

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

Spring 2024 VOL. 44, NO. 2

Living as Disciples of Jesus

IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, these are the often-quoted final words of Jesus before he ascended to heaven: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). Simply stated, the imperatives are "go" and "make disciples." We can imagine what the "go" means—after all, that's part of what motivated that first Brethren in Christ missionary party to set out for Africa in 1897. But what does it mean to "make disciples" and how do we do it?

More than thirty years ago, starting with the Winter 1993 edition, *Shalom!* focused on what we called "Discipleship for the 21st Century." The impetus for this focus came from *Shalom!*'s governing board at the time—the Board for Brotherhood Concerns. That edition and the next four explored five elements of discipleship as identified by the Board: the Lordship of Christ, simplicity, reconciliation, community, and compassion. For the 1994 General Conference (Summer 1994), the Board published a double edition that featured reprints from the previous four editions along with several new pieces.

Thirty years later, as part of Brethren in Christ U.S.'s Project 250 looking forward to the 250th anniversary of the founding of the denomination in 2028, one of five priorities for the future is "Making Lifelong Disciples." Three objectives for this priority are:

1) Increase understanding and awareness of the nature of discipleship from a Brethren in Christ identity and perspective; 2) Increase understanding and awareness of disciple-making principles; and 3) Have Brethren in Christ U.S. congregations develop a contextually-specific process "roadmap" for developing lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. To help flesh out this priority and these objectives, the theme for the 2024 General Assembly in July is "Formed to Follow," inviting the church to embrace our identity as disciples created to follow Jesus.

In this edition of *Shalom!*, you'll find one congregation's "roadmap" for making lifelong disciples, as well as other descriptions of what discipleship means and stories from individuals who are trying to live as disciples of Jesus. There's even a reprint from that Summer 1994 edition. The articles don't neatly address the five elements of discipleship as defined thirty years ago (Lordship of Christ, simplicity, reconciliation, community, and compassion), but I think you'll still find those themes.

Going back to Jesus's final words as recorded in Matthew 28: Making disciples involves baptizing them (presumably after a confession of faith in Jesus), and then teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. That's a tall order, but one which is accompanied by Jesus's promise to be with us always.

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

THIS ISSUE OF SHALOM!

What Is a Disciple? 2

More Than a Children's Ditty 3

A No Labels Christian 4

Discipleship and the Church Today 5

Discipleship in the Home 6

Celebrating Life While Mourning Death 7

MIDNIGHT MUSINGS

A Lifetime of Re-Reading the Bible 8

When the Church Hurts 9

Community Development and Christian Discipleship 10

BOOK REVIEW

Living as a Living Sacrifice 12

What Is a Disciple?

By Melissa Lowther

IF YOU ASKED your church leadership, “what is a disciple?” what do you think they might say? What if you asked key volunteers in your church? What if you asked the everyday parishioner who attends the worship service one or two times a month?

Disciple is one of those terms we often use in the church and usually assume everyone knows what we mean when we say it. We read about the activities of Jesus and his disciples and preach the Great Commission. But do our congregations really know what we’re being exhorted to do in the call to “make disciples”? Do we know what it means to be “disciples”?

What do the Scriptures say?

The New Testament Greek word *math-*

etes is what we translate to “disciple.” It’s used about 230 times in the Gospels and twenty-eight times in the book of Acts. It connotes apprenticeship and followership, people who are associated with the pedagogy and views of their rabbi or teacher (Matt. 10:1, 24). It was someone who learned and lived the way of their leader (Matt. 16:24; 28:19-20). It’s a term not only designated for the twelve, but after Jesus’s death, those who followed him were also called “disciples” (Matt. 27:57; Acts 9:1; 11:26). From the outset, disciples of Jesus were equipped and empowered to make more disciples. When Jesus calls his disciples he says, “come follow me and *I will make you fishers of people*” (Matt. 4:19, emphasis added).

What a disciple is not

Even with all these Scriptures (and more) that describe disciples of Jesus, we can still lack consensus on what a disciple is. Some would say a disciple is a person who has prayed a certain prayer identifying themselves with Jesus at some point. Some would consider a person who attends church services or activities regularly a disciple of Jesus. Some might think a disciple is someone who likes to study the Bible deeply or who has experienced supernatural elements of Christianity like speaking in tongues or miracles. And some might consider a disciple someone who endorses the political causes we think Jesus would endorse. While discipleship may include some or all of these aspects, the essence of a disciple cannot be boiled down to any one of these.

Defining “disciple”

Having a clear, contextualized definition of disciple for your local church is vital. A shared, memorable definition gives a church clarity on who Jesus is calling them to be, and helps a church cultivate a culture of disciple-making. It provides a balanced, biblical understanding of the word that unites a church in its mission and dispels assumptions about what a disciple is. A contextualized definition can helpfully reflect the congregation’s unique time, place, and people. While the process of defining disciple may feel mechan-

ical at times and has the danger of oversimplifying the richness and nuance of who Jesus is shaping us to be, it has the benefit of giving a church focus in its teaching, decision-making, and life together. Ideally, the definition is simple enough to be memorable and helpful, but allows for elaboration to bring out the fullness of the word.

Elements of a definition

As a congregation goes about the process of defining disciple, in addition to understanding the Biblical concept of “disciple,” it is good to reflect on the unique context of the congregation. At Grantham Church, as we engaged in this process, we accounted for the fact that many in our congregation and region are part of academic communities that emphasize learning. While intellect is certainly part of the life of a disciple, we wanted to communicate that following Jesus is more than an academic exercise; it involves our heart and actions. Additionally, as a Brethren in Christ congregation, we wanted to reflect our value of community and the importance of journeying with Jesus together, not in isolation.

We also wanted to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit, guarding against our tendency toward works-righteousness. We thought it was important to include the multiplication of disciples in the very definition as that is a part of following Jesus that we often set aside or leave to the “super-Christians.” Finally, we wanted to integrate our definition into strategic thinking we had already done as a congregation, with a phrase we often use to sum up our church’s mission: “leading others to the God who looks like Jesus.” The definition we ended up with is this: Disciples are people in community who—empowered by the Holy Spirit—are growing to love, follow, and lead others to the God who looks like Jesus.

What’s next?

