numbers growth rate already 30 years ago, or one whole generation previous to today.

A common argument is that quality is more important than quantity. Granted, everyone considers themselves to be a “middle-of-the-road” person, or in this case, a “middle-of-the-road” church. One of the principles of life is that everyone must somehow justify everything they do and say. Therefore, everyone has their closely-held reasons to live as they do, and become or remain as a member where they continue to belong. And that applies in regard to people changing their membership to a more conservative church or to a more liberal one, not only in dress, but also more and more, in regard to doctrine, just as importantly, or even more so.

I have observed and/or studied these things for 65 years, having grown up in the Weavertown Amish Mennonite (Beachy) church. These things are continually in flux, causing movement within churches, and in

some, creating stability both in doctrine and in practice in various churches, but conversely, instability in others. That stability translates directly to intra-church growth or decline, in regard to membership numbers. Quality of preaching and teaching is an important factor, and relates to Bible interpretation and application. Capable preachers and teachers also can contribute to congregational growth, along with men who have a shepherd's heart and serve in leadership as priests and prophets, not as kings and dictators.

Our earliest history is of the original creation by God, where the Bible says, *"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth."* It is the genesis of extent, content, and gradually the intent by the mind and heart of God; the extent being endless for length and breadth, height and depth, creating infinity.

The content is boundless with the potential of continual expansion, except where man has interfered with inconsiderate exploitation. The intent for it all is by revelation on God's part, and exploration on man's part, with continual expansion in all segments of His creation.

"So, he drove out the man...from the garden of Eden" (Genesis 3:24). *"And it came to pass, when man began to multiply on the face of the earth..."*

For all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth...For the earth was filled with violence. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, all fowl, cattle, beasts, creeping things, and every man. And God remembered Noah, and every living thing. Go forth of the ark...Bring forth...breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply. And Noah went forth. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (from Genesis 6, 7, 8, and 9:1). Multiply is repeated again twice in Genesis 9:7. Multiply! Math: add, subtract, divide, and multiply!

God says, "Fill the earth!" The overall plan of God is one of EXPANSION. All of the good, noble, lovely, and fruitful things of God's creation should expand, grow, and increase. God seeks people so that more can be saved from sin. Godly families also should increase to fill the earth. Churches built by Christ should grow and increase world-wide.

God's creation is a showcase of multiplicity! Only a small percentage of our total U.S. corn crop is retained for next year's seeds. Only several acres of uncultivated cropland could yield billions of weed seeds. Two bushels of wheat seed planted in our area can easily yield 120 bushels an

acre in harvest, which would be an astronomical number of individual seeds. The potential of multiplicity in God's world is fabulous, enormous, and stupendous! The potential in one grain of wheat created by God on the third day of creation could have before now, covered all the land of the whole earth if it were always kept back for seeds only. God appointed man to plan for the needs of humankind by selection, cultivation, and distribution. Thus, the number of people at any given year, generation, or century should always have sufficient to use and share, and to store until the next harvest, with most times having some left over. Surplus is good, which keeps prices at a reasonable level, avoiding price gouging and needless speculation and hoarding, as when supplies are thin.

All of which somewhere brings up the question of how many people can this planet comfortably and adequately sustain? World planners have said this earth can be okay with nine billion, but would be maxed out at 10 billion. We say, our world has no known limit in a well-planned and rightly managed economy. Individual initiative produces much more effectively and efficiently than centralized governmental planning and management, such

as has been forced by communist governments upon the masses within their conquered borders.

The variables are too numerous, and beyond that, much too complex for us to discuss here in the scope and purpose for our addressing the population issue. God is sovereign, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Under His benevolent care and kindness and grace, He loves all the people of the world with a total provision in our entire pilgrimage, albeit, not altogether without our temptations and struggles and some losses and disappointments. But besides, He always makes a way for His own.

The Bottom Line is that sometimes we wish for a more perfect world, or a more perfect nation, or a more perfect community, or a more perfect church, or a more perfect extended family, or a more perfect personal family, or just me to be a more perfect person. Those feelings can be good, but we need to apply ourselves to His principles in general and to our individual lives in Bible specifics.

Jesus has promised a perfect home in heaven for those who are saved from sin, and besides, a perfect glorified body for each of us, in which to live there eternally! Amen!



Jacob J. Hershberger

1908-1965

Ray Shank, Rochelle, VA

Jacob was born into an Old Order Amish community in Geauga Co, Ohio. His dad, Joe I., was jailed for not allowing Jacob and his brother to attend public school after the eighth grade. Early in 1922, the family moved to Kempsville, VA, where the school laws were more relaxed.

Jacob started out a typical husband, father of nine, and dairy farmer. After that, life got more complicated. When the church school needed someone to finish out the last half of the term, Jacob was available. When Yoder Dairy needed a manager, Jacob served. When the church needed a leader, Jacob was called (minister, age 33, bishop, age 52).

During the last 12 years of his life, his "Lynnhaven Gleanings" in the *Budget* were both newsy and preachy. They offended an Old Order minister in Lancaster, PA, who threatened to boycott the *Budget*. Jacob traveled

to the man's farm incognito. After a rapport-building discussion, Jacob identified himself and was able to establish peace.

When AMA was organized in 1955, Jacob's letter-writing and typing skills were needed. He developed the job of AMA secretary into the efficient functioning role that has blessed that organization. In his travels to Germany on AMA business, a certain ocean vessel was used. The captain requested that Jacob preach the Sunday morning service. On a later voyage, the captain recognized his name on the ship's list and solicited his service as message bearer for that trip.

Jacob's service to the church was cut short by death at age 57. On a trip scouting for a church outreach, he was killed in a tragic wreck. Jacob, a man "ready to every good work," was willing to be used where needed.



"Cry out for insight and understanding. Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure."

Proverbs 2:3-4

Who Actually Has the Advantage?

Marvin Kauffman, Weldon, IA

Looking at the story of David and Goliath from the perspective of the military culture of that era may give us a different picture of David's dramatic victory. It may also teach us some valuable lessons about perceived advantages being actual disadvantages, and vice versa. Goliath appeared to have all the advantages: size (possibly over nine feet tall!), impenetrable body armor, a brass helmet, and an armor bearer. He carried an impressive spear with a thick shaft and weighing around 20 pounds, certainly a formidable weapon when thrust by a man of Goliath's size and strength. He was "armed to the teeth!"

David, on the other hand, had no body armor, and was armed only with a shepherd's staff, his trusty slingshot, and five smooth stones. He appeared to have every disadvantage. But did he really? He had the advantage of being able to move rapidly because he was not encumbered by heavy armor. And he was incredibly skilled with a slingshot as a result of many hours of practice and actual experience with a lion and a bear. Judges 20:16 mentions an army of 700 chosen left-handers who could sling a stone within a hair's-breadth. Military

records would indicate that a unit of heavily armored, lumbering, infantrymen were no match for an army of slingers, who employed their deadly weapons long before the infantry got close enough to use theirs.

Goliath's size and his heavy armor were an actual disadvantage, because he moved slowly. He was expecting close-up hand-to-hand combat, but David didn't feel obligated to play by the rules. He employed his deadly weapon long before Goliath was even close enough to thrust his huge spear.

