

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Winter 2021
VOLUME 6 • ISSUE 4



Being people of hope



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in Germany** PAGE 4



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 **VMMissions**

Hope that does not disappoint



BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN, PRESIDENT

Where does hope come from? From optimism about the future? From careful planning to manage the unknown? From confidence in human ingenuity, wealth or strength?

These can be temptations for all of us. Yet Scripture tells us that God alone is the source of our hope. Psalm 31:24 (NIV) declares, “Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.”

Not surprisingly, the book of the Bible with the most references to hope is the Psalms. It is in prayer and praise that we place our hope in God despite life’s trials.

Coming in second place in the number of references to hope, however, is the book of Job. Suffering and hope are linked.

As Job ponders his profound losses of family, wealth, and personal health, the topic of hope emerges. Unable to understand the meaning of his suffering, Job cries out (6:11): “What strength do I have, that I should still hope?” If anything, Job expresses defiant hope, longing to confront God for what he believes is unjust treatment. “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face” (13:15).

In contrast, Job’s friends find ways to blame him for his troubles. They have a simplistic equation. Those who do right prosper. Those who do wrong suffer. Since Job is suffering, the answer is clear. He must have done something to deserve it. If only Job would turn from sin, he would have a reason to hope again. As his friend Zophar promises, “if you put away the sin that is in your hand... You will surely forget your trouble... You will be secure, because there is hope” (11:14, 16, 18).

After an exhausting 35 chapters of point and counterpoint between Job and his friends, God finally speaks. Essentially, the Lord says, “You’re both wrong. The answer is not in justifying yourself before me or in blaming people for their suffering. My ways are beyond your comprehension. You must trust in my sovereign goodness even when you can’t see it.”

We find hope not in seeking an explanation for our trouble but in clinging to God’s goodness despite our circumstances.

Ultimately, that’s what our Lord Jesus did as he faced the cross, abandoned by his friends and seemingly by God himself.

“Abba, Father,” Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

Because Jesus walked the path of suffering and death and came out victorious on the other side, we can have hope in God’s plan to make all things new, regardless of our present troubles. Indeed, “hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5).

In this season of uncertainty, may we find our hope in God and the fact that “we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/19 to 12/31/20

Special Projects \$560,359	Special Projects \$559,785
Mission Fund \$291,165	Mission Fund \$272,961
Revenue Total \$851,524	Expenses Total \$832,746

Mission Fund: undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries. The above figures do not include investment income.

Transforming

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Cover photo: David and Rebekka Stutzman’s street at midnight on New Year’s Eve in Mannheim, Germany. Normally, the street would be alive with people and fireworks, but was completely quiet and still because of COVID-19 restrictions on celebrations.. See article on page 4. Photo: David Stutzman

VMMissions to host virtual 5K for Missions



Abe Hartzler after completing his 5K in April 2020.

In April, VMMissions will host a virtual 5K run/walk where participants choose their own 5k for fun or competition. Run or walk as a family or strive

for the best time. Proceeds will benefit the ministries of VMMissions. *See the back page.* Learn more and register at vmmissions.org/5k-for-missions/

Board and staff participate in racial and cultural sensitivity training; board begins strategic plan for racial inclusion



Alicia Manning

On October 24 and November 6, 2020, VMMissions board and staff members participated in a two-part training on racial and cultural sensitivity facilitated

by Alicia Manning, an educator, consultant, and member of Calvary Community Church (C3) in Hampton, Va. The purpose of the training was to provide a baseline of common language and awareness to inform VMMissions' efforts of becoming a more effective agent of racial justice and reconciliation. A strategic planning process at the board level is underway to discern concrete ways for VMMissions to pursue greater diversity reflective of God's kingdom.

Hurricane relief ministry in Honduras continues

In November 2020, Honduras and other Central American countries were devastated by two major back-to-back hurricanes, Eta and Iota. Honduran partner Allan Lorenzana mobilized his church network in Honduras and immediately began relief efforts of food and essential supplies.



Juan Carlos Malvaez, VMMissions board member and pastor of Manantial de Vida, Harrisonburg, Va., loads supplies bound for Honduras.

