

IN PART

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE BRETHREN IN CHRIST COMMUNITY IN THE U.S.

Spring 2013

We believe
JESUS IS
WITHIN US

PIETISM

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I do not claim to be a church historian, but I found [the] representation of Anabaptism in the winter issue of *In Part* magazine to be somewhat flowery. Like almost all attempts at Christian reformation, the story of Anabaptism is also a sad story, filled with the testimonies of people whose lives were torn apart by disunity, division, and even persecution. As one author stated, “One reason why Anabaptists are so involved in conflict resolution is because they have a lot of experience within their own tradition of resolving conflict.” The challenge that visionaries like Pastor Woody Dalton at Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC face today is how to institute reform while maintaining Christian unity.

—Dwayne Magee, from *InPart.org*

Right after receiving the last *In Part*, I read [the magazine] from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was interesting to me that it was concerned with learning from Anabaptists. I am an evangelical with an Anabaptist heritage, which I very much value. I think we have things to learn from each other as we grow in God’s grace!

—Julia Frey Taylor
(Atlanta, Ga.)

THE VIEW FROM HERE

I confess that a few months ago “piety” didn’t exactly excite my curiosity. In fact, on the whole, the word left a slightly sour taste in my mouth. After all, when was the last time you heard someone say, “Wow, she’s so pious,” and mean it as a compliment? But my impressions of piety changed when I encountered the story of Martin Boehm (1725–1812). This brother grew up in the Mennonite Church, was baptized, and lived the “Christian life.” When he was 33, he became a reluctant pastor after drawing lots for the role (according to the Mennonite practice of selecting leaders). Yet despite his earnest attempts to read Scripture and pray and do all the right things, Martin couldn’t ever come up with anything to say at church. As he put it, “To be a preacher and yet have nothing to preach, nor to say, but stammer out a few words, and then be obliged to take my seat in shame and remorse!” Then, one day while ploughing his field, Martin encounters Christ. (Read about this moment on page 8.) For the first time, his faith lives and breathes, and he’s utterly transformed:

As before this, I wished the Sabbath far off, now I wished it was tomorrow. Sunday came: [. . .] When speaking of my lost estate and agony of mind, some began to weep in the congregation. [. . .] It was all new; none of us had heard or seen it before. A new creation appeared to rise up before me, and around me. [. . .] I rejoiced and praised God with my whole heart. This joy, this faith, this love, I wished to communicate to those around me.*

After learning about Martin Boehm, I found myself inspired by Pietism—not a strict and sanctimonious theology but a call to experience and rebirth. At its core, Pietism gives us a story to tell, as our hearts of stone are transformed into hearts of flesh. In fact, it was Martin’s own story, which he shared in revival meetings held across Lancaster County, Pa., that inflamed the hearts of Jacob Engel and the other believers who would go on to found the Brethren in Christ Church. In this second installment of the “We believe” series, I hope that we can cast aside Pietism’s crusty connotations in order to hear the prophetic word it has to offer us today—giving us a story to cherish and to tell.

Kristine
Kristine N. Frey, editor

*As recorded in *A History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* by A. W. Drury

Creative contributors

Cover art by Andy Rash

ARTIST’S STATEMENT

To create this visual representation of our Pietist heritage, I drew in a variety of elements, each with symbolic meaning:

- The **slate background** represents the cold and cracked state of being “religious,” without having a relationship with God.
- In contrast, the **light** emanating in the figure illustrates the warmth of personal, heartfelt faith. The **linen background** illustrates the weave of community, and the **patterned tin** emphasizes small groups, a discipleship practice pioneered by early Pietists.
- The **green outline** around the figure represents the rebirth and new life that come through conversion.
- The **spine** of the 1536 Froschauer Bible—which was owned by three generations of early BIC bishops and is housed in the BIC Historical Library and Archives (Grantham, Pa.)—appears at the base of the figure to illustrate Pietism’s foundation in the Word.
- The **words flowing through the figure** (from 2 Corinthians 5:14 and the hymn “My Jesus, I Love Thee”) demonstrate the Pietist idea of faith being “affirmed with the head, enjoyed by the heart,” and lived out by the hands. The **halo** encircling the figure’s hands and the **wires** extending out to the slate reinforce these concepts.



Andy Rash attends Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC with his wife, Jennifer, and stepson, Noah. He looks everywhere—from trash heaps to craft stores—for art materials. For example, the slate in this piece came from his roof.



Amanda Witmer is a part-time registered nurse by day and an amateur photographer by . . . well, for the rest of the day. She attends Speedwell Heights BIC (Lititz, Pa.) with her husband, Dave, and son, Sam. Amanda’s photography appears on pages 8–9.



Nate Bridi, formerly the designer for *In Part*, relishes freelancing for the magazine from time to time. He designed the feature articles appearing on pages 4–11. Other activities relished by Nate and his wife, Melissa, include cheering on the Pittsburgh Penguins and traveling.

IN PART™

Spring 2013 VOLUME 126 NUMBER 2

Now I know *in part*; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. I Corinthians 13:12

BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH IN THE U.S.