Defining “disciple” is a good first step toward giving a church clarity and unity in its mission. However, it necessitates follow-up questions. Now that we know what a disciple is, what does one look like, what are the char-



Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church U.S. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

EDITOR

Harriet Sider Bicksler
127 Holly Dr.
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
EMAIL: bickhouse@aol.com

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Eddie Asbury, Mechanicsburg, PA

DENOMINATIONAL LIAISON

Lynn Thrush, Tipp City, OH

EDITORIAL ADVISOR

Lois Saylor, Harrisburg, PA

The views expressed in *Shalom!* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Brethren in Christ Church US. Please direct all correspondence, including changes of address, to the editor. A third class nonprofit mailing permit is held by the Brethren in Christ Church US, 431 Grantham Rd., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055. Third class postage paid in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.

Website: bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom

acteristics of a disciple? Our Brethren in Christ core values are an excellent outline of the qualities of a disciple. What is our plan for making disciples? At Grantham Church we talk about the up-in-out triangle of spiritual health (loving God, loving each other, loving neighbor) and engaging in different “spaces” (public, social, personal, intimate) as important contexts for discipleship. How

do we know if our plan is working? Our congregation took a survey based on our disciple definition that showed us ways to celebrate progress and identify areas where God is inviting us to grow. It highlighted for us the need to address the “out” part of the triangle and how we empower and equip our people to grow in relationships with their neighbors and share their faith.

Making lifelong disciples is by no means a linear process and it is one that should continually be re-evaluated. But an important and helpful starting place is to ensure we are making what Jesus called us to make.

Melissa Lowther is pastor of discipleship at the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

More Than a Children’s Ditty

by Samuel M. Brubaker

“**THE WISE MAN** built his house upon a rock. . .” goes a little song many of us learned in our childhood. The story of the houses built on rock and sand, and their fate, has been familiar to most of us. We were taught it in simple terms, which led us to believe that there were two actual men, one foolish enough to build on sand. We learned the lesson that it’s good to build on solid foundations and bad to build on soft ones.

This simplistic and erroneous concept of what Jesus actually said is relieved somewhat by the last stanza of the children’s song: “so build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ.” In telling this simple story, Jesus actually presented it as an allegory, by which he illustrated a point he was making. This little story is the concluding paragraph of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount. The man building on the rock represents “everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice.” And the man built on sand represents the person in Jesus’s audience who “does not put them into practice.”

Jesus is clear about it: we are wise or foolish, depending on whether or not we put into practice his teachings. The wise man and

the foolish man are us—we choose which one we are. The story we learned in simple terms as children is not about building houses—it’s about living by the Sermon on the Mount.

Notice that Jesus’s criterion is not whether we agree with his ideas. Or whether we regard him as paster teacher. Or whether we say he is the divine Son of God. Not even whether we profess him as Lord and Savior. The distinguishing criterion is whether or not we practice the way of life he taught.

It is true that the way Jesus taught is challenging—at times it seems impractical, even impossible. In our humanity, we have trouble seeing that long view. It’s hard to acknowledge that this way of life is, in the long run, a great way to go. So we find ways to side-step the challenging instructions while maintaining the claim that we follow Jesus as Lord and as Savior from our sinfulness.

Jesus is gently reminding us that whenever we make wealth-gathering the priority of our life, we are establishing our life on a poor foundation. Likewise, when we refuse to forgive, when we become judgmental, when we engage in ostentatious charity or

worship, when we fail to love and even serve those who act as our enemies, when we indulge in lustful thinking—then we are fools building on sand, with collapse as our destiny.

Jesus also wonderfully affirms the strength of the life based on his teachings. This life will make sense ultimately, frequently even during one’s earthly pilgrimage. Far from being an inferior way to pass our earthly days, Jesus’s teaching open new possibilities for happiness in this life.

For the 1992-1994 biennium, the Board for Brotherhood Concerns has attempted to highlight what we believe to be key features of discipleship: the Lordship of Christ, simplicity of lifestyle, caring, community, and reconciliation of relationships. We hope these efforts have stimulated new commitment to practice the teachings of Jesus.

Samuel M. Brubaker passed away in 2023. He served on the Board for Brotherhood Concerns and as its chair from 1992-1994 when the board was dissolved. This article is a slightly edited reprint from the Summer 1994 edition of Shalom! on “Discipleship in the 21st Century.”

Shalom! Reprised

“For the Brethren in Christ, discipleship means making a personal commitment to follow Jesus and to submit to his Lordship over every aspect of our lives. It also often means going against the grain of the surrounding culture.

Instead of accumulating money and possessions, we live simply so that we can share with others. Rather than participate in

and contribute to the violence between people and nations, we believe that God calls us to be reconcilers and peacemakers. Instead of living in isolation and loneliness, we come together as communities of faith to care for each other’s emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. Instead of selfishly looking out for #1, we extend God’s compassion and our own resources to people who are hurting and in need. As

Jesus’s disciples looking toward the 21st century, we obediently follow the way he has laid out for us. Admittedly, these affirmations are not universally practiced, but they represent a Scriptural standard against which we can measure our progress as disciples of Christ” (*Shalom!*, Summer 1994).

On Being a No Labels Christian

By Perry Engle

I'M SURE NOT too many people were surprised when the fledgling political party, No Labels, announced that it would not sponsor a ticket in the 2024 presidential election. Although the nonpartisan organization, formed in 2010, never gained much traction, still the whole idea of “No Labels” found its way into my head and my theological lexicon causing me to wonder about an alternative way to describe my approach to faith in Jesus.

I've never really liked labels, especially when it comes to describing followers of Jesus. I've come to realize that many people border on obsession when it comes to trying to distinguish one Christian from another. In this tribalistic day and age in which we live, labels are often used as an opportunity to beat up on others who don't fit the mold of what we think a Christian should be.

I've been registered as a political independent for as long as I can remember. This is relevant to the extent that we tend to take political descriptors and apply them to faith on a regular basis. Not that I would ever describe myself as an Independent Christian, any more than I would consider myself a Conservative Christian or a Liberal Christian—both terms that are held with disdain by certain members of the body of Christ. As a Brethren in Christ, I like to say we as a church are conservative in our Biblical principles, but liberal in our Christian love—or at least, that should be our goal.