Does this somewhat different perspective downplay the power of God in giving David the victory over the giant, or the level of trust in God needed by David? Not really. God obviously wanted the victory to go to Israel. He shows His power by raising up a young man at just the right time, and with the courage and skills needed to beat the giant when the seasoned warriors in Saul's army were thoroughly intimidated. And David's greatest weapon was his unwavering trust in God. He knew without a doubt that he had an incredible advantage because he was fighting "*in the name of the Lord.*" His enemy, Goliath, was actually an

enemy of God, an uncircumcised Philistine who was defying the armies of the living God and being allowed to bring reproach on His name. In David's mind, losing was not an option; there was too much at stake.

A fresh perspective on this well-known account does teach us some lessons about perceived advantages and disadvantages. Actually, the history of man is filled with similar stories. One man who today has a large house in Beverly Hills, and his children are growing up with every so-called advantage, recalls his own boyhood in a time and place where money was scarce. When he was 10, he got commitments from folks up and down the street to have their sidewalks shoveled after their frequent snows. It was more than he could do himself, but eventually he had eight friends on his payroll! By the time he was 11 he had made 500 dollars. But today he is honestly facing a dilemma: how is he going to teach his "advantaged" children the value of money and the joy and satisfaction of earning their own way?

David Bois grew up with dyslexia, resulting in poor reading skills and scarcely being able to spell. Frequently, the spell checker on his iPad could not even figure out what

he was trying to spell! His goal to become a lawyer seemed daunting with all the material a lawyer typically needs to read. In law school, while fellow students were either furiously taking notes or daydreaming, he was forced to focus intently on what was being said and commit much of it to memory. Today, he is a successful attorney who "doesn't miss a thing" with an incredible memory, both a tremendous advantage for a trial lawyer.

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, His apostles would have appeared to be at a huge disadvantage. Their number was small. They had the powerful religious elite working against them and later the Roman empire itself. The odds were definitely not stacked in their favor! But within 60 years, most of the civilized world had been exposed to and influenced by the Gospel. The church was strong and growing despite what most people would have seen as insurmountable disadvantages. They were a force to be reckoned with because, first of all, they were doing battle on God's side just as David was. Their weapons were not physical, but "*mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds*" (II Corinthians 10:4).

There were incredible odds against our Anabaptist forefathers. Yet

they prospered, and their numbers grew. Because of their identity and purpose in this life and their hope of eternity with Christ, they were at a tremendous advantage over their opposers. They went fearlessly to their deaths, some with a song of triumph on their lips. Ironically, their growth slowed down over time as they gained the perceived advantages of religious freedom and economic wellbeing.

As our country becomes increasingly secular and socialistic, we tend to become anxious about losing our religious and economic freedoms. While we certainly don't wish that for ourselves or our children, might that actually be a spiritual and eternal advantage?

As Kingdom citizens, aren't we always, no matter what we face, in a position of incredible advantage over our opposition, just as were the early Church and our Anabaptist forefathers? These Scriptures speak very clearly of all that we are given in Christ:

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (II Peter 1:3).

So, in all our battles against what we anxiously tend to perceive as giants, who actually has the advantage?



Pardon

Richard Stoltzfoos, Burgettstown, PA

I saw his gun—and mine was lifted—
But dropped mine and dared;
For long ago, an Adversary
With gun prepared,
Refrained from lifting death at me,
And I was spared.

marriages

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

Brychik-Miller

Bro. Jared, son of Dan and Linda Brychik, Salem, NJ, and Sis. Shelly, daughter of Richard and Mary Miller, Woodstown, NJ, on September 20, 2025, at Hardingville Bible Church for Woodstown Anabaptist Church, by Floyd Graber.

Hacker-Miller

Bro. James, son of Dewayne and Jennifer Hacker, Carrier Mills, IL, and Sis. Jessica, daughter of Leonard and Beth Miller, Milford, IN, on October 9, 2025, at Camp Alexander Mack by Dan Herschberger.

Miller-Esh

Bro. Sean, son of Titus and Sharon Miller, Afton, OK, and Sis. Kathleen, daughter of John and Linda Esh, Woodstown, NJ, on November 1, 2025, at Fellowship Bible Church for Woodstown Anabaptist Church by Lee Stoltzfus.

Miller-Thompson

Bro. Josiah, son of David and Effie Miller, Shreve, OH, and Sis. Jessica Ann, daughter of Lon and Toni Ann Thompson, Millersburg, OH, on December 13, 2025, at Messiah Amish Mennonite Church by Nathan Yoder.

Stoltzfus-Peachey

Bro. Tim, son of Daniel and Mima Stoltzfus, Munnsville, NY, and Sis. Karen, daughter of Wilmer and Vera Peachey, Ellisburg, NY, on November 29, 2025, at Northern Light Christian Fellowship by Wilmer Peachey.

Stoltzfus-Yoder

Bro. Merle, son of Wilmer and Thelma Stoltzfus, Chuckey, TN, and Sis. Bethany, daughter of Troy and Matilda Yoder, Montezuma, GA, on November 8, 2025, at Montezuma Mennonite Church by Morris Yoder.

Yoder-Yoder

Bro. Andrew, son of Philip and Marietta Yoder, Cumberland Furnace, TN, and Sis. Vanessa, daughter of Brady and Luann Yoder, Montezuma, GA, on December 6, 2025, at Montezuma Mennonite Church by Morris Yoder.



cradle roll

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

Chedryk, VasyI and Kate, Perry, NY, fourth child, third daughter, Natalie Kateryna, December 16, 2025.

Dyck, Abe and Beulah (Swartzentruber), Montezuma, GA, fifth child, third daughter, Gracie Willow, November 12, 2025.

Kanagy, Tony and Marla (Troyer), Dolphin, VA, third child, second son, Charlie Flint, December 11, 2025.

King, Kenny and Sharon (Nissley), Paris, TN, first child and daughter, Harmony Dawn, September 30, 2025.

Marner, Fred and Sheena (Morton), Arcola, IL, second child, first son, George Beckett, December 10, 2025.

Miller, Brandon and Cheyanne (Yoder), Yoder, KS, first child and daughter, Aubrielle Grace, December 15, 2025.

Miller, Edwin and Julie (Kauffman), Lovington, IL, second child, first son, Weston Blake, December 1, 2025.

Miller, Wayne and Edna Marie (Troyer), Paint Lick, KY, third child, first son, Jordan Wyatt, August 14, 2025.

Mullet, Joseph and Rhoda (Miller), Owenton, KY, sixth child, second son, Thaddeus Joshua, December 17, 2025.

Peachey, Andrew and Ina (Hershberger), Mannsville, NY, fourth child, third son, Lincoln James, January 4, 2026.

Peachey, Brandon and Krista (Byler), Partridge, KS, first child and son, Bridger David, January 19, 2026.

Peachey, Jeremy and Marita (Miller), Paint Lick, KY, second child, first daughter, Ashlyn Joy, November 21, 2025.

Schlabach, Marcus and Rebecca (Mast), Batesville, IN, fourth child, third daughter, Kiana Shalom, January 18, 2026.

Schrock, Daryl and Colette (Nissley), Shipshewana, IN, first child and son, Fletcher Jay, November 15, 2025.

