



The Vine



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Growing UP, IN, & OUT

Adapted from Pastor Kevin's sermon on
December 31, 2017

Built into life are natural rhythms. Ask any farmer. They follow the sun – longer summer days mean longer days of work, short winter days mean calling it a day earlier. The goal each year is to grow in season and produce fruit.

Churches have natural rhythms. At Calvary, ministry is intense from September through Christmas. (Ask Pastor Dan about long days during the Advent season.) But the week between Christmas and New Year's, well, this year we actually closed the office and encouraged our staff and ministry leaders to take a breath to enjoy what God has accomplished and to consider how we might grow and produce fruit in the coming year.

In winter, farmers plan their crops for the following year. "Let's grow corn, beans, and alfalfa." I invite you to imagine with me what God may have for us, and I would like to use three simple but powerful prepositions to wrap our imagining in – UP, IN, and OUT. (f.n. Michael Breen, "Building a Discipleship Culture.")



LET'S GROW UP

Growing UP is simply growing our love for God. Using farmer language, that's root growth. Jesus made this clear this is to be our first thing. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." A growing love for God will sprout in the passion of our

worship as we express this love to God and experience His love and pleasure in us. Oddly, God does not need our love. The command to make love of God the root of our lives is essential for us. We are hardwired to need that love from God and to express our love back to God in order to become what God designed us to become.

Loving God supremely and others sacrificially is at the heart of the gospel.

Growing UP in corporate worship gives us a deeper experience of intimacy in our triune God (abiding), and allows us to almost touch eternity (have you ever had *Holy Spirit shivers* in a moment of worship?). It also communicates to others around us about our God, and calls us UP to greater love for God, as we sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. So let me ask you, Calvary family, is worship a regular part of your reality? Current research shows that even committed Christians now attend worship 1.4 times a month (this is down from 2 just 5 years ago).

Growing UP does not just happen in our walls on Sunday. It is your calling all week long as you stay intimately connected to Jesus, as a live branch stays connected to the stalk (John 15:1-8). Some time in your quiet time, pull up an internet concordance and type in the words, "In Christ" and do a search. It will explain vividly how we stay intimately connected with Jesus and why that is essential. (To tip you off, you'll discover many things you know that help you stay connected – prayer, reading and meditating on God's word, listening to God, etc.)

LET'S GROW IN

Growing IN, in one word, is community. It is experiencing God on life's journey with other believers. Acts 2:42 describes the early church's life, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." At Calvary, we need others to grow as God intends. It is here, with life rubbing on life, that we are sharpened



and encouraged and cared for deeply by people who have grown to know and love us. Most times you find the word “you” in the Bible, it is PLURAL – “y’all.” Calvary has a number of places you can find community: community/affinity groups, mini-congregations, ministry teams serving together. Find a form that fits, and grow IN.

God calls us to live out the Gospel with one another. Part of growing IN is finding the place where you can live out the Gospel.

Don’t wait. Growing IN through authentic community provides the network of caring friends you need when you need care. Life excels in creating crisis. Who are you going to have around you when the job collapses, your parent dies suddenly, or your newborn has massive medical issues? A crisis is often not the time to start to develop this network. Let’s be intentional about Growing IN.

LET’S GROW OUT

In farmer terms, this is the harvest. The end goal. Growing OUT is reaching out. It’s harvesting. For many Christians, this has become our weakest area. In fact, it’s an area we often don’t even think about. We lose contact with people around us that don’t have a

relationship with God – the very ones Jesus urged us to prioritize (Jn 4:35). I need to share with you that Growing OUT has grabbed my heart lately. I have asked myself, “Do I pray for those who don’t know Christ?” Now Rebekah and I have that list and are praying through it. I am asking myself, “Does my heart hurt for the hurting, the poor, the sojourner, the downtrodden?” I want that answer to be a growing and resounding, “Yes!” I rejoice in the ways we say Yes! Compassion Counseling Center, Children’s Heart Project, Love Justice, Feed My Starving Children, and the CareFest on Wheels road trip to rebuild hurricane-stuck Texas to name just some. I say, “Keep it coming, Lord. There is so much more your compassionate heart wants to do for the people you love!”

Be like those farmers on those cold winter days. Decide with me what you are going to grow this year, and how you are going to grow it. Choose with me to make 2018 a year we grow UP, IN, and OUT. Just pick one area and ask God how you can improve in that area this year. Then visit with one of our pastors. We have a few tools ready to help you break ground for a better crop.