Increasingly, Christians are being labeled as American Christians, or Christian Nationalists, or Evangelical Christians, or just plain Evangelicals. Most all of these labels are intended to describe Christians who tie allegiance to God and country closer together than I am comfortable with. This is a bit sad because the word “evangelical,” taken from the Greek word *euangelion*, which translates as “gospel” or “good news,” is actually a fitting biblical word to describe the core convictions of everyday, ordinary followers of Jesus who believe in the triune God, the Bible, faith, Jesus, salvation, evangelism and discipleship.

Denominational/theological labels are

another way we distinguish between people who align themselves with different families of faith within the body of Christ: Charismatic Christians (they speak in tongues), Progressive Christians (they're into social justice), Anabaptist Christians (peace, love and Jesus), and Reformed Christians (God is sovereign and the Bible is inerrant). For me it seems denominational labels are far too often used by Christians to let other Christians know where they are right and others are wrong.

Because I live in the state of California, I have even been labeled by some as a “Californian Christian”—and I'm pretty sure that it's not intended as a term of endearment. I was once told that someone had done a background check on me prior to inviting me to preach in another state, because, well, I am a Californian Christian. I like to tell people that we all have our personal crosses to bear, and mine just happens to be preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to the lost and hurting of America's Left Coast.

When I question the use of labels in the Christian Church, I'm not arguing for some kind of universalism where everybody can believe whatever they want and still get into heaven. Far from it. What I am saying is that we do the body of Christ a disservice when we perpetuate the kind of labeling that the world uses to divide, and often conquer us. Instead, I would suggest that we have a come-to-Jesus moment (literally) and like the believers at Antioch described in Acts 11:26, that we simply identify ourselves as Christians, with no other labels being necessary.

On January 6, 2021, following the confusion, anger, and violence of the insurrection at the Capital building in Washington D.C., when tribalism threatened to tear our nation apart, I wrote the following as a reflection of my personal pledge to follow Jesus, and identify with him alone, unencumbered by any other label:

- I will embrace no other label than one that identifies me as belonging to Jesus, and him alone.
- I have one true loyalty, and that is to Jesus,

the Prince of Peace and Lord of Lords.

- As a follower of Jesus Christ, I disavow violence for any purpose or reason, even during the most troubled of times.
- I will return good for evil, even when I feel justified in giving people what I feel they truly deserve.
- I will love my enemies, even when I disagree with most everything they stand for. I will bless them, and not curse them.
- I will bend my knee to none other than Jesus. I will offer no fealty, pledge, or allegiance, nor will I worship at any other altar than at the nail-scarred feet of the One who came to save me from my sins
- What I am is a Christian, a follower of Jesus, and will reject any other description that dilutes my one true identity in him.
- I pledge to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and not any kingdom or empire of this world.
- And I will strive until my final breath to see his kingdom come and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- My final resolve, to the very end of my days, will be “to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2).

No other labels necessary.

Perry Engle is the lead pastor of the Upland (CA) Brethren in Christ Church and formerly served as bishop of the Pacific and Midwest Conferences.

Discipleship and the Church Today

By Jose Rodriguez

DISCIPLESHIP IS AS relevant a topic to the church today as it was two thousand years ago. Right at the heart of the Great Commission, Jesus reinforced what he had been doing for the last three years of his life on earth. Jesus dedicated his ministry, among other deeds, to making disciples. He called twelve to follow him. When he previously declared “*Tetelestai!*” (“It is finished!”) and was ready to return to the Father, he commanded his disciples to make disciples themselves.

What is a disciple? A disciple is a person that follows his teacher. It is interesting that Jesus has not commanded his closest followers to make Christians, but to make disciples. There is a huge difference between being a Christian and being a disciple. Even though we are used to saying that a Christian is a follower of Christ, that is not always the reality. In today’s church, specifically in our context, there are many comfortable, nominal Christians, whose faith may tremble if they would be exposed to persecution, and whose acts don’t reflect a life transformed by the regeneration provided by Christ at the cross.

I am not trying to isolate myself or the church from the term Christian. As followers of Christ, we want to be serious in our commitment to the Scriptures. We need to recognize that “Christian” appears three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16), while “disciple” appears 258 times in the New Testament, and at least twice in the Old Testament. This disproportionate correlation tells me that the emphasis throughout the entire New Testament is on discipleship as a style of life, rather than being called and identified as Christians.

Since the beginning of the Brethren in Christ Church, our forebears understood the need to form lifelong disciples—men and women who regardless of their social, political, economic, emotional or personal situation would reflect Jesus’s life, principles, values and love to those who need salvation through Christ.

To help understand the difference between a Christian and a disciple, I am pre-

senting a comparative scenario in which the believer could identify as one or the other.

A Christian is one who receives passively what the Lord brings to their life. A disciple is one who serves proactively in the congregation of the saints and outside of it. A Christian, in most cases, lacks spiritual disciplines in areas like prayer, fasting, systematic Bible reading, commitment to church attendance, generous giving, and so on. A disciple is spiritually disciplined. A Christian may have a private faith—their family, co-workers, and friends do not know about their faith. A disciple applies their faith in every instance of their life, 24/7. A Christian may be assimilated within the society, not having a defined identity. A disciple is a counter-cultural force.

For a Christian, attending church may be optional (i.e., if there is spare time, and/or it does not interfere with other activities, like work, or entertainment, or family events). For a disciple, meeting with the congregation is essential, because they are the church. A Christian may not be secure in the Scriptures. A disciple knows how to properly handle the Sword of the Spirit, the Word. Maybe a Christian does not testify of Jesus, or evangelize with the Good News, while a disciple shares their faith, evangelizes, and wins souls for the Kingdom of God. A Christian may try to live a light Christian life, avoiding confrontations of sin, rejecting injustice in the world, and ignoring opportunities to reach the unsaved as much as possible, while a disciple would deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus to the death, if necessary.

This comparative scenario can help us search our heart and identify ourselves as one or the other. Jesus’s command to make disciples is still valid in the twenty-first century as it was on the first century, and it will be in effect until he returns for his church.

In his advice to Timothy, Paul instructed him to develop a systematic and relevant method to secure an enduring line of discipleship: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses,

entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.” The succession is as follows: from me (Paul), to you (Timothy), to faithful people who will teach others. If the church of the twenty-first century in the West applies Paul’s structure for discipleship, we may see an amended church in a short period of time.

The beauty of the Word of God is that it is relevant for every generation, in every period of time. The Word brings life and relevance to each generation regardless of the social, political, economic and geographical differences.