Stoltzfus, Brian and Sarah (King), Perry, NY, third child, second son, Zander Kade, December 12, 2025.

Stoltzfus, Lavon and Amber (Glick), Perry, NY, first child and daughter, Jazlynn Raine, November 2, 2025.

Swartzentruber, Matthias and Jill (Wenger), Montezuma, GA, second child, first daughter, Eden Adele, December 4, 2025.

Weaver, Jon Anthony and Jennifer (Borntrager), Milan, IN, fourth child and son, Mason Cole, December 30, 2025.

Yoder, Delbert and Elizabeth (Yoder), Fredonia, KY, fourth child, third son, Kody Blake, October 6, 2025.

Yoder, Joshua and Gina (Miller), Arlington, KS, first child and daughter, Corinna Danae, December 30, 2025.

Yoder, Leslie and Katlyn (Yoder), Mannsville, NY, second child and daughter, Clarissa Rae, December 16, 2025.

Yoder, Micah and Janita (Peight), Greeneville, TN, second child and daughter, Oaklynn Sage, December 20, 2025.

Yoder, Tim and Clara (Kuhns), Auburn, KY, fifth child, fourth son, Tristyn Benjamin, September 13, 2025.



ordinations

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

Bro. Mark Beachy, 44, (wife, Melody Stoltzfus), Cayo, Belize, was ordained minister at Cayo Christian Fellowship on November 23, 2025. Preordination messages were given by Ben Stoltzfus and Laban Kropf. The charge was given by Orlando Matute, assisted by Ben Stoltzfus and Hughdelle Ysaguirre. Quinton Stoll and Eduardo Sanches shared the lot.

Bro. Kevin Byler, 31, (wife, Veronica Mast), Vanleer, TN, was ordained deacon at Lighthouse Mennonite Church on January 11, 2026. Preordination messages were given by Matt Miller. The charge was given by Julian Esh, assisted by Paul Overholt and Lavern Eash. Phil Yoder and Jonny Yoder shared the lot.

Bro. John Miller, 35, (wife, Crystal Yoder), Hutchinson, KS, was ordained minister by the voice of the church at Center Amish Mennonite Church on January 25, 2026. Preordination messages were given by Thad Thayer, Perkins, OK. The charge was given by Dwight Miller, assisted by David Yoder and Brian Shenk.



obituaries

Bender, Mary Edna, 83, of Kalona, IA, passed from this life on January 4, 2026, at the Pleasantview Home in Kalona. She was born on January 12, 1942, in Kalona, the daughter of David H. and Susan J. (Yoder) Bender.

She spent many years serving in missions in both Mt. View, AR, and at Hillcrest Home in Harrison, AR. After returning to IA, she taught at Sharon Bethel School for 20 years and worked as a cook and housekeeper at Pleasantview Home. Mary Edna was a faithful member of the Sharon Bethel Mennonite Church and enjoyed gardening and piecing quilts.

Survivors include her brothers: Henry (Yvonne) Bender of Oregon; Enos Bender of Kalona; three brothers-in-law: Manasses Burkholder, Francis Swartzenderuber, Joseph T. Miller; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Preceding Mary Edna in death were her parents, five sisters: Katie Bender, Mabel Burkholder, Esther Miller, Sara Mae Swartzentruber, Anna Goode; and

one brother, Harvey D. Bender.

Her funeral service was held on January 7, 2026, at the Sharon Bethel Mennonite Church in rural Kalona. Burial followed in the church cemetery.

Fisher, Jacob L., 77, of Narvon, PA, passed away on January 9, 2026, at home. He was born on July 23, 1948, in Gap, PA, to the late Samuel and Katie (Blank) Fisher.

He was a member of Mine Road Church.

Surviving are five siblings: Omar, Gap; Chris, OH; Sadie (John) Zook, Gap; Fannie (Leroy) Riehl, Lykens; and Naoma (Amos) Stoltzfus, New Holland.

He was preceded in death by two sisters: Lydia and Annie Fisher.

The funeral service was held at Millwood Mennonite Church, Gap, PA, on January 14, 2026, with Nathan Fisher, Larry Beiler, Floyd King, Jason Smucker, Marcus Beiler, and Mel Weaver serving. Interment followed in the Millwood Cemetery.

Helmuth, RoseMary, 77, of Dickson, TN, peacefully passed from this life on December 31, 2025, at her home after battling kidney failure. She was born on August 4, 1948, to the late Edgar and Bertha (Nissley) Helmuth in Kalona, IA. On August 20, 1969, she married L.J. Helmuth, to whom she was married for 54 years. In 1977, they moved to Whiteville, TN, where they resided for 42 years, and in 2019 they moved to Dickson, TN.

She loved her grandchildren and

enjoyed when they popped in to visit. She also enjoyed quilting, sewing, baking, and supporting her husband in his ministry.

She is lovingly remembered by her children: Ferman, Harrisonburg, VA; Ernie (Danelle), and their children: Nicole, Jared, Vivian, and Kari; Ellen (Mark) Yoder, and their children: Jordan, Chloe, and Jenson, all of Dickson; Nevin (Tina), Slanesville, WV, and their children: Kaiden, Karson, and Asher; Quintin, Whiteville; her siblings: Verna (Ray) Overholt, Frederick (Anna) Helmuth, Jacob (Laura Jean) Helmuth, Simon (Lillian) Helmuth, Sanford (Sheila) Helmuth, James (Brenda) Helmuth, Lorraine (Darrell) Diener, Salinda (Cletus) Rhodes, Grace (Durlin) Miller, Anne (Jim) Yoder, Tim (Romilia) Helmuth, and Mark (Retha) Helmuth.

She was preceded in death by her husband, L.J. Helmuth, grandchildren: Emily Sue (Ernie and Danelle); Trevor Angelo (Mark and Ellen); siblings: Roger Helmuth, Barbara Hershberger, Edna Mae Helmuth, and brothers-in-law: Jim Yoder and Durlin Miller.

The funeral was held on January 4, 2026, at Lighthouse Mennonite Church, Vanleer, TN, with Julian Esh officiating.

Miller, Ora Lee, 85, of Utica, OH, passed away in Sarasota, FL, on November 12, 2025. He was born in LaGrange, IN, on October 6, 1940, to Simon B. and Lydia Miller. He was married on May 26, 1960, to Rosa J. Miller, who passed away December 2, 2014. On June 3, 2017, he married Esther

Burkholder, who survives.

Ora was a charter member of Melita Christian Fellowship. He was well-known in the community as a farmer and window/siding installer. He enjoyed playing guitar and mandolin. Most people remember him by his music and his sense of humor. Operating his backhoe was another favorite pastime. He never met a stranger and enjoyed meeting new people. After marrying Esther, he enjoyed meeting people and doing taxi work for the Amish in Sarasota during the winter months.