Beyond the Missionary Refrigerator Magnet:

Practical ideas for engaging in the lives of missionaries

By Melissa Meyers

“Mom, why is our picture on everyone’s refrigerator?” asked my five year old son.

We were on home assignment from Central Asia, and had been visiting many homes, having lunch or dinner with people who supported us in some way. Indeed, almost every home we entered had our picture stuck to their refrigerator. His innocent question stuck in my mind. After trying to explain it to him, I had a nice chuckle and realized for my son, these visits probably felt like causal visits with friends and not formal updates. This in my opinion is exactly what it should be. I’d like to give you some ideas and equip you with some hints to move a relationship that usually feels formal to an organic and natural one.

In our media driven lives we are connected with hundreds of worthy causes to get involved in. So why is it important as Christians to connect with missionary families? Missionaries were present shortly after the birth of the early church. In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was given to all believers, everyone. The apostles are strongly proclaiming the word of God, people are being saved, miracles are happening, and people are meeting together daily. There is this beautiful picture described, where new believers bring their possessions together so that their daily needs can be met and they can focus on the spiritual side of life (Acts 2: 42-47).

Continuing on, a man named Stephen proclaims the gospel message in front of the Jewish authorities of the day. He has been accused of blasphemy. After one of the most powerful testimonies in the book of Acts, he becomes the first Martyr. The church that had been meeting daily scatters, and the gospel begins to spread. Who is there to witness this? A man named Saul. Later on, this man, Saul, has a divine encounter with God, and he is given a new name, Paul. He eventually becomes one of the first missionaries as he is sent later

throughout the region. Now I am skipping over a lot of little details, but you see Paul was an extension of this new church. Paul and Barnabas went not proclaiming their own gospel, but they went proclaiming the truth of Jesus that impacted many.



Melissa Meyers and family served as missionaries in Central Asia.

Growing up in individualistic societies we are inundated with stories of the hero who rises above everyone else. These stories inspire and perhaps challenge us to be better people, but to a default they focus on *super women and super men* to do extraordinary things. When in fact, Biblically we have the opposite; Jesus poured into the lives of twelve men, and sent them out in pairs to work together. Saul and Barnabas were sent off together and reported back to authorities in Jerusalem on what was happening in the Gentile churches. So when we look at why it is important for you to connect with missionaries and their families, it is simply because they need you. They were not meant to do it alone.

So what are some practical ways for you to support and connect with missionaries? There are books written about this, but I will personally share what impacted us over the years. First, I’d encourage you to focus on one to two missionaries in your church. Some very well-meaning people might think, they can pray for one missionary a day and cover them all. Realistically, if I were to do this I know only failure would be in sight. Look for organic relationships. Who have you met that you connected with? Is there a particular ministry or country that you felt like you wanted to know about? Otherwise, you will be so overloaded you will do nothing.

#1. Read their newsletter or blog

Did you just groan? I understand. In our tech-savvy lives we are overloaded with information. The amount of words we filter through daily leaves even one more thing to read a burden. Let's be honest, the latest article on pop culture is probably more interesting than the latest missionary update. Try to first read what is important before the extra stuff.

It was wonderful when someone repeated back to me a story they read in our update. In that short exchange, I moved from feeling alone in my journey of learning a new language, and struggling to raise my young children far from home to feeling connected. So follow their blogs, updates, and other ways they are sharing their lives and let them know you are listening.

#2. Invite them out for a meal or into your home

We loved these informal/formal ways to connect with our supporters or people at church. It allowed us to share in a more personal way than a formal talk. At these meetings, I usually felt like something spiritually important happened. Not only did they connect with what God was doing in our lives, we connected with what God was doing in their lives.

Ten Questions to Ask Missionaries

1. *What kind of food do you usually eat in _____?*
2. *Do you have to dress differently than you do in America?*
3. *What do you find most challenging about living in _____?*
4. *What do you enjoy about living and working in _____?*
5. *Where do you feel God has used you the most in the past year?*
6. *Tell me about the local church in your country? What do you do for church?*
7. *What has changed for you in America since you last visited?*
8. *When your children visit America, what is the most challenging thing for them/you?*
9. *When you think about returning, what are you looking forward to for your next term?*
10. *What is one thing I can pray for you about?*

Next steps: Why not look up your church's missionaries and start connecting.