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INPART.ORG (ISSN 1940-2945)
IN PART (ISSN 1940-2937) is published four times a year by the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S. *In Part* invites readers into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ within the context of the shared life and ministry of the BIC Church.
Printed by Evangel Press (Nappanee, Ind.)
Send feedback, address changes, or subscription questions to inpart@bic-church.org.
Postmaster: Send changes of address to:
IN PART
431 Grantham Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055 USA

Periodical Postage paid at Nappanee, IN 46550-0166.
Printed in U.S.A.
Member of the **Evangelical Press Association**.
Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *New International Version*.
Copyright © 2013. All rights reserved.
Printed on FSC-certified Domtar Opaque-Plainfield paper. At least 25% of the paper fiber comes from well-managed forests independently certified according to the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council; 10% is recycled from post-consumer waste paper.

About “We believe”

“We believe” is a four-part series examining the theological streams that have shaped our identity and values as Brethren in Christ:
Anabaptism—Winter 2012
Pietism—Spring 2013
Wesleyanism—Summer 2013
Evangelicalism—Fall 2013

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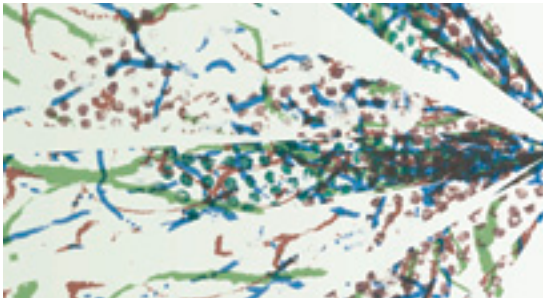
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IN MOTION

Ever wondered . . .
what's Pietism?

pi·e·tism | 'pī-ə-ti-zəm |

Origin: from root word “piety,” from classical Latin *pietas*, or dutifulness

NOUN:

a 17th-century religious movement originating in Germany in reaction to formalism and intellectualism, and stressing personal religious experience and devotion over dogma*

USED IN A SENTENCE:

The Pietist awakening that swept central Pennsylvania in the 1700s touched believers from across denominations; Mennonites, Lutherans, Reformed, and Dunkers experienced dramatic conversions and participated in house prayer gatherings and “great meetings.”

*adapted from Merriam-Webster

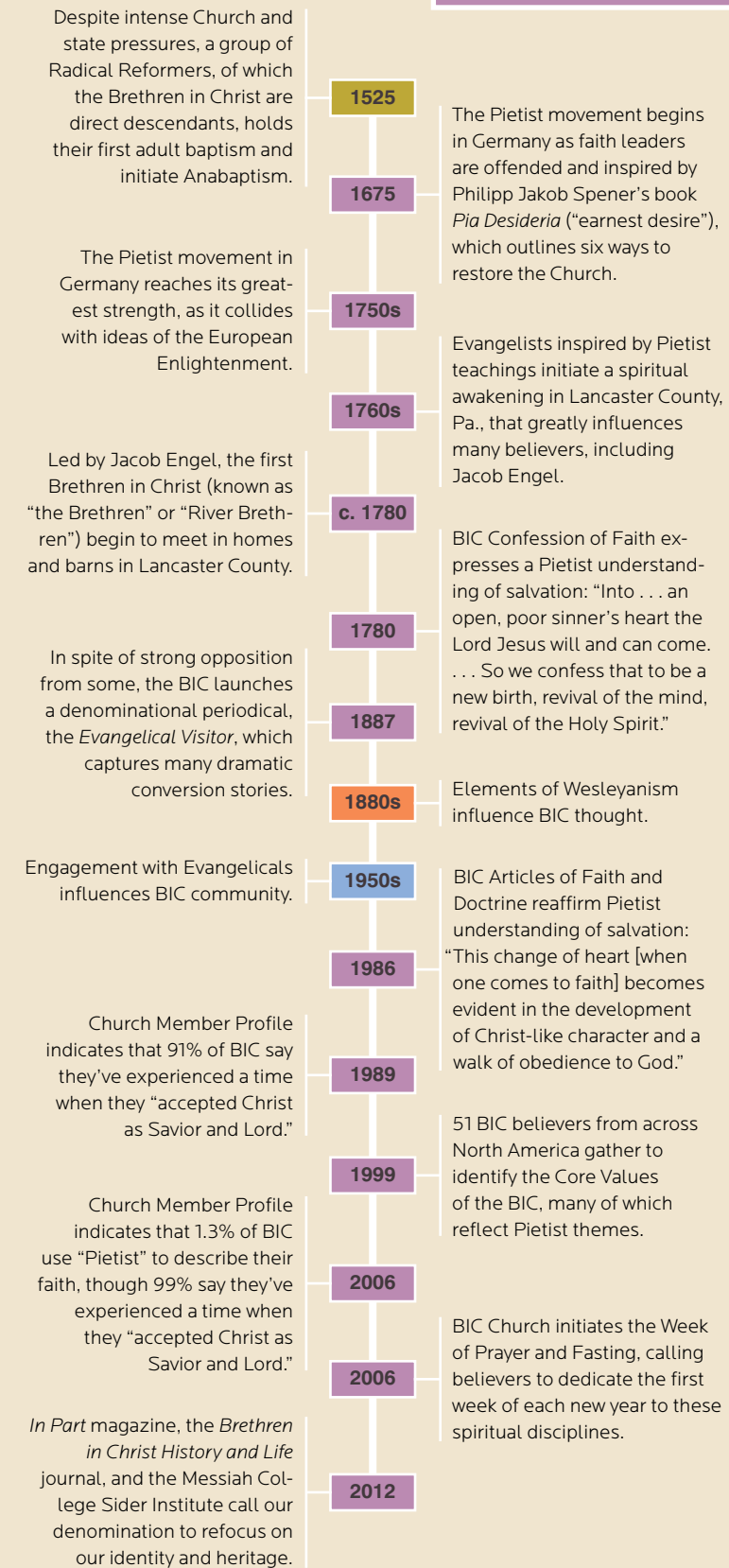
FOCUS Serving victims of Hurricane Sandy