Survivors include his wife, Esther, of eight years, Ora and Rosa's children: Richard (Bertha), Gambier; Wayne (Ada), Columbus, NC; Marion (Miriam), Gambier; Sharon (Jonny) Gingerich, Arcola, IL; Arlen (Rita), Inman, SC; grandchildren: Cierra (Seth) Stoltzfus, Hannah, Javin (Brienne), Zackary (Amanda), Felicia, Kimberly, Quinton (Aly), Kenton (Emily), Justin, Jacklyn, Kara, Bennett, Andre Gingerich; Analise, Ross, Madelyn, Katriel, Kingston; great-grandchildren, Charles and Gloria; nine stepchildren, 53 step-grandchildren, 15 step-great-grandchildren; one brother, Leroy (Sylvia) Miller, and two sisters-in-law: Gladys Miller and Odessa Miller.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his first wife, Rosa, a daughter, Karen, a son Paul, a stillborn great-grandson; and four brothers: Lester, Lloyd, Olen, and Ray Miller.

The funeral service was held on November 16, 2025, at Melita Church in Utica. Burial was in the church cemetery.

The services were conducted by the Melita ministerial team.

Mullet, Melvin Leander, 83, Auburn, KY, passed from this life on January 5, 2026. He was born on December 18, 1942, in Plain City, OH, to Emmanuel and Katie (Miller) Mullet. Melvin married Katie (Yoder) on May 8, 1964.

For many years he was a member of Fair Haven Mennonite Church in Goshen, IN. During his later years he was a member of Providence Mennonite Fellowship in Auburn, where he and Katie lived with their son Stanley and wife.

Melvin is survived by his wife of 61 years, and five children: Karen (Lewis) Weaver, Plain City, OH; LaVern (Rhoda), Columbus, NC; Darlene (Michael) Overholt, Ripley, WV; Stanley (Emmileen), Auburn; Cindy (Brad), Shipshewana, IN; 20 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Also surviving are four siblings: Menno (Dena) Mullet, Sadie (Levi) Yoder, Emmanuel (Mattie) Mullet, and Ida (late Andrew) Schwartz.

He was preceded in death by his parents, four brothers: Marvin (late Wilma, Kathryn), Eli (late Verba), Vernon (Rachel), John; and two sisters: Lizzie (Daniel) Borntreger, and Katie (Amos) Yoder.

A visitation was held on January 7, 2026, at the Providence Mennonite Church, Auburn. The funeral was held on January 10, 2026, at Fair Haven Church, Goshen, IN, with burial in the church cemetery.



Saints in the Aisle

Carol Nisly, Altamont, KS

Her hat caught my eye. We were strangers sharing the aisle in the eggs, butter, and bacon section at our local Walmart. Clearly not a spring chicken, this woman's hat struck me as playful for someone her age, and so I commented on it. She informed me with cheer that she had “inherited” it from a daughter! As our chat continued, I concluded I'd met one of God's saints while shopping. There followed a joyous exchange about the goodness of God (though she is a widow) and finding a mutual friend (our daughter's music instructor). She invited us to attend their Christmas cantata Sunday evening, but we had plans already laid. The warmth and joy from that little encounter lingered with me, and smiling, I steered my cart to locate the half-and-half we like with morning coffee.

Next, I was in the candy aisle. Yes, I was hunting for chocolate—for gifts, you know, since this was December 19th. A friendly individual spoke to me, extending his hand and introducing himself as Dan Goddard, State Representative. Oh, gulp. I'm

woefully and willingly ignorant of politics. So I waded right in with one of my favorite questions, mined out of James K. A. Smith's book, *Desiring the Kingdom*. “So what do you think constitutes human flourishing?” I thought this might buy me a little time to compose myself before I exposed my ignorance.

His eyelids fluttered a bit; perhaps he was not accustomed to being quizzed by Mennonite ladies. But he soon recovered, and we had a friendly exchange in which he told me he was 84 years old. So I popped out another of my favorites, “At the end of your story, what do you want to have been true of the way you lived?”

You never know who you'll encounter at the grocery store or local hardware. It could be a lonely widow or a friendly politician. Whoever it is, they bear the image of their Creator and you would do well to look for it. Do not allow yourself to pass by on the other side, deterred by paint and glitter, nose rings or tattoos. When we truly see people as we shop, we find more than eggs and bacon, cream and candy. You might be the

only bit of Jesus they see in the day. Wouldn't it be nice to know you actually showed up—present to the

person in front of you? You might find a saint in the aisle at Walmart.



stones and stories

“Ya Hamar!”

Chris Stoltzfus, Lancaster, PA

“**Y**^a *Hamar!*” (Oh, donkey) The words hit my friend as he refused to accept the *masjid's* (mosque) offer for a free house, a free wife, and all this world could offer. The expression used in Arabic is used to call out ignorance or stubbornness as bad as a donkey (*hamar*). Samir (name changed) was rejecting an offer to continue his work as the *Imam* (leader of a mosque) where Muslims gathered five times daily to pray. It was his job to lead the prayers and offer the weekly Friday *khutba* (sermon).

My friend grew up as an observant Muslim in the Middle East. He attended the mosque and the Friday prayers, and at a young age was enrolled in Qur'anic school. His devotion to Islam inspired him to become an Islamic scholar where he read voraciously about Islam's prophet, its people, and its history.

All of this qualified him to take the highly honored role of an *Imam* in his small community. But he was leaving that position because he had discovered another treasure and was willing to sell all that he had to buy that field.

The Treasonous Question

Years prior to this, Samir and I had passed through the busy streets of an Arab town packed with women wearing the hijab and young men strolling the streets and sidewalks in small groups. With the guttural sounds of the Arabic language all around, we found a cafe and sat on the second floor. As in times past, our conversation quickly turned to Jesus and His message. However, this time, he had a more pressing question. One that a Muslim would not dare to ask for fear of ostracization or much worse.

As we talked, we were repeatedly interrupted as young folks from his

masjid phoned with questions on what was *halal* (acceptable) or *haram* (prohibited) in Islam. He would point them to a specific page in the Qur'an and tell them they could find the answer on the right or left side of the book! While in Qur'an school he had memorized the entire Qur'an which made it easy to direct them to the answers.

While Muslims claim that their religion is very simple and focused on *Tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) and the five pillars, Islamic law stipulates how Muslims ought to live in extremely vivid detail. Imagine a world where instructions on breaking a fast are divulged in intricate detail where one must begin with water and handle the cup in a very specific way. First, the water must be in the right hand. Next, one must drink a bit and then put the cup down. It is haram to drink a full cup of water at once. Since the prophet drank his water in three rounds of lifting and bringing the cup to his lips, that is the proper way to drink water when breaking a fast (or any other time).

Between the phone calls, our conversation turned to a more serious note. Samir had a question most Muslims would not dare to ask and one he must have been pondering as he began a journey of discovering Jesus and the story of the

Gospel. Our relationship was most likely the only safe place he could ask the blasphemous question.

He uttered his question: "Was Muhammad a false prophet?" Then he looked at me, waiting for an answer.

Immediately, my mind began spinning. How could I navigate this question and not offend my friend but also tell the truth about the prophet of his people? And was it even safe to answer this question? In some countries, honestly answering the question about Muhammad would be met with bitter repercussions. To avoid such a fate, one Muslim missionary's response to this question was to say something to this effect; "I thank God that Muhammad spoke against the terrible things of his day. I thank God that Jesus came to pay for our sins" (*Strong's*, p. 288). Sadly, that response put Jesus and Muhammad on nearly the same level. I could NOT do that. I would rather tell the truth and offend or have my head cut off than compare them in such a way!