Photo courtesy of Juan Carlos Malvaez

Working together with Manantial de Vida Church in Harrisonburg, Va., VMMissions started a Honduras Hurricane Relief Fund to participate with the Honduran effort by providing funds and supplies. Food, mattresses, water filters, and medicines were delivered to some of the hardest hit areas. Along with relief distribution, teams of trained "seed sowers" went in groups to share the gospel.

On Christmas Eve, displaced people in a shelter in La Ceiba volunteered to prepare 500 tamales as a way to bless others in the traumatized community. Lorenzana reported that many doors and hearts were opened through this blessing. Lorenzana was especially blessed to be able to present the gospel in the Miskito language, spoken by over 80,000 people who typically have little exposure to the gospel message.

VMMissions announces staffing transitions



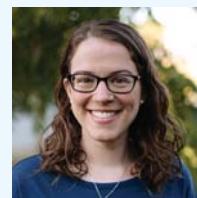
Lynn Suter

VMMissions underwent several staff transitions at the end of 2020. Lynn Suter completed her assignment as Director of Operations at the end of December.



Dianna Lehman

Dianna Lehman stepped away from her roles as Executive Assistant and Human Resources Manager at the end of December to take a position at the Virginia Poultry Growers Co-Op. She is continuing to work part-time in the human resources role for VMMissions until a replacement is hired.



Melanie Sherer

VMMissions is delighted that Melanie Sherer agreed to assume the Executive Assistant role that Dianna vacated, having worked closely with Dianna for the

past several years.

VMMissions blesses Lynn and Dianna in their transitions, and is grateful for the skill and continuity that Melanie brings to her new role.

As VMMissions continues to discern how best to staff for ongoing needs, visit vmmissions.org/now-hiring to learn more about our open positions.

● A glimpse of hope in Germany

VMissions church planter David Stutzman realizes that he can offer an incarnational witness of God's presence as he listens to the anxieties of the people with whom he relates in the secular context of Mannheim, Germany.

BY DAVID STUTZMAN

Hope is an interesting word these days. As I gathered my thoughts and reflections on the topic of hope, I honestly struggled with it. I was troubled, distracted by all the despairing things going on. Things feel somehow unglued. Uncertainty hangs about, as COVID-19 impacts our daily routines, menaces our livelihoods and even threatens lives. Unrest abounds in the streets and runs rampant online. Even in grander terms, there is a crisis of sense-making, a disruption that we are undergoing with the shifts in our norms, traditions, and worldviews. We have entered an uncharted post-this, post-that world. Even the volatile events of early 2021 on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, somehow don't feel out of place with the currents and forces we see inhabiting the zeitgeist of 2020.

These are strange times. They leave us searching and asking questions. Indeed, they leave us looking for hope. So maybe it should be easier to write about hope. Yet, few of us today find it straightforward to talk about hope, especially to those around us.

Yet, talking with people is what I feel like I have had an abundance of this past year. I mean, really talking with people. As COVID-19 has restricted our ability to gather in our home, to meet as a church community, and curtailed our social interactions, the space for sharing that opened up has been quite extraordinary. The normal conversations with community, friends, acquaintances, school parents, shopkeepers, or neighbors have had a deeper quality. We still talk about family, work, sports, the news, or relationships; but the questions are more searching, the attempts at making sense of things are more earnest. People's worries, fears, frustrations, perplexities and burdens are more audible. There is more to make sense of.

I experienced that there is more of a space to talk about what is important and to ask more vulnerable questions. This space is sacred. And I have learned to treat it as such. In times past, people would have sought out the church or ministers for counsel and wisdom on life's questions. Today, rarely do people in a post-Christian society have that inclination to seek out the church. It just wouldn't occur to anyone. Yet, when I am talking to people, there is sometimes an underlying curiosity about what I, as a Christian, might have to share.