In the wake of Hurricane Sandy last October, grocery stores along the East Coast struggled to keep shelves stocked. That's when Jim Martin, of Antrim BIC (Chambersburg, Pa.), realized he and his company, Martin's Famous Pastry Shoppe, had a role to play. Martin's bakers put in extra hours, accountants extended payroll deadlines, and truck drivers braved hazardous conditions to deliver to areas hardest-hit by the storm. “This all happened, even as many of our workers were facing damage to their own homes,” says Jim. “The strategy at Martin's is ‘Whatever it takes, God helping us,’ and this was another opportunity for me as a leader and us as a company to put that into practice.”

Tracing our history

Pietism



Anabaptist influence Wesleyan influence
Pietist influence Evangelical influence

INPART.ORG

TO OUR CORE

EXPLORING THE CENTRAL VALUES OF THE BIC CHURCH

COMING HOME TO GRACE

One disciple's journey to Jesus leads to unexpected places

by ZACH SPIDEL

It was 2 a.m., on a school night during my seventh-grade year when I realized that Jesus loved me. The discovery gripped me with a mixture of laughter and weeping. My nose ran unchecked and tears streamed down my face onto the Bible cradled in my lap. They marked the words I had just read to my heart's great joy: “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens . . .”

Those words astonished me, because I knew they were spoken by a living person, not some character in an antiquated story. I knew that the offer was good and how desperately I needed it. Most wonderfully, I knew that at that very moment, the One who made this offer did so with only love in His heart.

At first, though, I came hesitantly. While my heart reached out to accept His offer, my head remained incredulous. I couldn't reconcile the conflicting notions that the God who knew my secrets also loved me with a passion that could rob those secrets of their shame. But the message of His costly, cross-shaped love had been made plausible to me by the flesh it wore at Fairview BIC (Englewood, Ohio). The memory of that fellowship paved the way for me to come fully to Jesus that night, despite my doubts. I came to Him, because I discovered that He had already come for me.

That experience was the beginning of my journey with Jesus, and grace has been my second home ever since.

After high school, I left Englewood to attend college and then seminary.

→ EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE: We value the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.



There, I grew in my understanding of the grace that had seemed so unfathomable to me that night five years before. Yet with this new knowledge, the mystery and magnificence of the grace that had first moved my heart began to fade.

Following graduation, I was surprised when God led me back to Englewood, back to where I'd begun. Initially, I felt ambivalent about going back to where I'd started. After years in the rarefied atmosphere of seminary, here I was again, engaged in devotional Bible Studies and popcorn prayers, worshiping with friends who had never heard of Kierkegaard or Moltmann. But also, here I was again, crying for joy at the gift of grace, struggling to bend the knowledge of my head to serve the older knowledge God had given to my heart. I had come home again to grace.

I do not regret my sojourn. There were some lessons that required me to leave home to learn. Yet those lessons only came to mean something, only really became a part of me, when the road bent round again and led me back to where I began—to the place where I could integrate those lessons and test their worth.

As a follower of Jesus, I know that grace plays a similar role in my life. It is the home God has provided for my soul, the place where all my journeys begin and end, and the only place from which I can make any sense of this world. I am glad to be home.



Zach Spidel graduated from Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary in 2011. He's pastor of The Shepherd's Table, a new site of Fairview BIC with a vision to serve the urban neighborhoods of Dayton, Ohio.

A defining moment

How Pietism transformed the Brethren in Christ— and has potential to do so again

BY DEVIN C. MANZULLO-THOMAS

Recently, a pastor friend and I had a conversation about how we introduce new people to the origins, beliefs, and practices of the Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church in the U.S. In addition to sharing about the Core Values and doctrinal statement that shape the BIC community, my pastor friend mentioned that he always describes its roots in various theological traditions. “I tell people we’re a Protestant denomination with a unique mix of Anabaptist, Wesleyan, and Evangelical doctrines,” he told me, adding, “I usually don’t mention Pietism. It just gets lost in the mix.”

What did my friend mean by this statement? Because he knows that Pietism played a defining role in the formation of the BIC Church, I can only guess that he doubts the movement’s *contemporary* significance to our community life. Perhaps he meant that Pietism “gets lost” because of its negative connotations. Certainly the term “Pietist” (and related expressions like “piety” and “pious”) smacks of stuffiness and judgmentalism—hardly the basis for effective Christian ministry or true spiritual formation.

Or perhaps he meant that Pietism “gets lost” because it has so little support among the BIC community today. As reported in a 2006 survey,¹ most BIC would describe their religious faith using terms like “Anabaptist” and “Evangelical.” A meager 1.3 percent would use the term “Pietist.” Clearly, very few among us today identify with this historic theological tradition.

Or perhaps my friend meant that Pietism “gets lost” because its major contribution to BIC theology—the notion of a heartfelt and life-changing conversion experience of the saving grace of God—is emphasized by other theological traditions in our heritage, like Wesleyanism and Evangelicalism.

No matter what my friend meant, it’s clear that this theological movement—so important in our community’s formation—no longer resonates in the way it once did. But can it? Is there more to Pietism than stodgy connotations and a redundant theology of salvation? How did the Pietist impulse first galvanize the BIC Church? And in what ways does our Pietist heritage position us for bold witness and effective ministry today?