Sometimes, missionaries have a narrow window of time to meet. If it doesn't work out this time around, it may be a couple of years, but yes, ask again. They really will keep it in mind for the next home assignment and make it a priority to meet with you.

#3. Ask specific questions about what they do

Does your child ever come home from school and you ask them, "How did your day go?" They reply, "Great!" You are dying for information, and they may be excited to share something with you, but essentially you asked a dead end question.

People sometimes asked me, "How was it?" This is such a broad question, only panic set in when I was asked this. *How was what? The food, the culture, the church?* The missionary is left with not knowing where to begin and both parties leave the conversation frustrated. So here are ten questions to ask. Feel free to add to them, but ask questions that are specific and open-ended.



My Journey Toward Jesus

By Leslie Gaska

My faith journey began in fits and starts with detours along the way. I was first confirmed a Lutheran in my early teens in Velva, North Dakota. That was followed by a move to the Twin Cities, and another confirmation in a new church, this one Presbyterian. Then in my 30's, I took another turn to United Church of Christ and was confirmed there. None of these "stuck." At no point along the way did I meet Jesus.

DISILLUSIONED

The UCC pastor was removed, and I became disillusioned with church structure, so decided I could figure all this out on my own. No more church for me! Slowly over the years, I discovered I couldn't figure it out, so I allowed myself to become intellectually complacent. I carelessly decided I probably wasn't a true Christian, but always believed in my version of God. What I knew about the Bible I'd learned in confirmation classes, in other words, not very much. It wasn't a book I read.

In 2006, I moved to Rochester because my mother was aging and starting to need help. After a year, she moved into my home, and we settled in. I decided to run for the Board of Directors for the Stonehedge Townhome Association where I lived, and was elected in 2008. The president of the Board was this nice guy, Brian Kaihoi, a Calvary attender, who worked at Mayo doing what I thought were fascinating things. We clicked a little. I liked his wife, Sharon too, feeling a pull toward her. But I couldn't find any reason to get to know her much better, though. Then she retired, and I thought well, maybe now. But there was never a time when suggesting we do something together didn't feel a bit awkward. So I didn't.

Besides, I was hiding a secret. I knew neither she nor Brian drank alcohol, and I knew by then I was having a problem with it. So I thought our interests and lives weren't in synch enough for something to work. Or so I thought. God had other plans.

At Christmas time of 2015, my mother passed away. In short order – months, really – I had to put two of my three cats down, and I held the hand of my wonderful friend, Vern, as he passed away due to Lymphoma. While

driving home from Bismarck that final time after Vern's funeral in very early June of 2016, I had what some AA folks might call a "come to Jesus" meeting with myself. On a road somewhere in North Dakota, I made a decision to quit drinking. I felt a great relief, yet knew I needed to do a lot more than just quit. A week later I finally worked up enough courage to attend an AA meeting, and then another, and another. Very few family and friends were aware that I had a problem and certainly weren't aware I was trying to fix it.

I felt myself more and more drawn to something much bigger than myself and my life.

FRIENDSHIP

Initially, I was surprisingly euphoric over my decision. One afternoon, without much thought, I walked over to the Kaihoi's and knocked on their door. Maybe we *could* be friends, I hoped. And I really wanted to share my story with someone I knew I could trust. Sharon was home, and welcomed me in. I gave her the short version of me, the sadness of Mom's passing, pain over my beloved cats, the pain and hurt of Vern's passing, and my recent self-honesty that had led me to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. That afternoon the bonds of a true friendship were born. But there was more to come, shared events that would change me forever.

A few days later, Sharon called to recommend a book she was reading called "You'll Get Through This," written by Max Lucado. Before I'd had a chance to even order it, she knocked on my door, handing me her copy of the book telling me that although she hadn't finished it yet (but almost), she wanted me to have it NOW, feeling sure I would benefit from reading it. We spoke a lot that summer of 2016.

Towards the fall, she called to tell me her church was going to have a study group on this book, and asked if I was interested in joining it? I didn't ask what church (I couldn't remember its name, but should have – I'd been

there for a few musical events). I thought, well, sure, absolutely. By now, I had immersed myself in Alcoholics Anonymous, was working the 12 Steps of AA, reading the Alcoholics Anonymous book, and listening to CDs. I knew my life was changing, and adding a spiritual book review in a spiritual setting sounded perfect.