So, in these moments, when I sense that we are talking about more than just the surface issues, I take the time to listen and to discern my role as a witness to Jesus Christ. Mostly, I do so softly, sharing my perspectives on how I live my life and what I believe. Sometimes, I offer the wisdom and counsel present in the scriptures. More often, I offer to take their concerns or worries into prayer. These are genuine moments. My goal is not to articulate or persuade but rather to convey my hope in Christ and sense of purpose authentically. I have been able to share more about my faith precisely because of the shared experience we are living through this past year, and precisely because of the encroachment of worrisome and fearful things.

During the Advent season, I had occasion to ask several friends within our church community about their observations of how hope is understood in our modern society. What gives people hope? What do people understand hope to mean?

Themes kept emerging. People hope to be happy. Thus, they pursue wealth, success, excitement in life or adventure. They pursue fulfillment through romantic relationships. They avoid or try to minimize hardship or pain. What one



A Protestant church in Mannheim, the church where David and Rebekka's friend was confirmed at as a boy. In post-Christian Germany, most people don't go to churches for answers any more. Photo by David Stutzman



A mural of an angel over Mannheim, Germany, in the Schönau neighborhood, one of the poorest and most socially disadvantaged in Mannheim, with high unemployment and alcoholism. This is the neighborhood in which the Stutzmans are helping to open a new community center and family cafe. They are working in partnership with the Protestant church there, and their hope is to create community and hope for families. Photo by David Stutzman

can hope for is happiness in this life—one of comfort, excitement, romance or minimal suffering.

I also asked the question, what is hope for us Christians? I liked the answer given by Thomas, a young student in Mannheim: God is near and always will be. He cited Deuteronomy 31:8 (NASB): “The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Thomas said, “In God being near, God knows me and understands me. My hope is that I will continue to meet God also in the times of suffering or pain, for God understands and knows suffering.”

Like Thomas, I have learned that I have a different starting point and expectation for what to hope for in this life. Life doesn’t promise to be absent of hardship, pain or suffering. That things will be made right is something that may happen in my lifetime or not, but I trust that God is at work, reconciling the world to himself. I place my hope in the fact that God is near. This hope is not something I can manifest myself or bring about with my own volition. The hope is in

the work of God. Something beyond me. The hope I have means I can live my life as a follower of Jesus, taking part in a grand story that goes well beyond me.

If we gain hope from God’s nearness, then being near to others is a way we can incarnationally share that hope with others. Particularly in troubling times, when the world seems upside down, we have a chance to practice presence with people. It is entering that space with people—with humility and patience, in confidence and faith—that we have a unique message of hope that is suited for the strange and difficult times we are in.

What gives us hope? God is near. God is at work in this broken world. There is hope for peace, salvation and the reign of God in the age to come. We want to hear God speaking to us, “I am present. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

David Stutzman serves with his wife Rebekka and three children as church planters in Mannheim, Germany, serving in partnership with the South German Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Mission Network.

The tragedy of addiction

D.J. Mitchell's life experience and faith in Christ enable him to understand the needs of addicts and help them to have hope for the miracle of recovery.

BY D.J. MITCHELL

I knew Frank from Twelve Step meetings. He'd been sober a few years, drank one day, and then came back to our meetings for another few years. Then he went out for one drink and couldn't stop. I called him about a business matter a few months later, and he told me he was desperate and wanted to talk. We agreed to meet for coffee the next day. That night, Frank wrapped his car around a telephone pole. I have always wondered: if I'd met him that day instead of putting it off until tomorrow, might Frank still be alive?

This story illustrates that working with addicts is a life-and-death effort. It also reminds us that we don't know how much time someone has. Today is the day I need to be of service to them—no matter how tired I may be and no matter what else I may have scheduled. Taking time to talk with a person struggling with addiction may save a life.

My friend Mario had been drinking and using drugs for 30 years, and had been arrested more times than he could count. I mentored him while he was in rehab, but I was pretty sure he wasn't serious and would relapse as soon as he finished the 60 day program. I was wrong. Mario stayed clean and sober. Fifteen years later, he manages a homeless shelter and runs the local Twelve Step meeting house.

I don't mean to suggest that my efforts bring success. They don't. An addict has passed beyond the realm of human aid. Only through God's loving intervention can any of us be saved. Mario, like every one of us who recovers, is nothing less than a miracle.