Pietism in our past

In the latter decades of the 18th century, a group of German-speaking immigrants in Lancaster County, Pa., experienced a spiritual awakening. These believers were Anabaptists, heirs to a radically communal and countercultural form of Protestant Christianity that originated in 16th-century Europe. But they had become, to one degree or another, disillusioned with the faith of their youth. They craved a deeper experience of God than their Anabaptist heritage had provided. That’s why they were drawn to the preaching of Philip Otterbein and Martin Boehm, two evangelists whose fervent sermons were stirring religious revival in the area. In particular, these Anabaptists responded to Otterbein’s and Boehm’s call for an authentic renewal of vital Christian living—a message inspired by another radical European Protestant movement: Pietism.

Originating in 17th-century Germany, Pietism emphasized an intimate, personal encounter with God’s love and grace resulting in a transformed heart and life—otherwise known as a conversion. Combined with this, the Pietists formed small groups for devotional study of the Bible, prayer, testimony, singing, and intimate Christian fellowship—which, in that era, was an innovative approach to Christian nurture. Eventually,

¹ The 2006 Church Member Profile (CMP) was conducted to assess the demographics, attitudes, and theological perspectives of people across the Brethren in Christ Church in the U.S. The results of the survey are available at BIC-CHURCH.ORG/CMP.

Pietism spread across Europe and over to North America, where it suffused the sermons of colonial preachers, revitalized established denominations, and birthed new religious communities—including the community that would become the BIC.

Indeed, for this small band of soon-to-be BIC, embracing Pietism proved to be a defining moment. On an individual level, and perhaps most significantly, the moment defined each person's spiritual life. Every member of the group now had encountered—in a deep and transformative way—the boundless grace of God. They had each confessed their sins and received the free gift of salvation. They were all now new creations—new beings in Christ—and they would never be the same again.

On a broader scale, the movement defined a new religious community—a fresh and vibrant expression of Christ's Church. No longer were these believers *just* Anabaptists, nor were they *only* Pietists. As BIC Church historian Luke Keefer, Jr., described, they were Anabaptists and Pietists “with a difference.”² In other words, they were now Brethren in Christ.

For these believers, being BIC meant synthesizing an Anabaptist vision of the Church and a Pietist vision of salvation. The BIC viewed the Church as a covenant community of believers who had actively and personally committed to following Jesus in total obedience, patterning their life together on the teachings of the Gospels and on the pristine model of the Early Church. To be a part of this body, one needed to profess a personal “born-again” experience and exhibit (as a result of this experience) a changed heart and mind, with the result of greater conformity to God and God's will.

In later years, the BIC added into this synthesis two other theological traditions: Wesleyanism and Evangelicalism. Both of these new influences echoed Pietism's emphasis on a genuine Christian conversion while incorporating fresh insights and perspectives. Wesleyanism, for instance, added an emphasis on the empowerment of the Spirit for holy living, intensifying conversion through a second encounter with God's grace. Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on missions and evangelism, complemented the Pietist desire to share the good news of God's love.

Pietism in our present

Pietism has played a crucial role in our history as BIC, and its message of revelation continues to speak to us today. For those with eyes to see, the influence of Pietism is still evident in our emphases on *experience*, *transformation*, and *connection*.

Experience. Shaped by Pietist revival, the BIC emphasized genuine Christian conversion as a result of a powerful encounter with Almighty God. Therefore, *experiencing* God—comprehending at a deep and intimate level God's limitless love and grace—has always been at the heart of the BIC. In fact, as Luke Keefer, Jr. expressed in *Focusing Our Faith*, experiencing “the love and grace of God serves as the foundation for all that we as BIC hold dear.”

This emphasis, born of our Pietist convictions, leads us to believe that the God we experience is active and relational. Our understanding of God is not book knowledge resulting from extensive doctrinal study, nor is it an esoteric perception

In a world desperate
for authenticity,
awakening, and
relationship...

of God as derived from mystical clairvoyance. Rather, we come to know God as God flows through and works within each of us. As we read the Scriptures, pray, and participate in the life of the Church, we begin to see God's activity throughout history and in our lives still today. And to know God in this way—to enter into this kind of intimate, Person-to-person relationship with the Divine One—is what the Bible means by salvation.

Transformation. In their first Confession of Faith, the early BIC spoke of conversion as a “revival of the heart.” This is not the judicial language of justification, but of regeneration—a *transformation* of heart and life. These believers felt that too many Protestants were content to profess their faith at the moment of conversion but were not ready or willing to commit to a life of discipleship and growth. Although the BIC also recognized the need to declare their trust in God and seek forgiveness for sin, they were driven by the Pietist impulse toward renewal, and they viewed salvation as both dynamic and comprehensive.

Put another way, these believers were not simply content to profess faith in Christ; they wanted Christ to work in them, to nurture a new creation.

Today, we BIC continue to speak of conversion in these terms. BIC churchman John Zercher captured this emphasis well when he wrote that we BIC “find a little difficulty in saying that ‘a saint is only a sinner saved by grace,’ because a saint is a new creation.”³

Connection. After experiencing their conversions to Christ, the early BIC began meeting regularly for fellowship and worship. Like the 17th-century Pietists who convened in *collegia pietatis* (“schools of piety”) for spiritual edifica-

...our Pietist-inspired emphases
position us well for reaching the
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of God's kingdom.

tion, these brethren gathered in homes and barns, where they shared testimonies, sang joyfully, and studied the Bible for new revelations. In the process, they began to connect. No longer were they just individual sinners transformed by grace; now, they were sisters and brothers in Christ, unified by their commitment to the Lord and eager to grow together.