Unbeknownst to me however, there was this matter of a church service following the book club meeting. Since they had picked me up in their car, I found myself going to the 10:30 a.m. service, at a church called Calvary Evangelical Free. I was uncomfortable at first, but quickly I could tell the experience felt GOOD. The “Evangelical” part I struggled with, but later I had a chance to meet with Pastor Kevin who gave me a wider view to think about. I’m still thinking.

So began my regular attendance at Calvary. My own sisters thought I was nuts after I’d made so many declarations over the years that “I’d never set foot in a church again.” Instead, I felt myself more and more drawn in to something much bigger than myself and my life.

In late fall of 2016, Sharon mentioned a trip she was planning to take to Africa. AFRICA?!! That’s number one on my bucket list! I decided to go. It was being led by a MINISTER, of all things. Its focus was on the BIBLE – Daniel and the lions – which made me feel unsure (remember, I don’t know much about the Bible). I welcomed a chance to learn more.

LIFE CHANGE

About a month after we got back from the trip, Sharon (bless her sweet heart) suggested I might want to join her in a two-day women’s conference called Devoted Hearts. I’d never heard of it. Sharon told me it was spiritual in nature. Day one was memorable; Day two was life-changing. I heard magnificent presentations by a host of skilled and inspirational speakers.

Closing out the conference was our speaker, Karen Kingsbury. We were all on our feet. Karen asked if there were any women ready to devote their lives to Jesus, to raise their hand. God raised my arm for me, nearly giving Sharon a heart attack and putting a shocked look on my face.

But I didn’t want to take my arm down. It felt so good, so right. I was beginning to pull together disparate parts of myself into something more cohesive and Christian-based.

In Step 3 of the AA book “12 Steps and 12 Traditions,” it said, “Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him.” I had initially struggled with this step, but that day at the conference, I suddenly better understood what was being asked of me.

My journey had taken me back to God; such a miracle. Every day I say that I’m a grateful alcoholic. Without AA, I may not have listened to the call of the church. I still search for how to reconcile old beliefs with these new ones, but I’m not afraid of them anymore. I welcome having those former beliefs questioned, and I absolutely love our church and its ministers and ministries. I am now 14 months sober, and have more wonderful people in life than I’d ever thought possible. I am participating in my very first Bible study class this year! I am so grateful to so many for their guidance to a safer, more peaceful place. I’ll never know all the facts, or be a Bible scholar, but I do know I have found my way home.



Leslie Gaska and Sharon Kaihoi at the Devoted Hearts Women’s Conference last spring.

What Happened to Esau?

By Pastor Tim Nelson

Then Esau said to himself, “When my father dies, I will kill my brother.” Genesis 27:41

(And you thought *your* family had conflict?)

ESAU

Esau had reason to be angry – at his brother, at his parents, with himself. His younger brother, Jacob, had just pulled the wool over dad’s blind eyes, convincing Isaac by hook and by crook that Jacob was his older brother Esau. Deceived, Isaac had pronounced words over Jacob, essentially giving him the family farm and a fruitful future. Esau knew the little rat’s mom was a part of the rouse. The ringleader, in fact. Momma had always had a special twinkle in her eye for his fair-haired, homeboy little brother. And if he thought about it very long, Esau should have loathed some of his own impulsive choices, like trading away family leadership and double inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of soup.

Knowing how furious and impulsive Esau was, Rebecca sent Jacob away in the middle of the night to his relatives’ house hundreds of miles to the north. Genesis Chapters 28-31 provide the play-by-play on the next 20 years of his life. By Genesis 32, Jacob, his two wives and two sort-of wives, his ten sons and one daughter, escape once again in the middle of the night, heading back toward home. Toward Esau. Jacob was not willing to bet his life on the cliché, “time heals all wounds,” so he sent some serious gifts ahead to his brother, Esau, hoping to soften him up. His messengers returned, reporting, “Well, we didn’t have to travel far. Esau is heading straight for us, and with 400 men.”

Fearing the worst, Jacob separates his family into waves. Jacob will go first. He’s Esau’s payback. Next will come his sort-of wives with their kids. They’re cannon fodder. Leah and her kids will be next. Hoping Esau’s blood-thirst will be quenched, Jacob places his favorite wife (Rachel) and favorite child (Joseph) at the rear.