I began my response slowly. "If Jesus really is Who the Bible says He is," I tried to couch my words carefully. I continued with a question, "What is one thing that Satan would NOT want people to know?" My question to Samir was centered around the Gospel story of Jesus'

death and that being the ONLY way for humans to have their sins forgiven. “If that is true,” I reasoned, “Satan would want to ensure people DO NOT find out about it.”

Samir understood my line of reasoning. He agreed that Satan would not want people to know that Jesus was the only way to salvation and realized more than me that Islam is a system directly opposed to Jesus' death being an atonement for sin.

I came to my final point, “I believe that Muhammad was a false prophet.”

Amazingly, he seemed to accept my thoughts, and we continued our relationship.

Four Years Later

Time passed and years later I was back in the Middle East and meeting with Samir again. We had not planned to be in the same country at this time, but after arriving there with my family, I happened to come across a social media notification that showed he was in the same country. I was surprised to learn that while he was hundreds of miles from his home and I was thousands of miles from mine, in some surprise arrangement of God's providence, we happened to be in the same city. Weeks later, we sat down at a coffee shop to catch up and this time he was talking about Jesus as though he had made the jump to believe in Christ!

I wanted more clarity. Was he really a believer?

“How did you come to believe that Jesus is the Way?” I asked, hoping for some clarity on his commitment to Christ.

His reply was exciting! “I was asking Allah to show me what is the right way, Islam or Christianity,” he confided. And in a surprise way he found his answer. He shared this in writing many years later:

“I had been feeling bored and wanted to get out. So I went to the mosque to find spiritual comfort. But there I heard the reader say, “Oh, Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve.” I discovered that this was the voice of Christ telling me that comfort is not here in the mosque.”

Amazingly, God used a Muslim Imam preaching from the Quran in a mosque to point a Muslim towards following Jesus!

The Injeel is all Light

With such an open heart, I wanted to spend more time with Samir, so I invited him to join our group for a Sunday morning service in a small apartment building. He came with his wife and shared more of his story. The journey began in our first meeting when he came to convert us to Islam. That meeting gave him

the opportunity for the first time to read the New Testament. He began reading the book and was deeply and profoundly touched by its light.

“The Injeel is all light,” he explained in his broken English, “but the Quran only has a little bit of light here and there.” He came to love that Light of the world and began to question all he had been taught. But what seems to have impacted him even more was the film of Jesus. With words and hand motions, he explained how he wept and his body was covered with goose bumps as he watched it. The story so deeply impacted him that he would come back over and over again and watch it. “When I watched it, I had power for one month,” he explained with excitement!

An Imam

During our conversations over the years, he described to me his life at the mosque. “I read the *Injeel*,” he shared, “then when it is time to pray, I go out and lead the prayer.” He came to love Jesus so much that he would use a book that I had given him with the stories of Jesus as his *khutba* inspiration! An Imam preaching about Jesus to a Muslim audience in a mosque!

Once he described an invitation he had to teach a class on the prophets at a school in his hometown. He spoke a bit about different prophets but then

spent 45 minutes talking about Jesus. He loved talking about Jesus!

“You’re a Christian,” they claimed.

“No,” he emphasized, “I am a Muslim.”

Leaving the Mosque

By the time we met hundreds of miles from his home, Samir had grown in his faith and even came to believe that Muhammad was a false prophet. I was curious about him working as an *Imam* with such beliefs, so I asked how it works for him to be an *Imam* and believe the things he does.

His response amazed and inspired me. “I began to feel like it was not good,” he explained and made plans to leave the mosque. When they discovered he was leaving, they offered him all that a man could dream of in that culture. They offered him a wife for free (they usually cost a lot of money), a house with beautiful bedroom furniture, a good salary, and more. But he was not willing to be bought by money. He rejected it all to find the treasure hidden in a field.

[NOTE: There is more to this story that Chris hopes to publish in a book of Stones and Stories at some point. If you would like to be informed as this develops or if you just wish to share a response to the story, you can text (717) 333-4104 or email chris@happyfarmer.store.]



A month or two ago, I received a book in the mail I had not ordered, written by Peter Hoover entitled *The Secret of the Strength*. Peter wrote this book in 1991. I was first introduced to this book several years later by a mutual friend. The copy I recently received joined the other copy I have on one of my bookshelves. Peter's book is noteworthy and thought provoking, and controversial. One thoughtful reader called me and pointed back to the February 1999 issue of *Calvary Messenger* where my father in this column referred to this book and included a couple of book reviews. I thought it might be helpful to reprint what my father and others wrote 27 years ago.

RJM

•••••

“Peter Hoover has written a book entitled *The Secret of the Strength*. It has been suggested that two reviews be offered in this column. I wish to thank David Bercot, from Tyler, Texas, and Joseph Stoll, from Aylmer, Ontario, Canada, for both having given their kind permission that they be used here.

“Brother Stoll was rather startled as he had written it for personal

reflection. He had shared it with only a few friends. It came to Kansas via email. We still haven't figured out exactly how this happened. It does seem that to put something in writing is not a good way to keep secrets.

“These reviews are welcome in that they should help readers of this book to read with discernment.”

DLM

•••••

Review by David Bercot: *The Secret of the Strength* by Peter Hoover.

I have been asked to give my assessment of the book, *The Secret of the Strength*. The thesis of the book is that what gave the 16th century Anabaptists their devotion and fiery zeal was their personal focus on Jesus Christ, trying to follow Him in all that they did. The book warmly praises the 16th century Anabaptists while chiding 20th century Mennonites and Amish (to whom I will refer as the “plain people”) for many of their attitudes and spiritual deficiencies. I'm sure this book hasn't settled well with the plain people. Yet, the purpose of the book isn't to criticize them for criticism's sake, but to challenge them to recapture the love and personal devotion to Christ the Anabaptists once had. Of

course, no group ever enjoys being criticized, but I think it would be a serious mistake for the plain people to close their ears to such critiques. Groups that become immune to self-criticism invariably wander far from God.

Peter's book doesn't purport to be a balanced analysis of today's plain people. It was written to provoke the plain people to take an honest look at their spiritual state. I'm sure that Peter would agree that there are many things praiseworthy about today's plain people that he doesn't mention.

When first reading the book, I couldn't help but think of some of the twists of history that Peter doesn't address. For example, he criticized (I think rightfully) the second generation of Anabaptists for turning on one another and fragmenting into exclusive groups. In turn, he praises the groups that were freer in their expressions and church memberships. However, it is descendants of the exclusive groups—like the Amish—who have primarily survived and preserved Anabaptist beliefs. The freer groups disappeared long ago.

So if there is any weakness in the book, I would say it doesn't completely tell the other side of the story. (Again it doesn't purport to be a balanced look at today's

plain people.) If the plain people dropped those rules of theirs that are extra-biblical and focused solely on Christ, I think we might see some tremendous spiritual revival in their ranks—for a generation. After a few generations, however, they would probably be gone, just like the freer Anabaptist groups of the 16th century. That's what makes the matter so complicated. There are no easy solutions.