Now, as then, we BIC also stress the spiritual significance of *personal* devotional practices. Yet we maintain that corporate gatherings provide an equally important environment for spiritual growth and development. When we connect, we can share our spiritual struggles and triumphs, learning the sufficiency of God's grace for all. We can engage in fruitful conversation about what God is teaching us through the Word, sharpening our own insights and gleanings new ones. And we can seek support and encouragement for the journey ahead, creating networks of accountability and “spurring one another on toward

love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). Indeed, as the early BIC Confession of Faith declares, in such gatherings “confidence is strengthened . . . and the body of Christ is renewed.”

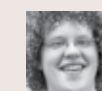
Pietism in our future

I never got a chance to defend Pietism to my pastor friend. But if I had, here's what I would have said: For an almost 400-year-old revival movement with a stuffy-sounding name, Pietism remains incredibly relevant today. It doesn't “get lost” among other theological influences; rather, it *strengthens* our various emphases to form the core of who we are as BIC. What's more, it supplies us with the theological resources for bold witness and effective mission-minded ministry in the 21st century.

Recent studies by Barna Group and others have revealed that non-Christians, especially those in the younger generations, largely regard Christians as legalistic, hypocritical, and overly individualistic (to name only a few of their critiques). Our Pietist heritage empowers us to combat these stereotypes as we embody and proclaim what it truly means to follow Jesus. Rather than perceiving God through rigid doctrine or hazy mysticism, we emphasize a firsthand experience of God's boundless love and grace. Rather than encouraging efforts to “get right with God,” we emphasize new

birth—transformation into a new creation in Christ. Rather than teaching a piety of individualism, we emphasize growing closer to God personally as well as in community, through fellowship and discipleship. In a world desperate for authenticity, awakening, and relationship, our Pietist-inspired emphases position us well for a Spirit-directed mission of reaching the lost and expanding the borders of God's kingdom.

More than 200 years ago, a small band of Anabaptists experienced a defining moment when they discovered and embraced Pietist virtues. Today, those virtues continue to shape our identity as followers of Jesus. May we rediscover the deep well from which these virtues spring, and may we recommit ourselves to living them out every day. As we do, we just might experience a defining moment of our own.



Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas is assistant editor of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, the journal of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society, and is adjunct professor at Messiah College (Grantham, Pa.). He and his wife, Katie, attend Harrisburg (Pa.) BIC. DEVINTHOMAS.WORDPRESS.COM

² “The Three Streams of Our Heritage: Separate or Part of a Whole?” by Luke Keefer, Jr., reprinted in the August 2012 issue of *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

³ “The Brethren in Christ Accent” by John Zercher, in *Reflections on a Heritage*, ed. E. Morris Sider.

Embodied mercy

God's blessings revealed in the flesh

BY KIMBERLY FORRY

I like to tell people that I became a short person at age 30. Because it was around that time that I went from walking around at a 5'8" height to sitting—usually in a wheelchair—almost full time.

Shortly after turning 16, I discovered I'd been living with a rare condition commonly known as a tethered spinal cord since birth. In tethered-cord patients, a fatty mass grows at the base of the spine, anchoring the spinal cord at the bottom (a normal spinal cord is only anchored at the top). The non-cancerous fatty tumor not only puts pressure on the spinal cord, it also chokes out the spinal nerves that become imbedded in it. The prognosis for most tethered-cord patients is gradual loss of feeling and paralysis in the legs, as well as loss of bladder and bowel control.

This diagnosis changed my life almost overnight from the care-free existence of a teenager to a serious reality of surgeries, therapy, and shopping for durable medical equipment. By the time I was 18, I had endured two serious spinal cord surgeries and, due to irreversible nerve damage, was walking with a cane and a leg brace.

It was at this point in my new, confusing reality that Lester, an older man whom I barely knew, stopped me in my tracks with a life-altering question. I still remember where I was—standing in a side hallway of my home church—when he asked, “What good are you finding in this situation?”

I don't know why Lester approached me. Maybe the question he posed to me was one he asked everyone. Maybe my mask of false cheerfulness wasn't fooling this faithful brother. In any case, at the time, his question sparked anger in me. But now, I see how the Holy Spirit shaped this encounter into a profound moment in my spiritual journey.

Looking back, I can see that Lester's question pierced my heart because it got at the root of what I was actually grappling with: not just my diagnosis but also my faith. And I can see how my unexpected crisis of health in my teens propelled me from a comfortable, untested, intellectual knowledge of God into a time of bitterness that ultimately strengthened and deepened my faith in God.

Giving up on being a “good Christian”

Prior to my diagnosis, I considered myself, and was considered by friends, to be a “good Christian.” I was raised in the Church; I could think intelligently about matters of faith and give the right answers in Sunday School. But my faith was without the foundation of a relationship. I had a lot of head knowledge, but I didn't know what it meant to rely on God. Deep down, I believed everything I excelled in was due to my effort and giftedness.

As a result, my spiritual response to reality as a “disabled person” was bitterness. I can still recall the intense anger I felt when I opened get-well cards with Scripture verses in them. And I still tried to keep my independence and control over my life; I let everyone know I wanted to walk, drive, and get back to my “normal” life again as soon as possible.