Awaiting the arrival of morning and Esau, he spends a long, sleepless night.

What happens at sunrise is, frankly, shocking. “Then Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept” (Genesis 33:4). Once reunited, Esau does a second thing equally shocking – when the grazing land for the herds of Esau and Jacob could no longer sustain both, Esau offers to move!

So I want to know, WHAT HAPPENED TO ESAU? The writer of Genesis does not tell us, but another story gives us a clue. Fast forward with me, oh, let’s say a cool millennium...

Beyond Hope? Beyond Repair?

Jacob’s twelve sons become 12 tribes, grow to be a multitude, and take over the land God promised to Abraham. Again there is family conflict. They experience our Civil War – North vs. South. Since there are ten northern tribes and they are more numerous, they keep the name, “Israel.” What’s left in the south is the large tribe of Judah, and the tiny tribe of Benjamin (how they got tiny you can read for yourself in Judges 19-21, but not on a full stomach, please). Both Israel (north) and Judah (south) are led by kings. Every king of Israel was corrupt. So were most of the kinds of Judah. But every now and then in Judah, a diamond was found in the rough.

King Hezekiah was just such a king. 2 Kings 18 tells us *what* he did – enacting major reforms to push back evil and turn his wicked, idolatrous nation back to God. Verse 5 tells us *why* he did this: “He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, so that after him there was none like him among all the Kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. For he clung to the Lord, and he did not depart from following after Him.”

MANASSEH

Wow. This makes what is said about his son, Manasseh, even starker: “Manasseh did abominations – more wicked than the Amorite nations before him, and made Judah sin.” A vivid description of how Manasseh made his nation sin is listed in Chapter 21. Again, I would not recommend you read this on a full stomach.

Manasseh’s wickedness was so intense, that the writer of 2 Chronicles 33 tells us God allowed the Assyrians to capture him, put hooks through his nose, and drag him off as a prisoner to Babylon. The people he led into sin were so wicked, God said what he did to Manasseh would be done to them – the whole hook-through-the-nose-and-carried-off-to-Babylon thing.

Like Esau’s story, Manasseh’s story ends with a shocking surprise. The writer of Chronicles tells us at the end of Manasseh’s life, he was restored as king, and with passion and all his remaining energy, undid much of the damage he had done and turned the eyes of Judah back to God (2 Chronicles 3).

WHAT HAPPENED TO MANASSEH? Unlike Esau’s story, the writer of 2 Chronicles gives us the answer: “And when he was in distress, he prayed to the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And when he prayed to God, God was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God” (2 Chr. 33:12-13).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Okay, how about one more? Fast forward about a century. One of history’s most impressive rulers was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon – the guy who designed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, still considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It may have been in that garden one day that Neb got just a bit too full of himself. Having already been warned by God in dreams just how fragile he was, he broke his arm patting himself on the back with these



words of self-worship, “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” God apparently thought that rhetorical question deserved a prompt answer. Daniel Chapter 4 tells us, “While that word was still in his mouth, a voice came from heaven...” If you haven’t read that story, God’s answer to that question was, “No!” Nebuchadnezzar was immediately struck down. If you want to read more about Nebuchadnezzar’s next seven years, look up “boanthropy” on Wikipedia. (Spoiler alert: It literally means, “cow-man.”)

The last verse of Daniel 4 fast forwards in time. Nebuchadnezzar snaps out of it. Here is what he says, “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exult and honor the King of Heaven, for all His works are true, and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” Sounds like something Billy Graham would have said.

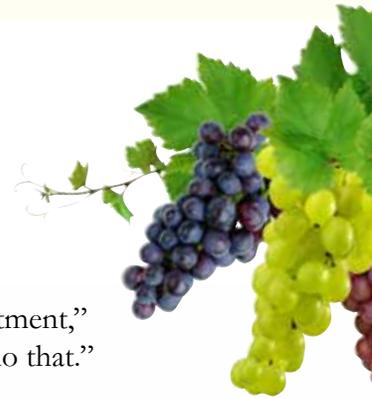
WHAT HAPPENED TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR? Nebuchadnezzar answers that one personally in a testimony fitting for a Billy Graham Crusade: “But at the end of that period (his 7-year, cow-man period) I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes to heaven...” (Daniel 4:34). You should probably stop reading now and read Neb’s whole testimony in Daniel 4:2-3, 34-37.