I struggled with addiction for a decade. Addicted to drugs and alcohol, I couldn't face life without chemical assistance. That I found recovery at all is miraculous. I went looking for a methadone clinic, and instead found a Twelve Step meeting.

I've now been in recovery for over 35 years. I owe a debt of gratitude for the grace and mercy I've been given. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 2, we were saved by grace to do good works. Part of my recovery is committing to doing for others what was done for me.

Six years ago I felt called to ministry. My family and I moved across the country so I could attend Eastern Mennonite Seminary. While there, I began to realize how little most pastors understand addiction. But ministering to those who are addicted is something to which I am uniquely suited.

Jesus tells us, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17 NIV). The Bible is filled with sinners who

were called. Jacob committed fraud. Moses was a murderer and a fugitive. And Paul, the greatest evangelist of the New Testament, was a murderous persecutor of Christians. We're given plenty of evidence that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5 NIV).

Addiction is more complex than most people realize. Society offers two models: addiction is either a choice, or a disease. Some religious people describe it as sin. That's true if one considers that sin is not just action, but separation from God. But addiction is more than any of these alone.

Typically a person uses drugs or alcohol to manage the pain they carry from childhood abuse or trauma. This becomes a coping mechanism for both the pain they carry and the ongoing difficulties of daily existence, which are made worse by continuing drug and alcohol use. We literally cannot cope with life without our drug of choice because we have no other coping skills. No matter how much we might want to give it up, we can't imagine living any other way and are certain we could never change.

Our addiction also plays the role of a religion. Our drug becomes our god—a false and destructive god to which we would sacrifice anything. Our using or drinking becomes a form of worship that we engage in with daily devotion.

With this religion of destruction comes the spiritual baggage of false worship. Our demons are both figurative and literal. Our lifestyles, circles of friends, bad choices, and frequent exposure to the occult open us to all manner of unfriendly spiritual influences.

To be successful, recovery must address all these aspects of addiction. But the most important first step is to offer hope. Many of us have tried to quit before and failed. We conclude that we are beyond help. And our addiction tells us there's no hope. Our false god doesn't want us to recover.

Paradoxically, real hope most often comes from desperation. It is most often the consequences of our actions that force us to consider changing. Shielding an addict from the consequences of their actions may seem the loving thing to do, but it may actually delay their recovery.

Once the decision to change has been made, the most important question in a newly recovering addict's world is simply this: "What do I do with all the time I used to spend drinking or using?"

This is where the gospel shines. It teaches discipleship. Helping someone walk with Jesus every day not only brings them closer to Christ, it teaches habits and coping skills that will serve them well in life. Church once a week will not



D.J. Mitchell (left) studies the Bible with a client at Healing Refuge, a ministry for those suffering from addiction in Harrisonburg, Va.. Photo courtesy of D.J. Mitchell

be enough; those of us accustomed to daily worship of our false god need more.

Recovering addicts need spiritual healing, as well as counseling and, in many cases, medical attention. My goal is to network effectively with other local healing ministers and ministries for the sake of those trapped in addiction.

Working with addicts takes patience and a tolerance for disappointment. Since I began my work here in Harrisonburg, despite the challenges of COVID-19, I've found ways to connect with addicts through referrals from other pastors and transitional housing facilities. I take men to meetings, work the Twelve Steps with them, and offer guidance for navigating the world without drugs. I also offer healing prayer and deliverance. For those who are willing, the change can be spectacular. One man, who lived on the street

for years, is now clean and working to restore relations with his family. Another, who spent over a decade behind bars for alcohol-related offenses, is sober today and attending college.

In the recovery community, we say that every one of us in recovery is a miracle; the rewards of seeing someone recover are beyond words. God can take someone with the worst past and the worst pain, and transform him or her into a light that shines in the darkest of places.

Serving with tranSend, D.J. Mitchell has begun Healing Refuge, in Harrisonburg, Va., offering support, encouragement, and accountability to those suffering from addiction. D.J. recently released his book The Soul of an Addict (image on cover page).