I don't remember a specific moment of letting go of my bitterness and turning back to God. But I think it was because of God's faithfulness to me and His mercy in keeping me connected to good influences and the Church—including people like Lester—that I started to, over time, give up much of my anger. It was only then that I could begin to see good in my situation.

For example, I am, at the core, a very driven, competitive, type-A personality. But my disability limits how much I can do in a day and how much I can do myself. Every day, I must rely on other people to help me with tasks like grocery shopping, cleaning my house, or reaching things too high up for me to grab. Every day, I struggle with pain or low energy, and I find myself praying for God to give me enough strength to get through the next task or even the next hour! And during the times when my body forces me to rest, I find I am still enough to hear the quiet voice of God, and I am available enough to pray for the needs of others.

Embracing what is good for my soul

God is showing me that, right now, my physical limitations are good for my soul. Could God heal me completely today? Yes, and He may someday. But I'm increasingly finding that God desires to use my disability to refine me and to allow others to encounter Him. Crisis events can change the trajectory of our life, but it is the daily decisions, the working out of our faith, that really determine the depth of our relationship with Christ.

So each day, as soon as I wake up and run smack into my limitations and my pain, I immediately face a choice: Do I approach

my day with a spirit of bitterness and complaint, or an attitude of surrender and expectancy? Increasing nerve pain coupled with decreasing leg strength constantly introduces me to new realities that tempt me to choose the former. And many days I do! But in the moments that I surrender—acknowledging to God that He has allowed me to be here, and He will meet me here—I have a tremendous opportunity to grow and give to others.

As author Ann Voskamp writes in her blog,

[. . .] the good things in life are not so much health but holiness, not so much the riches of this world but relationship with God, not so much our plans but His presence—and He withholds no good thing from us because the greatest things aren't ever things. He doesn't withhold Jesus from us. And no matter where we are, we can always have as much of Jesus as we want.

A position of privilege

When I pray about my healing, I have to be honest with God about what I would do if I were healed. And I have a strong sense that if I were healed tomorrow, I would first go out and buy several pairs of trendy shoes to fit on my un-braced feet, and then I would quickly fall back into a life of self-sufficiency and pride. Everything I accomplish would again seem proof of my energy and talent, and my old everyday reality of dependence on God in everything would quickly fade into forgetfulness. I have no doubt that I would soon start living my life again at

high speed, with fewer moments of simply sitting still and listening to the quiet voice of God.

Joni Eareckson Tada once wrote of her accident and subsequent disability, “God engineers circumstances. He used them to prove himself as well as my loyalty. Not everyone has this privilege.” After almost 20 years of dealing with my own chronic health condition, I can honestly say that I agree with Joni. More than any powerful sermon or decades of quiet time, my health struggles have helped me to love God better, depend on Him more, and live my days watching for His blessings.

For this time, and for both His glory and my good, God has placed me in this position of privilege. His gift to me through an imperfect body is a tangible awareness of a reality that is true for all humans: We can do nothing without God.



God is showing me that, right now, my physical limitations are good for my soul.

RISING HOPE

HOW GOD'S LOVE REDEEMS THE DEEPEST WOUNDS TO OFFER NEW VISION

BY DEB WILES

He came around the corner of the barn to the west side, out of sight of the house. He touched me again. However, this time I mustered up everything inside of my 12-year-old self I could as I wheeled around on him and hollered, "Stop it!" Then I raced off to the only sanctuary I could find, a pond about a hundred yards away. My dad never touched me again in "that way," but from that moment on, any semblance of a father/daughter relationship was severed.

Living with the wounds

As I moved on from that day behind the barn, I worked hard to hide the wounds of my childhood behind a façade of perfectionism and shyness, both defense mechanisms to help me survive in the "real world." I poured myself into school and sports and found great worth in the praise of others. I looked for peace and safety at Grandma Mansfield's house, but when I was home, I usually found sanctuary in the woods or in the melodies of John Denver. And I tried my best never to be alone with my dad again.

Years passed, and only by the grace of God was I able to come out of my shell, enter a successful teaching and coaching career, and get married. Soon after, my husband and I decided to try out a Bible study at a fellow teacher's home. I was soon hooked, and eventually we found a wonderful spiritual home in the Rosebank BIC Church (Hope, Kans.).

I'd never encountered a group of folks before who loved on people as soon as they walked through the doors. Most importantly, I'd never heard the Gospel before—the Gospel that proclaimed the love of a God so deep and profound that He sent His son, Jesus, to die for me. I discovered the love and salvation of Christ, and I soon chose to believe on Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

Life was good! However, even with all the blessings already in my life, God, in His infinite love and grace, had a plan for me that I never would have fathomed. And, even though decades had passed since my abuse as a child and I'd pretty much buried the past, God knew I needed to deal with the issues with my dad before that plan would ever come to fruition.

A retreat leads forward

In the magnificent Colorado Rockies, God invited me to experience a deeper manifestation of His love. At a women's retreat hosted by the Midwest Regional Conference of the Brethren in Christ Church, the Spirit impressed upon my heart the need to forgive my dad.

One afternoon, I chose to forego a shopping trip to Colorado Springs in lieu of a hike up the mountain overshadowing the retreat center. At the end of the trail were several large slabs of granite, and I lay down on one to soak in the afternoon sun.

I spoke to the Lord on that marbled surface, and I soon found myself sitting up and saying out loud, "I forgive you, Dad, for what you did to me." The tears poured forth: tears of refreshment, tears of healing, even tears of sorrow for my dad, who I knew was not in the best of health.