We "seekers" often overlook the fact that if the plain people—with all their rules—had not preserved so many primitive Christian practices, the seekers wouldn't be practicing them either. For example, if the plain people had not preserved the head covering, most of the seekers' churches wouldn't be wearing them. I'm sure that my wife and daughter wouldn't. It would have seemed too radical, too outdated. But the fact that there were still churches who preserved this apostolic practice, made it easier for my wife and daughter to begin wearing head coverings. The same principle is true in matters such as nonresistance, modest dress, a strict position on divorce, etc.

I believe that there are spiritual deficiencies among the plain people that need to be honestly addressed. Peter's book rightfully treats those

matters. The plain people need to listen with open hearts and minds to the charges that books like *The Secret of the Strength* make. At the same time, critics and seekers need to be aware of how much they have been blessed by the plain churches. If plain people can receive criticism in humility, and if seekers can humbly acknowledge their great debt to the plain people, God will hopefully continue to use both groups until His Son returns.

- David Bercot, November 12, 1998



Review by Joseph Stoll: *The Secret of the Strength*, by Peter Hoover

This book is a most brilliant and compelling overview of the Anabaptist movement. It is much more realistic than the classic, *Mennonites in Europe*, by John Horsch, which was biased and selective in its treatment of the Anabaptists.

And yet I cannot escape the feeling that Hoover's work is likewise far from being truly objective. One gets the impression, that in many ways, this book is the author's personal declaration of independence—an explanation and a justification of his own journey away from a structured and authoritarian upbringing to the rather free position in which he now

finds himself with regard to church membership. To make congregational authority the whipping post for the demise of Anabaptism is both an oversimplification and an error, it seems to me.

We must keep in mind that the whole phenomenon of Anabaptism is complex beyond our comprehension. There were underlying social and economic factors. Above all, it was a movement spawned by the Reformation itself and thus somewhat a matter of timing. The very same sparks introduced to the Europe of a century later (or indeed, to the world of today) would never have caught fire and caused such a conflagration as it did in the sixteenth century.

Therefore, to attribute its dying out entirely to the abuse of church authority is a misrepresentation. More recognition must be given to the pluralism and divisiveness of the early stages of Anabaptism. There was not the unity and cohesion that Hoover holds up as the strength of the movement. Rather, it was often a spontaneous but poorly organized intermingling of zealous people whose long-term faith and commitment remained quite fluid. Witness the example of the believers at Aallikon where many were baptized but few remained faithful

for any length of time.

True, a faith that did not flinch when confronted by the sword or the bonfire of martyrdom is a faith that cannot be taken lightly or scorned. Yet the fact should not be overlooked that the Anabaptists were not the only ones in that era who gave up their lives for their faith. The Protestants had their martyrs too, and the French Huguenots died by the thousands.

The forming and molding of stable congregations of believers in the context of this Reformation scramble was not a negative thing at all. It was a positive accomplishment of God by the labors of such committed church leaders as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips. It may well be that they erred in later years by allowing disunity to mar their fellowship and by being too judgmental of each other. Yet this was more likely a result of lessening persecution rather than the cause of it.

The secret of the church's strength is indeed in making Christ the central figure and giving Him the preeminence in all things. But to insinuate that this is not possible within the context of a disciplined and structured brotherhood and a strong church authority is perhaps the greatest flaw of this book.

Peter Hoover idealized the peak

stages of Anabaptism when it was fanned to a white heat by the blood of many martyrs. He bemoans the passing of this era by blaming it on the abuse or overuse of authority within the church structure. There is surely some truth in what he says. Yet it is also true, that had it not been for a strong and scriptural church authority pattern down through the ages, the fires of Anabaptism would have long ago burnt to ashes and been blown to the winds and would hardly have reached down to the twentieth century, and to Peter Hoover!

- by Joseph Stoll, June 15, 1998

•••••

David L. Miller finishes this up with these comments:

"Some of us may have a tendency to glorify the value of persecution. It is good to remember that we are to pray that we might live a *'quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty'* (I Timothy 2:2b).

"I believe that God wants us to learn from history, including recent history and also contemporary happenings. It is good to remember, however, that none of us, including those who write about history, are altogether immune to the possibility of having an agenda or a bias that limits our ability to be totally objective. Readers do well to

bear this in mind.


“While truth is greater than its bearer, writers with a strong or revolutionary message incur the risk that discerning readers will want to know enough about the writer to understand the context from which

the message is written. This seems not only right but also needful.

“Let us endeavor by God’s grace to be willing learners. May that willingness be characterized by a corresponding Spirit-led sense of discernment.”



Words



Words are like kites—
We send them away
On the wing of the air
When we speak or we pray.

Words fly away
For good or for ill,
But we can’t pull them in,
Like kites, at our will.

A gem cannot be polished without
friction, nor man perfected without
the *abrasion of trials.*

Not the Book

Susan Schlabach, Ripley, OH



With apologies to *The Screwtape Letters* (C. S. Lewis), and a sideways nod to *My Dear Hemlock* (Tilly Dillehay), imagine with me that a senior enemy spirit is instructing a younger one, giving him a detailed assignment.

Following are snapshots from a made-up check list laying out the mission. The assignment? To distract the subjects from God-worship, sow suspicion among the saints, divide marriages and families, and hurl spears at who God says we are. Who might be the targeted? You and me, dear sisters.

•••••

Says Senior Evil Spirit to Junior Tempter: Have I got work for you! The gender I'm sending you to is a pliable one. Convince one of them and you may catch five more, because they're peer sensitive. They compare. They take their cues from those around them and quickly measure themselves among their friends. See how easy your job could be?

But hard too, by the same measure. Because if one of them gets high-fangled notions in her head about

devotion and commitment to the study of The Book, and prayer time, and share time, and accountability to others with like notions, your goose is cooked. Putting it bluntly and in summary: keep her out of The Book. Push her phone, her friends, her styles, her self-care, her likes, but by all means, not The Book! If it makes it any easier, you may distract her with good-sounding things, like helping someone, cooking or sewing for others, and even fellowship, but it must not be Fellowship About the Book.

I'll begin with instructions for the female subject who promised her life to a man...

Make sure she knows how to measure his love. If the honey-do list is untouched, or if he forgot to kiss her on his way out, or if he brought a visitor home spur of the moment, assure her beyond any doubt that the promised man doesn't love her at all. He doesn't open her door like the other gentleman does. He talks with food in his mouth in front of guests, and he raises his voice at stressful times. Make sure she understands

that men are fickle creatures and just because they promised love yesterday doesn't mean anything today. She should watch for more blunders on his part and begin to list them in her journal. She can be assured these are all proofs of no-love.

Continuing to circle in on this Promised Subject—prevail upon her to withhold any affirming words of commendation from that man of hers until he reaches her finish line of perfection. Because after all, if she thanks or praises him for some small act of kindness, he will (as all men do) automatically know that he is an excellent king, and he will quit trying to improve. The only way this union can come to a place of peace is his ultimate perfection. Any words of affirmation (before he reaches perfection) are a death knell to the high expectations she had for him to start noticing her in the right ways and to understand her love language. Gratitude, kind words, and simple courtesies are your and my enemies. See they find no place in her head or tongue.

And just one more thing regarding the subject caught in the Promise. She must, must, must look to that man as her Ultimate Everything. It is his job to make her happy. It is his job to nourish her and to romance her endlessly and to brag on her and to fulfill her and to never disappoint

her. The glory she had so longed for and imagined before the Promise, must now be realized fully or this union is headed for the rocks. It is her job to expect this of him. If all else fails, convince her that she married the wrong man.