A lifelong culture of discipleship, even when there may not have been any specific methodology for producing disciples, has helped the Brethren in Christ to exist for almost two hundred and fifty years. We have enjoyed God’s favor on us. Discipleship is more than a class, an encounter, a course, an event, a program. It is a lifespan that shows the life of the Master within us, being shown on a daily basis, projecting the veracity of a transformed human being by the power of the Holy Spirit through an honest daily way of living.

Although many contemporary Christians may see discipleship as a way to gain some significance within the local congregation, or like a ladder to climb to a decision-making position within the church, the reality is that real discipleship may mean self-denial, potential loss, and probable suffering. All else being equal, the highest privilege and blessing for a committed believer is to become a truthful disciple of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to in turn produce disciples for him.

Jose Rodriguez is pastor of the Esmirna Brethren in Christ Church, Miami, FL. He also serves on the Brethren in Christ U.S. General Conference Board.

Discipleship in the Home

By Becky Owen

“THEY GROW UP so fast!” I wanted to punch the person who looked at my newborn in my arms and shared this remark with me. I was exhausted, sleep deprived, learning to nurse and care for a baby. I was NOT feeling the speed at which my offspring was growing up and out of my house. I was loving motherhood, don’t get me wrong, but I found this comment unhelpful at the time. Now, fifteen years later, I find myself saying it (in my head) too, but try to only allow it to tumble out of my mouth with caveats and care.

Parenting is an ever-changing trajectory of learning, growing and adjusting. Once you get the hang of one stage, you’re on to the next. While changing diapers, making meals, buying clothes for growing bodies and scheduling play dates were all really important and “instantly” gratifying in those early years, the faith development of our kids is always at the core of parenting.

The main training for discipling our children was the discipleship we received ourselves. As we teach our kids how to operate in our culture—how to eat, drink, go to the bathroom, share, interact with and serve others—we do so as Christ-followers. Everything is an opportunity to show and tell how we live out the Jesus Way.

With a teen and preteen now, we presumably have precious few years with them “under our roof” . . . they grow up so fast! Through each phase and season we have tried to set aside intentional times together in God’s Word, read missionary stories, and celebrate meaningful holiday rhythms. We also know the power of doing—modeling the Way of Jesus, day in and day out. With hopes of inspiring the Way in your family, here are a few testimonies from our home:

Prayer. In the baby/toddler years, I found it difficult/impossible to have my own personal devotional times as I had known them before. Interruptions abounded, sleepiness overtook me, concentration was hard to come by. I felt guilty and distant from God. That is when I was reminded of the constant prayer style of Brother Lawrence. He empha-

sized doing life while noticing and calling upon God in the ordinary things. So, since I’d often fall asleep if I sat down to pray, I started praying for things whenever they came to mind. I didn’t stop what I was doing, bow my head or close my eyes. I just talked to God in praise or petition. This lifestyle of prayer led me to listen for God’s responses in a new way. My littles were easily included in these simple prayers throughout the day. Even now, we continue this practice when riding in the car and in the midst of general conversation.

Scripture written on our doorframes, or bathroom mirrors, or walls, or places we look at every day. Although the kids couldn’t read yet, I started this early on as well because I needed reminders of God’s truth throughout the mundane. They served as conversation starters, pieces of art and tools for memorization.

Praising the good. I remember when I wanted to cultivate more good fruit in my kids. I could easily see and hear the opposite of the Fruit of the Spirit in my toddlers’ interactions. Correctives and reprimands flew from my mouth more than praise for good behavior. Then I paused, “How are they supposed to know what good fruit looks like if I only point out bad fruit?” So, I made construction paper fruit shapes that we could write on whenever we noticed someone bearing good spiritual fruit. After talking about it, we posted it on our cardboard papaya tree on the wall. It became a scavenger hunt for beautiful fruit in others! I became a more positive, gentle parent and my kids still remember this experience of recognizing the Way in one another.

Intentional apologies. There can be a lot of arguing, hurt feelings, and hurt bodies throughout childhood! We didn’t want to demand disingenuous apologies from our kids for doing wrong. A heart change was what we were after, not a polite (usually begrudging) formality. Early on, one of us read an article about intentional apologies. We started right away! When a kid stole a toy, hit a sibling, or you name it, we had them

talk through the following steps 1) I’m sorry for [specific answer]. . . 2) That was wrong because. . . 3) Next time, I’ll. . . 4) Will you forgive me? These simple prompts were used to help our little ones process what they did, how it affected others, why it was wrong and make a plan to act differently in the future. It also gave time and space to diffuse the situation and calm down. Rachel remembers, “I didn’t want to say a speech about what I did wrong, but by the end of the steps, I felt better.” They always ended in a hug and often giggles before returning to play.

The **liturgical calendar** has given us a framework to revisit major stories and themes of our faith each year. Journeying through Advent and Christmas gives us space at a particularly commercialized time of year to consider how and why we celebrate what we do while “the world” emphasizes and even indoctrinates non-truths. Early on, we celebrated Saint Nicholas Day on December 6 to learn about the historical figure and his example of living out the Jesus Way. This helped us explain all the jolly, red-coated men decorating stores without giving him an omnipresent, omniscient character only belonging to God. We learned how Nicholas served those in need and made plans for how we could do the same. We sought to redeem what truth was rooted in traditions and decided which ones we just weren’t interested in keeping at all. It is hard to be countercultural, but it is a skill our kids will need the rest of their lives, following the Way.

Throughout Advent, we walk through our biblical history from Creation to the Incarnation, adding an ornament to our Jesse Tree for each story. Lovely? Yes. Perfect? No. We’d have to catch up from time to time, but it was still a physical, artistic piece in our home and a desired part of our routine. Micah often instigates getting the Jesse Tree out each year, “I liked it because it was predictable and family time—and it was fun, too!” Similarly, Lent held practices of making homemade soft pretzels as a reminder to pray (folded arms) and making room for

Jesus by decluttering our lives of things and activities.

Discipleship is in the fabric of parenting. Kids see and copy their parents' words, actions, and even attitudes. That's what disciples do—they study and follow the example of their teacher. While these ideas have been

about our home discipleship, the family of believers we call Church have a significant role in their discipleship (and ours!) as well.