I camped out on that slab for several hours, took in the beauty of nature, and basked in the love and grace of my Eternal Father. Later, I slipped back down the mountain and headed straight to the evening session.

On that pivotal evening, the leaders asked for volunteers to share experiences of being set free from any kind of bondage. Nervously, I described my mountaintop experience—and, for the first time in my life, shared about the abuse I suffered at the hands of my dad.

I will never forget the words that Chris Sharp (current executive director of BIC World Missions) spoke to me that evening:

When an eagle is weary, it will perch on a rock in the warm sunshine to rejuvenate and gather strength. I was awestruck by what she shared, and from that point forward, I've had Isaiah 40:29–31 as my life scripture:

He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

To my amazement, other women approached me later that evening to share about their own abuse. Together, we all soaked in the love of a Father and Savior who had tenderly spoken to my heart about forgiving my dad. I was finally able to rise up on wings like those of the eagle.

Healed . . . and healing

My mountaintop experience taught me that the fence of my unforgiving spirit toward my dad had magnified itself as the "Great Wall of China" between my heavenly Father and the plan He had for my life. The Holy Spirit soon laid on my heart the desire to pursue pastoral ministry. I firmly believe to this day that the Lord would not have been able to speak His will into my heart until I had taken that step of faith to forgive my dad.

I have truly experienced the heartfelt love, grace, and forgiveness only a perfect Father can impart to His children. And for about five years now, I've had the incredible privilege of not only preaching God's word, but also leading women on the path of forgiveness and healing through the Life Skills classes held at Rock Island.

Life Skills helps men and women to not put a band-aid on their woundedness, but to deal with the core of who they are and the root of their unhealthy, sometimes even violent, behaviors. No two individuals experience healing in the same way; after all, our creative God made us all different and meets

us in different ways. Nevertheless, Life Skills is built on the premise that true healing occurs when a person confronts their wounds and grounds their road to healing in forgiveness. The power of forgiveness is at the crux of the program. When a person understands that forgiveness offers freedom not only to those being forgiven but also to the person doing the forgiving, incredible change takes place.

Never in a million years would I have imagined such fulfilling ministries in preaching and teaching. However, God had imagined and planned it all along, and I can see Him at work throughout my life, even when I was a 12-year-old girl, trapped behind a barn.

How can we grasp the love, grace, and forgiveness that we experience through our Savior, Jesus Christ? We open ourselves to it, live in it, pass it on, and allow God's healing to begin!

My earthly father's abuse wounded me deeply on many levels. When God reached out to me over the span of many years, I experienced the miracle of healing and forgiveness. And as I opened my heart to the Lord's, I discovered that the miracle doesn't end there: It continues to unfold as we discover His incredible plan and purpose for our lives.

God reached out to me over the span of many years, and I found that healing is possible.



Deb Wiles and Stan, her husband of 29 years, live in Ramona, Kans. Deb has been serving as pastor at Rock Island BIC and as Tri-County Life Skills director for five years. She enjoys jigsaw puzzles, good coffee, gardening, and tending to her flock of chickens.

TO THE POINT

How does Pietism shape our stories of conversion and faith?

1758

While thus engaged in prayer . . . , the thought rose up in my mind, or as though one spoke to me, saying, “You pray for grace to teach others the way of salvation, and you have not prayed for your own salvation.” This thought or word did not leave me. . . . I felt and saw myself a poor sinner. I was *lost*. My agony became great. . . . Midway in the field, I could go no further, but sank behind the plough, crying, Lord save, I am lost!—and again the thought or voice said, “I am come to seek and to save that which is lost.” In a moment, a stream of joy was poured over me. I praised the Lord and left the field. . . . Like a dream, old things had passed away, and it seemed as if I had awoke to new life, new thoughts, new faith, new love.

—**Martin Boehm**, Mennonite/Pietist preacher in Lancaster, Pa.¹

2013

I was raised in a sister denomination that strongly teaches plain dress and being set apart from the world. Yet I found that this emphasis often overshadowed the need for a personal relationship with Christ. After I started attending New Guilford BIC, I realize that there was a gap between the communal faith I’d grown up with and the personal faith Christ was calling me to.

I’ve always struggled to put my finger on a conversion moment, but since coming to Jesus, I’ve found a new identity as part of His body. Before, my “faith” was built upon expectations set by people, but now, it’s built upon Christ alone. Further, I view the decisions I make about dress and interacting with the world as opportunities to work out my own salvation. I’m finding that the Christian life is an ongoing process, only complete when God speaks the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

—**Grant Benedict**, New Guilford BIC (Chambersburg, Pa.)

1887

I engaged in lay preaching [and missions]. But my heart was still unchanged. . . . I was outwardly decent and moral in my conduct; regular in my attendance on public worship; and a hard worker in the Sunday School. Yet I knew not God experimentally [sic]. . . . I had been trying to work out my *salvation before I had got it*. . . . Thus I went to Jesus, weary of self, heavy laden with my burden of sin . . . and *then He took off my burden*. The load was lifted; my soul was set free. . . . Oh, how sweet was that moment! How happy I felt! How happy have I been since! . . . Now I can rest in the full assurance of salvation. The “old things are passed away,” and in Christ “all things are become new.”

—**unnamed BIC convert**²

1980

We never had any deaths in the family, but then my niece passed away. . . . Three months later, my mom went. Then about a year and a half later, my father went. And then I guess I went, in a way. . . . I didn’t care for anything . . . I even split with my wife, it got so bad.