And along this same scheme, if the subject you are circling is not promised in marriage, you must paint for her an out-of-this-world idyllic image of the Promise. Convince her that her personal happiness lies only within a future marriage, with a man wholly devoted to her happiness. No fulfillment, lasting joy, nor satisfaction of desire can be found outside of this Dream Promise. Don't let her glimpse The One True Lover of Her Soul, or this game is over, and you'll go down as the worst tempter ever.

If the subject answers to any as "Mama," you have huge potential for reaching our goals. Actually, I'd rather you convince her that reproduction of more of her kind is beneath her dignity and only for the weak who can't hold a job. But if you're too late already, there are always other techniques for deception that can be employed. The little humans come with a bent towards listening to you and me, but don't tell her that now! She will think they descended angelic-like. When they begin to assert their

fallen nature, make sure Mama has an explanation like sugar or food dyes, and encourage her to do everything she can to satisfy whatever the small human demands. Little humans need to be reasoned with, given choices, and encouraged to express every one of their little emotions. However, if their outbursts receive guidance from the adults in their world, there's an increased likelihood of developing mischiefs for the enemy camp. If the person whom they call Dad enters the fray, make sure Mama keeps the upper hand and Dad is made to look foolish, especially if he wants to draw a safe line. You can give it whatever gentle term you like, just make sure the little human's will is not crossed nor reprov'd, but only reasoned with and cajoled with plenty of choices. Keep the little human in sync with the nature we gave them.

The following applies to any female subject, promised, or mother, or not.

If you don't do anything else, you must convince your Subject that everything is huge. Teach her tunnel vision. Once she has her mind made up on a certain something, don't let her wander from that assumed truth, but build suspicion and assumption in the tunnel. She needs to tell stories to herself, replaying conversations in her mind incessantly. On and on and on. These repetitions will

eventually convince her of her own manufactured truth. Keep her in that rut.

Have her place people into tight boxes that reinforce her conviction that they are not to be trusted. Her own hard and fast opinions will give her a sense of security and control, whether it's about nutrition, child training, or end of the world sequences. Those who dare take issue with her ideas are enemies and need to be dealt with accordingly. She must learn to never be vulnerable nor to share her heart with anyone, for indeed they are all bent on harming her.

If she feels threatened in position or identity, have her take on more. Just more. More of whatever is in front of her or far away from her. More position. More responsibility. More possessions. More noise. More intensity. More functioning. More duties. More doing good. More appearance. More frantic putting on. Less rest. Less quietness. Less solitude. Less meditation. Less reflection.

Above all, my dear junior, don't let her get into The Book. You and I both know the secret for her true soul-rest is in The Book. So mark this down, you cannot afford to let her discover The Book nor the One Who Wrote the Book.



One Thousand Pages

Annette Miller, Red Bluff, CA

One of the activities at Streetlight Mission, in California, is helping Afghan children do their homework. Children come to their building, called The Lamp Post. Homework Club is touching children for Jesus.

“Here comes Setyesh!”

I watched as the girl looked both ways before darting across the street. Two little boys trotted along behind her.

Who are those boys? I wondered as I pulled out a chair and sat down at one of the long white tables. I enjoyed helping with Homework Club.

All kinds of children come for help with their homework after school on Wednesdays. Restless ones, tired ones, excited ones, sad ones... Homework Club is full of surprises.

“Hi, teacher.” Setyesh pushed open the door and held it for the two boys.

“Hi, Setyesh! How are you?”

“I’m good.” Setyesh ushered the two boys over to the table where I sat. “Dese boys needs help with deir homework. He has to do dis page and Zab has to do dis page.” She laid a page on the table in front of each boy.

She turned to Miss Bethany. “Can you help me with my homework?”

“Sure!” Miss Bethany pulled out a chair for her. “What are you working on today?”

I turned to the two boys. “Good to see you!” I said. “What are your names?”

“Zab,” said the one on my left, and “Mohammad,” said the other.

“Alright, Zab, let’s look at yours first.” Together we bent over his paper. “You were learning about greater than and less than symbols today? Way to go. Can you read the first question for me?”

Zab shook his head. “I can’t read.”

“Oh.” It wasn’t surprising that some of these children, who had so recently moved to America, couldn’t read English. No, it wasn’t a surprise, but it made homework much harder. “Okay,” I said, “I’ll read it.”

“Ben had six red socks and eight blue socks in his drawer.” I handed him a pencil. “So was the number of red socks greater than or less than the number of blue socks in his drawer?”

Zab shrugged. “Blue?”

I blinked. “Okay, there were more

blue socks in his drawer. So what symbol will we make to show that there were more blue socks than red socks?”

“Symbol? What’s a symbol?” He ran his fingers through his hair.

I looked at him. Was he trying to be funny?

“Did your teacher explain this to you at school?” I asked.

“No,” his big dark eyes gazed out the window.

This will take a while, I thought. I picked up a marker and mini white board. I drew two symbols. “We use this symbol to show that a number is bigger than the number on the other side of it. Like this.” I quickly jotted down a number on each side of the symbol. “See?”

Zab nodded. He leaned over to Mohammed, eyes sparkling, and rattled off something in Dari.

“What did you say to him?” I asked.

“I said ‘member when we went fishing?”

I looked at him helplessly. I glanced over at Mohammad’s book. Was his page any easier? Rows of fractions marched down both sides of the page. Fractions? I flipped the book shut and looked at its cover. “Fifth grade” it declared.

“Mohammad, what grade are you in?” I asked.

“Second.”

“Me too,” said Zab. “I’m in second grade too.”

I looked at Miss Bethany. “I don’t think this is Mohammad’s book.”

Miss Bethany looked at Setyesh. “Setyesh, is that your homework?”

Setyesh scowled. “But I have one thousand pages to do,” she said darkly.

I took the pages and handed them to her.

“This page is from yesterday and this page is from last week. It will take me years to finish all this homework.” She sighed. “One thousand pages,” she said again, grimacing.

•••••

Setyesh wanted to dodge her own homework and hand it off to the boys. That did not work well for anyone. I was glad I figured out that this work was not Zab’s and Mohammad’s.

We all have work to do, whether at home or at school. Every day we need the help of God to do our work well. We can ask Him to help us, for He loves us so much and wants to aid us.

“Whatsoever thy hand find to do, do it with thy might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men, for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23).



Am I Doing Enough for God?

Ryan Stoltzfus, Dobson, NC

Sometime around the year A.D. 30, Jesus was traveling through the town of Bethany and stopped to rest. Martha, one of Jesus' friends who lived in the town, invited Him into her house. She had a sister named Mary, who immediately sat down with Jesus, listening and talking to Him. Martha, however, didn't have time for any of that. She rushed around the house, taking care of her guests and "distracted by her many tasks."

Martha noticed her idle sister, and it ate at her. She eventually had enough of it and came to Jesus, telling Him, "Master, could you please make Mary get up and do stuff?" Well, Martha didn't exactly put it that way, but she clearly wasn't happy with her sister's inaction and told Jesus to tell Mary to help her.