We are all on this journey together, which is comforting and humbling. Take heart, and keep to the Way.

Becky Owen is an active member of the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church where she enjoys working with the youth. She represents BIC U.S. World Missions on the Leadership Council Advisory Team. She is also a substitute teacher in her local school district.

The Paradox of Celebrating Life While Mourning Death

By Gretta Owen

This is a story of how one person wrestled with how to follow Jesus. Gretta wrote the following right before her daughter's sixth birthday and a few weeks after she had been part of a protest in Washington, DC against the war in Gaza and spoken to her local congressman about the war (Editor's note).

IN FIVE DAYS, I will no longer have a five-year-old. We will celebrate her birthday with cake and gifts and macaroni and cheese, and peas: all her favorite things. But for tonight, and for these few more days, my baby is still five.

Tonight, as I sit on the floor by her bed, my body folded in half, head and arms resting on her mattress, songs sung, hugs, kisses, good-nights given, she strikes up a conversation.

"You know my ornament with me in the blue dress? I didn't mean you couldn't have it, I just meant that I should be the one that gets to hang it on the tree. Because it's me."

She's referring to a ceramic figurine of a little girl holding a gift. She is seated, wearing a light blue dress, my daughter's favorite color. I have four ornaments similar to this one, two boys and two girls. They are my mother's handiwork from my childhood when she took a weekly ceramics class. At some point, I assigned a name to each ornament and told my children that there was an ornament that represented each of them. However, I have not let them keep these ornaments in their own "ornament box" because they're my mother's work. And I don't quite trust my children with them yet. When we were boxing up our ornaments earlier this week, my daughter was very upset when I told her that I was keeping her ornament and she couldn't store it in her own box.

"Oh, yes," I reply sleepily, "Sure, you can hang it on the tree."

"Only you can pick the brrrranch," she says, "Because I'm not always good at picking the brrrranches for cerrrramics." She carefully pronounces each r in these words. The r sound still causes her to exert considerable effort to pronounce, just as it did for me when I was five.

"Okay, that's fine. Sure, I will pick the branch. Good night."

....

It strikes me as I sit there with my head on her mattress that this is what a five-year-old thinks about as she closes out her day. This is what matters to a five-year-old: who will hang up the ornaments. Whether she can pick a good branch for them. The effort it takes to make the r sound correctly. She's holding memories of a few Christmases and looking forward to a lifetime more—the feeling that it will go on forever into the future as it has in our home, each child opening their ornament box and putting their own on the branches.

And I remember another five-year-old I read about this week: a five-year-old boy brought to a hospital in Gaza, injured with his head penetrated by a bullet or shrapnel. Medics tried to resuscitate him; their best efforts were in vain. No one knew his name. No one knew who his parents were, or if they were still living. He died alone.

Who was this child? What was his conversation with his mom when she tucked him into bed for the last time? What concerns did he carry before each day held the possibility of death? Is his mother looking for him? Is she grieving? Or has she also died?

....

I am brought back into the present by my daughter's voice quietly mumbling to herself a description of the ornament, "blue dress, white present, red bow . . . blue dress, white present, red bow. . . ." she whispers to herself before she finishes up with, "And we wouldn't want that [for it to break or get lost] because then there would only be Gareth, and Eliot, and Eva, right?"

"Yes, that would be sad. I want to have all four."

"But it wouldn't really be me that was gone, because I would still be here. It would just be my ornament."

....

All I know of the five-year-old child in Gaza is the way his hand and arm look, coming out from under a blanket—small, similar in size to my daughter's. I don't know his name, what his face or hair looked like, his smile, whether he was one of many siblings, or an only child. I have nothing but this image of a hand and this story which has stayed with me—and now returns to me as my own child in her own way ponders her own existential limits.

....

Another question. "What did Valerie say in the text about my remembering to pray for the children in Gaza?"

"She said, 'Tell Gloria thank you for reminding us to pray for the children in Gaza,'" I tell her. This was her prayer request at our faith community gathering this evening, which she wanted me to say out loud for the group. "Pray for Palestine," she had whispered to me.

It's too late for one five-year-old. How many more will have to die before the destruction ends?

....

In February I sat across the table from my congressional representative. I went with two others to present our case, our plea, for a ceasefire in Gaza. I told him I was an educator, a mother, a caregiver—that in these roles it has been pounded into me that I am a "mandated reporter." I am obligated by vocation to speak up on behalf of the vulnerable. If I suspect abuse, to say something. Even if I don't know for sure, even if I can't prove it. It's woven into the fiber of who I am. Whether it's a child in my church class, an elderly client, a child in my neighborhood—I am required to be their advocate. Can I draw the line at Gaza?

A few nights after the meeting, I dreamed I encountered my representative in position to end his own life with a bullet to the head. I shouted at him to get him to stop. I called him by his first name, "Scott!" As if now, because I've sat with him for thirty minutes in a meeting, we are on a first-name basis. When that didn't work, I used his full name, "Scott Perry!" I yelled in the dream, still not deterring him. His title, "Congressman Perry, don't you remember me? I'm Gretta, caregiver! Please, don't do that! Don't you know that every life is worth saving?"

Don't you know that every life is worth saving?

I woke up with this question shouting in my mind, startled at my dream. What in the world: I had dreamed I was calling my congressman by his first name, attempting to save his life?! How bizarre. But then I realized—there are no controls on the subconscious. No guarantees that I may not be appearing in his dreams now that we've spent half an hour together across the table talking about the children in Gaza. Both I and my congressman profess to hold Christian faith—a tradition that includes stories with a fair amount of supernatural intervention through dreams.

...

My own five-year-old eventually falls asleep after she asks to move to my bed. "A new brrranch," she calls it, since she often pretends to be a sloth at night and wants us to sleep in the same tree. In a few days I will no longer have a five-year-old; and in a few years these conversations, this imagination, these concerns will be replaced. But I will likely still have my daughter, both her and her ornament. Because my five-year-old was born in Pennsylvania and not in Gaza. This

is why she is still here and the other child is not. Because my child is not five years old in the most dangerous place in the world to be a child.

Jesus, who said, "Let the children come," and held them in your arms and blessed them: "Hear our prayer. Let the children live. Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy."

Congressman Perry, a five-year-old died this week, who was still alive when we sat and talked last month. When I pleaded for a ceasefire on behalf of the children. How many more will have to die before the United States stops the steady and seemingly endless supply of weapons to a regime bent on human destruction in the name of safety and defense?