[Then Danny Farina, pastor of Fellowship Chapel,] brought me to his house to meet his family, and when we were eating at the table, the Couriers were on a record. They were singing . . . “Through the sinking sands He lifted me.” I had to get up and go into the other room. I was crying.

[Danny] came and prayed with me. . . . We went [to a concert with the Couriers], and I gave myself to the Lord at the end of the service. Then three months later, I joined the church. I became a Christian. And the difference—how I know it, is this: I’ve always loved God, since I was a tot. I loved God and respected Him, but I never knew Him. . . . When my family died, my heart went down. . . . But when my sister passed away five years ago, He lifted me. He lifted me, and I saw the difference; I saw that the Lord Jesus Christ is real. I can’t tell you how much He’s done for me. I got down, but He lifts me right up, and I’m most grateful to Him.

—**Bob Hart**, Fellowship Chapel (Bronx, N.Y.)³

PARTING WORDS

THE DATE IN THE FRONT OF MY BIBLE

Of Pietism and one young man’s decision to follow Jesus

by PERRY ENGLE

It’s been nearly four decades since I first wrote the date in blue ball-point pen on the opening page of my red leather Bible: **August 24, 1974**.

As a wayward 15-year-old, stumbling from my freshman to sophomore years in high school, I was downright belligerent about the prospect of spending a week of my summer vacation with a bunch of boring church kids at a camp in California’s San Bernardino Mountains. I

was way too full of myself to waste my time at church camp when I could be making money mowing lawns, or spending time going to the beach and working on my tan.

Somehow, someone convinced me to go and give it a try. It was only six days, they reasoned. How bad could it be? Little did I know it would be a week that would change my life forever.

What happened at Mile High Pines that summer was the miracle of God wrestling into submission my youthful, rebellious nature, and breathing into its place His life-giving Spirit. I wandered out of the last teaching session that

balmy evening so dissatisfied with my life, so at the end of myself, that I found myself falling into God’s loving arms under the spreading branches of an old oak tree out next to the ball field.

It was a beautiful summer night: August 24, 1974.

What happened to me that evening was a profound, personal, heartfelt conversion, a new birth—the very same experience the first Brethren in Christ encountered when they embraced the teachings of Pietism and set out to found a new church 200 years prior to my trip to summer camp.

In many ways, Pietism represented to the first Brethren a sincere quest for a more holistic vision of what it meant to be a Christian. It taught that there was a definite point in time when a person made a genuine, individual decision to become a follower of Jesus.

Today, we seem to be shying away from this kind of conversion language, mostly because it seems too canned and too formulaic. Our appeal to those who don’t know Christ tends to be more relational, more process-oriented, and less of a call to make a decision. In many ways, conversion just isn’t cool anymore and seems to have given way to a more user-friendly, relational approach of inviting people to enter into a non-confrontational dialogue with Jesus.

I’d like to challenge us to recapture the dynamic of our Pietistic heritage that

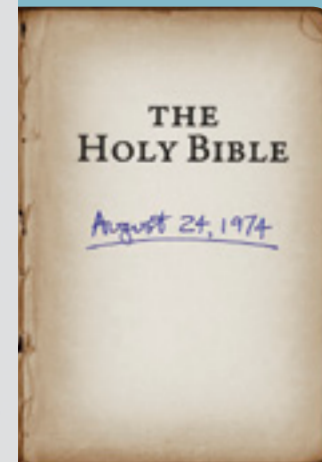
emphasizes the point in time when non-believers take that decisive step in saying “yes” to God and are truly born again.

I certainly appreciate that not everyone will be able to identify a date when they chose to follow Jesus. Yet I would argue that most commonly the new birth is an occasion when someone determines that Jesus is first among all other loves and embraces a lifelong journey of discipleship.

Every few years, as my Bible begins to wear out and I need to replace it, it’s become my habit to transfer the date from my old book onto the first page of my new one. This act reminds me of that warm August night nearly 40 years ago, when I initially said “yes” to God and received His wonderful promise as my own—that He who began a good work in me would carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.



Perry Engle still considers the presidency of Gerald Ford, 55 cent gas, and the debut album of Bad Company as highlights of 1974. He is bishop of the Midwest and Pacific Conferences of the BIC Church and lives with his wife, Marta, and their family in Ontario, Calif.

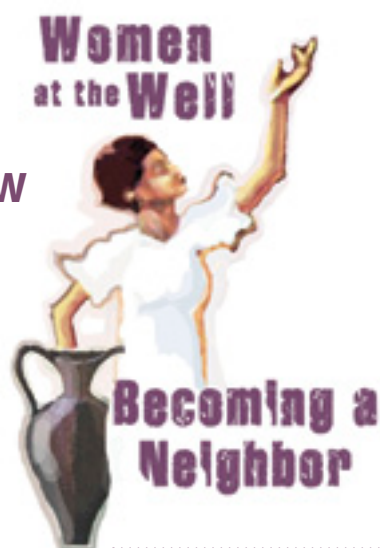


¹ Adapted from testimony, as quoted in *Quest for Piety and Obedience* by Carlton O. Wittlinger, p. 10.

² Adapted from “The conversion of a Unitarian,” in the October 1887 issue of the *Evangelical Visitor*, p. 26–29.

³ Adapted from “How the Lord reached me,” in January 10 and January 25, 1980 editions of the *Evangelical Visitor*.

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