What came next surely surprised Martha. Jesus, rather than rebuking Mary for not doing enough, rebuked Martha for doing too much. He didn't chide her for being lazy or lukewarm (as he rebuked the church of Laodicea several decades later) but *for being caught up in doing good things*.

It's a rebuke that has long puzzled me: Why in the world did Jesus rebuke Martha for what seems to be the *opposite* of lukewarmness?

An identity rooted in doing

As a young Christian, I subconsciously assumed that being the opposite of a *lukewarm* and *passive* Christian was a *busy* Christian. And determined not to be passive, I made myself busy serving and learning. I attended mission conferences, read books on Christian history and theology, and nearly always felt guilty for not doing just a little bit more.

But then my belief in busy Christianity was shaken. In 2022, I had the opportunity to visit the Tarahumara people, a native American group living in the Copper Canyon of Mexico.

There, I encountered a lifestyle that was as slow and laidback as my life was hurried and frenetic. With no cell service and no good roads, a slow life is the default for a Tarahumara. An ordinary day might consist of hiking four hours away to check up on a field of beans, then turning around and hiking back home.

Knowing the kind of life we American visitors were used to, one of the men living there said, “You guys are too hurried and busy. Us? We get up when the sun comes up, eat when we’re hungry, take a nap when we’re tired, use the bathroom when we need to, and go to bed when the sun goes down.”

This ultra-slow lifestyle contrasted sharply with the busy schedule that I knew in my conservative Anabaptist community: youth nights, kid’s club, hanging out with friends, attending local events, and on and on, ad infinitum. There in the Copper Canyon, with my checklists and full evenings and busyness taken away from me, I felt like part of my identity was gone.

And it was.

It was during this time that I slowly began realizing that too often, I found my value and identity not in Christ and His work in my behalf, but in being busy for God. Of course, I knew intellectually that my value came from being a child of God, but my default way of calculating my value was to measure up the things I did for God. My identity was less in what He did for me, and more about what I could do for Him.

Symptoms of a misplaced identity

Those few days in the Copper Canyon, along with several other

significant life experiences, revealed to me that I had a badly misplaced identity. Like Martha, I tended to root my worth in busyness, results, and good deeds.

To be clear, it’s not that doing good things for God is a bad idea. Not at all! Christians are called to action. But if our identity and our worth are found in doing those good things rather than in Christ Himself, there will be problems.

Several symptoms show themselves when being busy for Christ becomes our main identity.

1. *We serve to please people.* We gauge our value based on the ministries and expectations of others. We answer the question “am I doing enough?” by comparing our own work with the work of our church family and friends.
2. *We never meet our own expectations.* We never feel like we serve enough. There will always be one more hurting person, one more task to fulfill, one more thing to do to measure up to our own standards.
3. *We can never rest.* Because we serve to meet our own and others’ expectations, we are never able to rest. As Alan Noble says of his own experience, “Countless times I have found myself feeling happy and well-rested and a doubt

immediately enters my head: *Shouldn't I be doing something else?*

4. *We neglect God-given responsibilities.* A.W. Tozer was a great Christian writer who inspired many people to a deeper walk with God. Yet his home life tells another story. In his passion for God's work, he regularly neglected his family. His wife felt his absence severely. After he died, his wife remarried. She said of her second marriage, "I have never been happier in my life. [Tozer] loved Jesus Christ, but Leonard Odam (her second husband) loves me." While I don't pretend to be the judge of Tozer's life, it seems that his ministry for God might have become his identity, causing him to neglect his other God-given responsibilities.

5. *We use good works to hide spiritual neglect.* Measuring our success by being busy for God can ultimately blind us to spiritual problems. Many a youth has faithfully gone to kid's club every week, yet lived for party and pop culture. We can easily use busyness to drown out the voice of the Holy Spirit.

An Identity in Christ

Thankfully, we don't need to find our identity in accomplishments or results. A Christian's identity should

be rooted in Christ, because He owns us and our lives are His.

In John 15, Jesus uses the analogy of the vine to explain our relationship with Him. In the parable, the Father is the vinedresser, Jesus is the vine, and His followers are the branches. He tells his disciples: "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*" (ESV)

Take careful notice of the order here. Jesus says that we must abide in Him before we are able to produce good fruit. The first important thing is to abide in Christ, and the second is that those abiding in Christ will bear good fruit. We first abide or "make our home in" Christ, and the fruits come after.

Along with abiding in Christ, we must recognize that our lives are not our own. Paul tells the Corinthians, "*Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price.*" (CSB) And in his letter to the Colossians, he tells the church, "*You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*" (ESV)

Not only are your dreams and missions and ambitions not your own, you are not your own, and your life is in Christ. Your value is based on the reality that you are a child of God.

The joy of an identity rooted in Christ

There are several effects of having our identity rooted in Christ.

1. *We serve faithfully and trust God with the results.* There is no need to compare our mission with other people's mission, our children with other children, our results with other results. God is over everything, and everything belongs to Him. He gives the increase.
2. *We rest.* Recognizing that God is the Lord of all, and you are not your own, brings tremendous relief. It means that you can, at the end of the day, set aside your projects and your busyness, and rest. You can lie down beside the still waters and let the Shepherd restore your soul.
3. *We prioritize the right things.* If we aren't ultimately responsible for our mission or our calling, then we can rest in God's ownership of that and also fulfill our other God-given responsibilities. We don't become so obsessed with a calling God has given us that we miss the other God-given duties.

Grasping these truths has a tremendous impact on how we view the world and ourselves. It relieves us from the burden of performance that our efficiency and results-driven Christianity has put on us.

You are not your own. Your projects are not your projects. You don't need to prove anything to God. Your identity is not in what you do, neither in how busy you are, nor in how successful your mission looks. Your identity is in Jesus Christ.

The opposite of a lukewarm Christian is not a hurried, busy Christian. The opposite of a lukewarm Christian is one who finds his identity in Christ and faithfully follows Him.

The question then, "Am I doing enough for God", is perhaps the wrong question. It reflects the belief that value is found in how much a person does for God. A better question is, "**Does God have enough of me?**"

And once God truly has me, out will flow a life of service, a life of peace, and a life that recognizes that God holds the world in His hands. With this, then, we can (to paraphrase J.R.R. Tolkien) have patience, go where we need to go, and hope, trusting our endeavors and our work to the hands that hold us.



(USPS 767-160)
Carlisle Printing
2673 Township Rd. 421
Sugarcreek, OH 44681

Periodicals

THOUGHT GEMS

He who has no clouds sees no rainbows.

••••••••

If life is a grind, use it to sharpen your wits.

••••••••

God sends trials, not to impair us, but to improve us.

••••••••

A bit of love is the only bit that will put a bridle on the tongue.

••••••~•

Tomorrow will be a better day if we begin today to improve it.

••••~••••

Time may be a great healer, but it's not a very good beauty specialist.

••••~••••

Nobody really lives till he finds something big enough to give himself to.

••••~••••

God doesn't measure success in units of silver, but in units of service.

••••~••••

When you don't know what to do, do the most helpful thing.

••••~••••

The head may seek God, but it is the heart that finds Him.

••••~••••

A narrow mind and a wide mouth usually go together.

••••~••••

In salvation, it's Who you know that counts.

••••~••••

A song in the night is worth two in the day.