● The hope to create community

TranSender Vicki Barnes finds a deep yearning for friendship and hope as college students grapple with the isolation and disorientation of the pandemic. She leads campus Bible study groups and focuses on identifying and nurturing student faith leaders.

BY VICTORIA BARNES

The question was put to me: What am I hoping for? I know that regardless of where I am or what I am doing, my purpose is to make disciples. But I have struggled to understand my unique purpose. While in college, I knew I wanted to go into campus ministry. This caused some tension with my parents and I went through periods of time where I felt I wasn't cut out for this. I thought to myself, "Maybe I should just do what is normal for a post grad."

My relationship with God didn't really begin until I was 17. I had dedicated my life to Christ as a child and was baptized at 10, but it took years until I was ready to take God seriously. When I was in my senior year of high school, I reached a very low point. I had struggled with depression, anxiety, and insecurity for years, but this time there was anguish that I'd never felt before. I was unsure about my life because I knew I wasn't following God, and I wondered if I would ever experience joy or happiness again. I cried for days. I couldn't sleep well for weeks, and I took days off from school to try and get better, with my family trying to help as much as possible.

It didn't happen overnight, but I began to experience restored hope, and a solid foundation developed. I clung to the simple words, "I need Jesus." This realization signaled the end of most of my friendships. I didn't find new friends until college. But when I did, so many things changed. That is what has driven my passion for ministry: relationship! It is never just yourself and God! We are encouraged to develop friendships. I want to see strong friendships develop among students who encourage and empower one another, and who go out and find others to empower.

Since my assignment began in the fall, I have seen a deep yearning among students for friendship, especially after months of social distancing, periods of isolation, and not meeting new people. Mental health issues among students are rampant and COVID-19 made issues that already existed worse. We are in a setting where all around us people have lost jobs, lost family members and friends. Nothing seems secure. Not knowing where to turn, it can be so easy to place hope in temporary things, like relationships, substances, and social media. It can be even easier to shut down and lose hope all together.

This fall was a hard time to try to build up a ministry. I was so discouraged. Honestly, I cried the first night we were supposed to have our first women's study of the semester. Everyone was busy and no one showed up after we had struggled to find a time to meet. I was encouraged by



Vicki Barnes (left) and fellow tranSender Gabrielle Thorne serve at Eastern Mennonite University and James Madison University, respectively. Photo courtesy of Vicki Barnes

a friend to pray fervently, to remember why this is needed, and to place my hope in God to make it happen.

I waited about a month before relaunching, taking some time to pray and invite other young women. We began meeting on Saturday mornings in the discipleship center on the EMU hill with beautiful views of the mountains from all angles. My heart was overjoyed. At our first meeting, I brought clementines and leftover cupcakes from my birthday celebration earlier that week, and opened up the space to ask the young women what they needed. Hannah* talked about her loneliness, about how she didn't have Christian friends to walk with. Katie* shared her need and desire to explore a deeper relationship with God and to find faith on her own. They both agreed that they wanted to improve their devotional lives. After our second meeting, we went to Merge to get hot chocolate and ended up hanging out for a long while just chatting.

My hope is that God will use me to help students on campus be able to hang together as they navigate school, vocation, recreation, and relationships, all the while growing in their conviction of who God has called them to be and what he has called them to do.

**Not their real names*

Victoria Barnes serves in a tranSend assignment in college ministry, in partnership with Every Nation Campus.

● God at work in Bari, Italy

BY FABRIZIO PERFETTI

When you think of Italy, you usually get the idea that it is a Christian nation, but unfortunately it is not. Only 1% of the population would have a clear understanding of Jesus as Savior and Lord. Especially in southern Italy, people are very attached to local traditions, religious holidays, and the patron saints of their city. The ground is hard and the smaller the villages the more the hearts of the people are closed to the gospel. The gospel however brings light and liberation to those who feel oppressed by the rules and rituals of religion.

We can relate to the sense of emptiness in reciting prayers from memory, the lack of comfort from confession of sins through a priest rather than through Christ, and the burden of trying to please God with works. This was true in our own lives, until the biblical truth began to create a crack in our hearts through which a glimmer of light could pass.