Don't you know that every life is worth saving?

Gretta Owen works as an in-home caregiver for Messiah Lifeways, homeschools her four children ages 6-16, and is active in the Grantham (PA) Brethren in Christ Church where she serves as a storyteller for the children's Godly Play class.

A Lifetime of Re-Reading the Bible

By Zach Spidel

THERE IS A unique relationship between Jesus's disciples and the Bible—one that engages us in a lifetime re-reading this single text. Re-reading, in general, is not a very common activity. I am an avid reader and have revisited books that have been especially enjoyable or illuminating (or difficult), but those books are the exception, not the rule. Even among those books I've revisited, most have gotten from me a second or, even more rarely, a third read. And then there's the Bible: I have never and will never re-read any other book the way I am continuously re-reading Scripture.

We Christ-followers do that, but why? What value is there in re-reading, say, the parable of the prodigal son, for the tenth (let alone fiftieth!) time? Were Scripture's purpose merely to pass along information (as is true of some books), there would be very lit-

tle value in such reading! Yeah, yeah, I might think, I already know this bit. But I am convinced that Scripture's words are meant to carry Jesus—the living Word of God—to us. To make him palpably present to us that we might encounter him, gaze intently into his face, and grow by such gazing to resemble the one at whom we gaze.

If I read the Bible for information, I can dispose of it when I have extracted that information—there is no need to read it again, unless that is to look for errors in one's assimilation of that information. (That is what too much systematic theology amounts to—the Bible chopped up and processed to manufacture from it an organized set of theological propositions which become the real object of belief rather than the living words of Scripture themselves in all their wild, untamable beauty.)



But as disciples we don't dispose of the Bible, because we do not come to it primarily to extract information from it which can then stand on its own. Rather, we come to the Bible to gaze into the living face of Christ and, just as crucially, to allow him to gaze back at us. In the Bible we encounter Jesus encountering us. We gaze at Jesus as he gazes back at us. We look for the one who, we happily discover, was looking for us before we even knew his name. And it is Jesus's living gaze, mediated to us through Scripture that makes Scripture infinitely re-visitable.

The sight of a loved one's face gazing back

at us is never disposable and never grows old. I never am bored with my wife's smile, or with that mischievous twinkle in my daughter's eye just before she tries out a new joke. When I gaze at my son's young face, I am not tempted to say to myself, "Ah, this is boring, I already know his nose flares like that when he laughs." Knowledge about his physiology is not what I'm seeking when I look upon the face of my laughing one year old.

I gaze repeatedly and protractedly into the faces of those I love because those same old faces are always becoming new, casting new glances and reacting in new ways. They do this because they are the faces of living people who regard me even as I regard them. This is Scripture's role in the life of Jesus's disciples. It is the living literary face of Christ who is the human face of God. Scripture is not a death mask, but as living and active as the person who greets us in and as and through its words. Through Scripture Christ gazes at us. We learn to look not only at him but at what he looks at. We learn by gazing upon his face in Scripture to weep at what

breaks his heart and laugh at that which he finds delightful. We watch his face and imitate his manner, becoming more like him the longer we gaze.

This reading that is a gazing—a contemplation of Jesus's living face—is unique in the truest sense of that word. I approach no other text the way I do Scripture. When I approach it, for instance, I do not do so wondering what I might see and using methods to determine what it is I do see. Rather, as a Christian, I go to the Bible knowing that what I will see is Jesus; the question, and the terrible difficulty sometimes, is in discerning how he is rendered in any given passage and in learning how to see his face thus rendered. Sometimes Jesus's face is rendered by Scripture with something like photographic, literal accuracy, but sometimes—and very much on purpose—Scripture renders Christ's face in jarring, unexpected, or non-obvious ways.

Picasso painted people's faces with their ears in odd places, their noses as bulbous mounds, their skin a set of brilliant shades.

Are those bad portraits because they are not literally accurate? Of course not! Would a person be a good appreciator of Picasso's art if they tried to evaluate his portraits according to the criterion of literal accuracy? Of course not! Picasso wasn't aiming at literal accuracy. He was, in those portraits, expressing profound inner truths about the persons whose faces he rendered in such outlandish way.

In a similar way, the Bible presents Christ's face to us in sometimes strikingly different styles. Sometimes, in fact, we have to be trained how to look at a passage to see it for what it in truth is. Such training is the second reason we followers of Jesus are never finished reading the Bible. As we grow in our discipleship our capacity to see Christ in the Scriptures grows. Or, as Luke depicts it in the concluding chapter of his Gospel, as we walk with Christ, he opens the Scriptures and teaches us to see him there—and that's a sight that never grows old.

Zach Spidel is pastor of East Dayton Fellowship, a Brethren in Christ congregation in Dayton, OH.

When the Church Hurts

EDITOR'S NOTE: In an ideal world, the church is a community of believers that "value[s] integrity in relationships and mutual accountability in an atmosphere of grace, love, and acceptance" (Brethren in Christ core value #5) and where we are surrounded by graceful, loving, and accepting people as we learn to follow Jesus. We know, however, that this isn't always the reality that everyone feels. Olivia's story, based on and interview with the editor, illustrates how easily hurt can happen. Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

Olivia is a young adult college student, majoring in the human services field with a goal of working with children. She was raised in a Christian family and takes her faith seriously. Her family had attended another church during her early childhood but when she was about nine, they switched churches. Olivia's best friend from babyhood and her family also attend the same church.

For years, Olivia enjoyed the multicul-

tural makeup of the church. She liked Sunday school with all its different activities. As she grew older, she entered the youth group and enjoyed those activities too: bowling, lock-ins, birthday parties, and so on. She also appreciated the worship services and felt that they fed her spiritually. Along the way, she was baptized in the church as a testimony to her faith in Jesus.

Then the pandemic hit and she couldn't attend church in person anymore or be with her friends. She finished her junior year in high school and spent her entire senior year online. That spring she experienced a serious health crisis and was hospitalized for several weeks. In the fall, following her recovery, she went away to college, distancing her even further from her friends. In many ways, Olivia's story is about an unfortunate confluence of a world-wide pandemic, an unrelated illness, and going away to college for the first time.