We have opportunities to meet people who are beginning to be attentive to the truth of the word of God. We can see a change in their thinking and habits because they have begun to read the word or listen to preaching. Although none of these friends have yet truly accepted the message of salvation, we hold onto the truth that God loves them more than we do. It will be God who draws them to himself and purifies their hearts. We make ourselves available by investing into these friendships and by praying, taking advantage

of every opportunity to present them the good news.

Serving our God allows us to experience an eternal purpose to our days. We are neither bored nor fruitless! Whatever situation we face—within the family or out with people—there is always a divine purpose that calls us to be more Christlike. What greater, more creative and eternal goal can we wish for? Our eyes are open to the reward ahead and therefore we abound with hope, despite COVID-19 and the difficulties of 2020. We do not want to forget that our serenity does not reside in the favorable circumstances that everyone hopes for 2021 but in the fidelity of our God who governs everything with power, justice, wisdom and love even in adversity.



In partnership with the Italian Mennonite Church, Fabrizio and Ilaria Perfetti, along with their children Davide and Gioia, are completing a tranSend internship with the Bari/Valenzano congregation planted by former VM Missions workers.

● God at work in Winston-Salem

BY JUAN JOSÉ LAGOS

We met Selenny and her son Cristian through Gladys, who is a member of our church. As his teacher assistant, Gladys sensed that Cristian needed extra support with his school work and reached out to us as a church for help. Ceci began to help him with his schoolwork; we began to build a relationship with them both. Soon, both Selenny and Cristian gave their lives to Jesus. We began to disciple them and attend to various needs. Selenny has been battling health problems. Her work hours have been reduced by 50% due to the pandemic and she lost her car in a car accident. As a community of faith, we have come alongside her through this tough time, providing financial help for her needs, praying with her and many times driving her to medical appointments and to work. Nidia and Beto helped ease Cristian's stress of confinement by taking him on bike rides. We meet virtually with her twice a week for Bible study.

Recently Selenny sent a thank you note to us that said: "I would like to thank you for the time you take to give us the message of God through a Bible study, both for me and for

my son Cristian. From the first moment we started with this study, we feel closer to God, we face problems with a better attitude, and we have a clearer idea of how God works with human beings. We can better interpret the way our Creator speaks to us. We have better defined the actions that we must do to please God. Most especially, it has helped us to react better or to think more than once before doing or saying anything that might offend God or harm another person. In this sense, we are grateful for the valuable time that you have dedicated to feed our souls and educate us spiritually. I include you in my prayers so that God continues to bless you and give you the necessary strength to continue with such a beautiful work and to give you a long life in the service of the Lord Jesus. Amen and thank you." We see hope in Selenny and Cristian's life; we see Jesus, our hope of glory in them!

Juan José Lagos works with his wife Cecilia as church planters in Winston-Salem, N.C., with VM Missions and Tennessee Carolina Kentucky (TCK) district of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Call to Prayer: The posture of persistent hope

BY CAROL TOBIN

“For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, through perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” —Romans 8:24-25 (NASB)

There are a lot of things that we haven’t seen in the landmark year just past. My grandson has been praying daily for months for COVID-19 to “go away.” It seems to him that that particular prayer has not been answered. We feel restricted. We are waiting, prevented from doing so many “good works” that we associate with being God’s hands and feet in the world. In all of this, I sense that God’s invitation is to pick up the kingdom tool of prayer that is admittedly so utterly incompatible with the way of the world.

The biblical picture that captures for me the position in which we find ourselves is this: Elijah has just been spectacularly vindicated in the showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. With great confidence and ears open to what comes next, Elijah boldly pronounces to King Ahab that yet another mighty event is imminent. After three years of drought, rain is coming. Soon. He climbs back up to the top of Mt. Carmel, and sits down under the blazing sun and cloudless sky to wait. The text in 1 Kings 18 says that he crouched down to the earth and put his face between his knees.