When she did go back to church, she had difficulty fitting in again. Like many others who have experienced health crises, Olivia

found that her peers didn't know what to say to her or how to relate, especially in those first weeks when she wasn't quite her old self again. They were genuinely happy to see her; the whole church had prayed for her during her illness. But it was hard to explain what had happened, and she felt like hardly anyone intentionally reached out to her.

Olivia began to feel more and more isolated and excluded. Her peers didn't say hi to her or engage in conversation. She always had to initiate conversations. They didn't invite her to young adult activities. She admits that she was at fault to some extent—she knows she has a strong personality and is often confrontational. It's not difficult to understand how that was off-putting, and how, coupled with their inability to relate to her after a puzzling illness, they defaulted to ignoring or excluding her.

Eventually, after trying to attend young adult events, and continuing to feel excluded, she decided she needed to leave the church and go somewhere else. She did not feel wel-

come or wanted, and she had no friends. She was also very angry, and not in a good place to be disciplined in her faith.

When she talked with her pastor about wanting to remove her membership, her pastor didn't believe that what had happened was "church hurt"—it was just a situation of some people doing something Olivia didn't like. Olivia, however, believes the church did hurt her, because her peers and their leaders who were part of the church did not reach out to her when she herself was hurting.

The conversation with her pastor was difficult. She realizes now that she should have taken someone else with her—like her mom. The pastor pressured her to come to church

one Sunday morning so the congregation could pray over her and release her for the next chapter in her life. At first she agreed, but the more she thought about it, the more it didn't feel right. She called the pastor who accepted her decision not to come to church for the prayer, but still said with some surprise, "How can you not let us give you a prayer of release?" Olivia understands the intent and appreciates that in some circumstances such a prayer could be very helpful and encouraging, but it felt very awkward for her given everything that had happened. She wishes her pastor had been accepting of her need to leave for her own spiritual health and well-being.

Over time, Olivia has talked to her parents and others about the situation. She has not talked to her friends, although she knows she eventually needs to try to reconcile with them. She feels that she has been let down by folks who weren't being very Christ-like. She also knows that she has some of her own work to do on learning how to manage her confrontational style. Her faith is still strong, although with the exception of her boyfriend, she doesn't have other Christian friends her own age. She's been involved a bit with InterVarsity Fellowship at college, and hopes that this will help her meet new Christians friends.

Community Development and Christian Discipleship

By Chi Adelyi

OUR FAMILY MOVED to Dayton on August 4, 2023 when I assumed duties as the Director of Community Development for the East Dayton Fellowship. The position was newly created, and I was taking one day at a time to understand the role and the various dynamics involved. One was to research the area to identify the causes of poverty and what the church could do to make a difference.

One thing I knew to do was to go see my constituency—the people suffering from homelessness. Charlotte, a key volunteer in the church, offered to take me on the tour. I was not ready for what I saw.

Different face, one story: hopelessness

We visited people living in the woods, in crevices, some in makeshift shelters and some in total ramshackledness, in a tree. I saw faces of despair, anger, sadness, and general hopelessness. When I asked what the church can do to help, most of them responded without expectation; the rest were focused on the present, with their need for food, clothes, and a place to lay their heads. Others wanted medical care. Most blamed relatives, the government, and other social structures for their predicament. Some wanted justice and were suspicious of authorities of any kind. My question was, "Where do we go from here?" **"I just want to be a human being!"**

Then we met Belinda. Like the others, Belinda was experiencing homelessness. She lived in a tattered tent at a corner of a park with her partner and their dog. It had rained the night before we visited, and she and her partner were busy wringing out water from their belongings and trying to get them dry enough for use. As she got into our car, she assured us that her clothes were wet from the rain and not from her urine. We were not even thinking of her that way, but she wanted us to be comfortable. She told us they used hand sanitizers for fuel to keep warm. Her tent was not fit for her dog, yet that was the only home she and her partner could afford.

There was a lot more to Belinda than her living conditions. Belinda wanted a normal life. We began inviting her to volunteer. She was a bit apprehensive because she felt she did not have anything decent to wear. We offered her suitable clothes, and she was delighted to dress up for "work." Charlotte packed up some other nice stuff and fit them all in good suitcases. She and her partner were planning to move to Kentucky soon.

On one of the days when we went to see her again, we asked Belinda what she thought the church could do for people in her situation. She jovially said, "McDonald's with a milkshake!" We played along and got her what she requested. As she ate, she slowly

began to talk. She told us that a lot of people want to help people in her situation and they appreciate it. But, "many of the people who come to help have their own agendas. They imagine what the needs should be, and they go ahead to meet the needs that meet their imagination. Many don't have time for us beyond what they think we need." Then she turned to us, "Even you will not have the patience to hear me express what's going on in the inside of me. You will run away if I tell you." She summarized it all by saying, "My one need, the most important, is to be treated like a human being. I appreciate the gifts and everything people give, but my one most basic need is to be a human being and be treated as one." We thought that was profound. I felt I had found the theme for my role—to join God in his work of restoring the dignity of the human being.

The image and the role

Christian discipleship and community development are integral and crucial components of a holistic ministry. It will take a human being to treat Belinda and others like her as human beings. It is therefore not just about Belinda, but about us being who we are supposed to be, to be able to do what we are supposed to do. The distinctive feature about human beings is that we are made in the image of God. Humans are God's image

bearers who have dominion over all the other creatures and are given authority to represent God on earth (Gen.1:27-28). However, humans disobeyed God and lost their privileged role. Simply put, Christian discipleship is the recovery of the image; community development is the recovery of the role.

Often, for Christians the focus is more on the “doing” than the “being,” but for Jesus, the image and the role were not bifurcated. When we become who we were created to be, we will do what we were created to do. Christian discipleship produces whole persons who are then called to minister to others holistically—spirit, soul, and body.

From relief to development

East Dayton Fellowship (EDF) has been invested in the “care of neighbor” since its inception about thirteen years ago. In addition to the preaching of the word and prayer, EDF is involved in various relief programs, some in partnership with other ministries. My position was created to help move EDF’s efforts from relief to rehabilitation and ultimately to development—in other words, from hand-outs to self-sustainability.