And right here is our prayer posture. After being animated by such certainty about the preeminence of God’s purpose and plan, he is now doing the hard work of holding on to what has been revealed to him, realizing that the last thing he needs is to gaze at that brassy blue sky! I picture him with grim determination keeping his heart’s eye fixed on God’s word to him, and

continuing to reach out in hope for what is not yet seen.

In his book *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson wrote, “The spiritual atmosphere in which we live erodes faith, dissipates hope and corrupts love.”

In the face of the louder voices and the evening news, our job is to vigorously hold on to the hope that God will fulfill his purposes, not by might, not by strength, but by his Spirit!

We are instructed to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6: 10 NASB). When we declare what is “not yet,” we hold on to our kingdom position. This is why it is always appropriate to pray for healing: it is the kingdom reality. If not manifested as soon as we might like, then most certainly, ultimately.

With Elijah as the model given, may we not forget the mind-boggling words in James 5:16 that our prayers are effective and powerful!



The prophet Elijah waited for God to send rain after three years of drought, praying with his face between his knees on the top of Mt. Carmel, as recorded in 1 Kings 18. Image: *Prayer Changes*

Things by Sheila McDaniels

Elijah sends his servant time and time again to tell him if there is yet any sign of rain coming. It is recorded that the servant had six disappointing trips to scan the horizon. Six: the sum of the imperfection of humans and human history.

But the seventh time—the number that carries an inference of God completing his work—the servant sees a tiny cloud “as small as a man’s hand” coming up from the sea. This small sign is all that Elijah needs as confirmation that his hopes are a matter of certainty. Indeed, the awaited rain comes.

May we, like Elijah, guard our God-given hope that he will indeed come and “rain righteousness upon us” (Hosea 10:12).

Carol Tobin is Mission Advocate and Content Editor of *Transforming for Virginia Mennonite Missions*.



Service program: transForm
Serving since: 2016

● Worker profile: J. and M. W.

Assignment:

I (M.) am teaching English Language Learning for elementary students, for whom English is a third language after home and local languages. This year, I am also mentoring a student teacher. J. is Business Developer for transformational educational businesses. A current project involves starting a new preschool. He also mentors leadership teams to develop sustainable witness, and has been serving as interim director at an international school.

Biggest challenge:

With COVID-19, learning to teach effectively online is a growing process. During the fall, when some classes were being held at school, our reality included constant monitoring of everyone's health and needing to find coverage for teachers when they couldn't come to school. The constant need to evaluate plans was draining, but worth it so some students could learn at school. This was especially important for early elementary students and other students who struggle to learn online.

In addition, it has been difficult for me to not see my dad and our older son and his wife for over a year. It is

heartbreaking to cancel plans twice to visit, especially with my father's gradual decline in memory. Another area is not being able to worship corporately.

J. has missed being able to visit and support in person our team, language school, and computer programming business in Central Asia this year. However, the work there continues through remote conversations. A local leader who was gone for a period of study returned in December. We are praying for new outreach opportunities through his witness.

Biggest joy:

My greatest joy is in seeing my students grow. In the spring, I was really worried about how they would learn online. I was able to assess them in person after 10 weeks and we were all thrilled to discover that they had done well. It is also a joy to know that their parents are able to continue their ministries to some degree because I am teaching their children. We praise God that he is bigger than this pandemic and that Emmanuel is working both in our lives and those around us.

J. is especially grateful that the new school leadership team is working well together and distance learning is going

decently. It is great to see a new team in place and to welcome a new school director who started in January. In addition to this, classes at the preschool started in August. This school provides daily opportunities for the leaders and two believing teachers to impact co-workers, students, and parents.

A typical day:

I teach in the mornings. My afternoons and evenings are a combination of home-tasks, exercise, finishing up lesson plans and taking time to talk with our high school aged son. Some evenings I take time for worship on my piano and once a week I call my dad to see how he is doing. Processing the day and upcoming decisions with my husband is also an important part of my day.

J.'s typical days involve changes to what he has scheduled, as well as frequent surprise visitors. In the middle of it all he is mentoring others, whether it is ironing out details for the new school building contract, listening to a parent who has a struggling middle school child, or helping staff members figure out how to manage the ever-changing schedule.



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