Warm conversations

To start, we want to create a day home for people who are homeless. We want to provide a conducive environment where those caught in homelessness can take a break and ruminate in a safe community. This would mean a place where they can get a warm meal, a warm drink, a warm shower, and do their laundry. Members of the church and volunteers from the larger society will intentionally come in to fellowship or to offer their services. In this place, the root causes of their conditions can be identified and addressed. This will be a place where human dignity is restored and people will be accorded the respect God’s image bearers deserve. We hope that from this soil, resources for the subsequent phases of the mission, including job creation and sustainable housing, will organically emanate.

An imago-dei approach

EDF’s approach to community development is based on our understanding of the image of God and our belief that the most significant fact about the poor is not their poverty, but their identity as fellow bearers of the image of God. They deserve not only commensurate dignity but also the commu-

nity of fellow human beings. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus calls the needy his own brothers and sisters and insists that they be treated as he would be (Matt. 25: 40-45). When the Bible says there will always be the poor in the land, God commands an open-handed approach to them as part of the community (Deut. 15:11).

God-centered, all included

Our mission is centered on God, incorporates community, and includes all. Therefore, prayer is our foremost strategy. Networking relationships connect us with people of like minds and advocacy links us with government agencies and officials. We create awareness indiscriminately because we believe everyone who bears the image of God has a part to play. They can pray, volunteer, network, give, or become a link.

Humans were created to be very good. (Gen. 1:31). The East Dayton Fellowship hears that cry in broken humanity and is committed to a holistic restoration.

Chi Adelyi is director of community development at East Dayton Fellowship, Dayton, OH.

continued from page 12

Jesus.

Every act of justice, every word of truth, every creation of genuine beauty, every act of self-sacrificial love, will be reaffirmed on the last day in the new world. The poem that glimpses truth in a new way; the mug of tea given with gentleness to the down-and-out at the drop-in center; the setting aside of my own longings in order to support and cherish someone who depends on me; the piece

of work done honestly and thoroughly; the prayer that comes from heart and mind together; all of these and many more are building blocks for the kingdom. That is what following Jesus is all about.

Having a list of examples is helpful to visualize following Jesus, but these are concepts to ponder, ingest, and integrate into daily life, not merely “how to” instructions. And while the book is divided into two sec-

tions—knowing Jesus and following Jesus—our lives are not bifurcated in such a sharp distinction. We learn and follow. Then learn and follow some more—a process that lasts a lifetime as we live as living sacrifices continually being transformed.

Lois Saylor is an editorial advisor for Shalom! and attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

Editor’s Notes

2024 subscription contributions: In the Winter edition, I said that the 2024 subscription renewal letters would be going out soon. I guess I lied! Since then, I decided that because there is a healthy balance in the *Shalom!* account, everyone’s subscription would be extended for one year. Thanks to those who have contributed/renewed anyway—your gifts are much appreciated. If others would like to contribute, you can do so online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom/ or send a check payable to Brethren in Christ U.S. to the editor. Thank you!

Upcoming topics:

The Summer edition will likely explore singleness in the church, and the topic for the Fall edition is still tentative but may focus on the official “peace position” of the Brethren in Christ as articulated in the “Articles of Faith and Doctrine.” If at anytime you have ideas for topics or would like to write for *Shalom!*, contact the editor at bickhouse@aol.com.

Address Service Requested

431 Grantham Rd., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

BOOK REVIEW: Living as a Living Sacrifice

By Lois Saylor

SOMETIMES WHEN IT comes to topics like discipleship, I confess a “how to” book would be nice with Christian principles broken down into neat categories and possibly a check list. But that reminds me of those who just want the rule book—do this, don’t do that. And that mindset got the scribes and Pharisees into trouble. It was the same mindset that Jesus turned upside down for the rich young ruler and those holding stones ready to throw. N. T. Wright’s *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* is no how-to rule book. It does not offer a formula, but rather a person. So, his book, a collection of sermons, wades into discovering Jesus and being a living sacrifice.

The first half of the book is titled “Looking to Jesus.” Wright looks first to Hebrews to understand Jesus as the Son of God, our high priest who knows what it is to be us and the final sacrifice bringing in the new covenant. He looks to Colossians “in which the victory of Christ over the powers become[s] the central theme” and “that God rescued them from the power of darkness, and has transferred them into the kingdom of his beloved son.” When he looks to Matthew, he sees the theme of Emmanuel, God with us, and the new word, “I am with you always.” Then Wright turns his attention

to the gospel of John focusing on the glory of Jesus. As the Word who became flesh, Wright sees Jesus’s glory at the wedding of Cana transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. In healing the sick, he sees Jesus’s glory “as the sovereign giver of life.” In fact, Wright sees the whole of Jesus’ ministry as a “transfiguration.”

Next, the chapter on Mark is called “The Servant King” and we look at Jesus refusing to be a king like earthly rulers who dominate.

Mark calls the Church to abandon its imperialistic dreams on the one hand, and its passive noninvolvement on the other, and to become for the world what Jesus was for the world. That is what discipleship, following Jesus, really means.

It is a call to active suffering, to take up the cross, to carry the burdens of others. Lastly in the first half, Wright turns to the book of Revelation saying, “This is where terror and joy meet: this is the Easter Jesus.” It is “the victory of the creator over all evil” and “the God of love over tyranny.” In these and other reflections, Wright gives us a multifaceted picture of who Jesus is.

The second half of the book is titled “A Living Sacrifice” as he quotes Romans 12:1-2 calling us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to be transformed. These two

themes echo what Wright has already written about who Jesus is. Now it’s our turn and Wright starts with a hard saying. “Let’s make no mistake about it: until you learn to live without fear, you won’t find it easy to follow Jesus.” He bases this statement on the most frequent command in the Bible, “Don’t be afraid.” However, in a following chapter, Wright acknowledges that we start our life in Christ in a muddled state. He encourages the reader to keep heading in the right direction saying someone moving forward has a glass half full, whereas a believer moving away from Christ has a glass half empty. In this analogy, Wright allows for growth even as we struggle and learn. Thinking rightly about Jesus and rightly about who we are allows for transformation and the renewing of our minds as we look to follow him.

Wright further discusses temptation and our failures, but affirms God’s constant love saying, “To know this love and to act out of unswerving love is one of the central features of following Jesus.” In a different discussion of power and victory, he asserts that the victory of Jesus is “not simply a fait accompli.” But rather “it is a victory waiting to be implemented through his followers.” Here is a brief synopsis of what it means to follow

continued on page 11