So where am I going with this? Simply this: Nobody is beyond hope or repair. Not bitter Esau. Not wicked Manasseh. Not prideful Nebuchadnezzar. Not that person you have on your mind right now, especially if that person is you. God can repair individuals, relationships, and even whole sin-damaged nations. **God can** and does. The question is, **will we** turn our eyes to heaven, or take that first step of reconciliation toward our brother?

The Moe the Merrier

By Evan Miller, Senior Editor. From Guideposts/ June 2016. *Used with permission.*

She's practically a one-woman welcoming committee!



Ask Mark Robinson about the secret of the Homestead's warm, welcoming spirit and his answer is simple: Marilyn.

As in Marilyn Moe, an 80-year-old resident of the senior-living and care community Mark manages in Rochester, Minnesota. She's a woman on a mission: making sure every one of her 120 fellow residents feels at home. No one there is forgotten. Marilyn sees to that. She seeks out anyone who seems a bit down and sits with them, asking about their grandkids or a favorite TV program.

Folks at the Homestead, owned by Volunteers of America, a faith-based nonprofit, consider Marilyn an angel, Mark says.

He fell for Marilyn's charm offensive in 2012, the day he came to interview for the job. He was standing in the hallway, hoping he didn't look as nervous as he felt, when a stylishly dressed woman walked right up to him. "Good morning," she said. "I'm Marilyn. I hope everything works out for you." She gave him such a warm smile that he couldn't help but smile back, nerves forgotten.

He got the job, and it didn't take long for him to realize what an asset Marilyn was. She'd arrived herself only two years before, moving from Fargo, North Dakota, with her husband, Darrell. They had a daughter who lived in Rochester. They moved into one of the Homestead's independent-living apartments, complete with a full kitchen.

It was a huge change, leaving her friends, her church family, her piano students. She loved teaching, seeing her students' skills and confidence grow. Would she find something as fulfilling at the Homestead?

"I could have just sat in my apartment," she says, "but I wasn't going to do that."

Marilyn wasn't trying to make a big splash. "I just wanted to make friends," she says. But it was more than that. All her life she'd done her best to follow Jesus' teaching, to love her neighbor. She wasn't about to quit now. Besides, it wasn't like Darrell, now 84, was sitting around either. He plays the trombone and joined two community bands.

Marilyn noticed that most people kept to themselves and didn't know much about their neighbors, so she started a monthly newcomers' get-together, inviting residents to her apartment for tea and homemade desserts. One by one they'd go around the circle and share a fun fact about themselves as an icebreaker. Soon people were chatting in the hallways and the common areas. Thanks to Marilyn, they had something to talk about.

Her optimistic view of life is contagious.

She went to the monthly women's breakfast. To her dismay only three or four others showed up. She took over, each month lining up one of the residents to give a talk about a special interest, trips they'd taken, former careers, even more weighty topics like hospice care. She personally invited women to attend. It wasn't long before the room was packed.

She gave out birthday cards, using the Homestead's monthly newsletter to get the dates. Then anniversary cards for the married residents. She played the piano for church services and special occasions.



Marilynn didn't notice anything different about the Homestead, but others did. "These changes you're making, they're great," the residents would tell Mark. "Keep it up." He knew he wasn't the one who deserved the credit.

April 2012, Mark was in his office when the call came in. It was Darrell. Marilyn had had a stroke. The paramedics were on their way. The news hit Mark hard. What if she never fully recovered? He'd seen it happen too many times. With her family's permission the staff told residents. They said hundreds of prayers for her.

All her life she has done her best to follow Jesus' teaching, to love her neighbor.

A week later, Marilyn was back on her feet—albeit with a walker. Her doctors were amazed. "We can do the rehab in stages," her therapist said. "Nice and slow."

Marilynn's reply? "I want the boot-camp version. The toughest one you've got." Her therapists were impressed by her rapid recovery. They said her lifetime of exercise and healthy eating had paid off. Marilyn says it wasn't her strength but the Lord's that pulled her through. "He's the ultimate healer, the reason I'm alive today." Another week and she was back at the Homestead. No walker needed. If anything she seemed more energized than ever, giving tours to prospective residents, hosting the women's meeting, the newcomers' dessert klatch. Going to Bible class. Playing the piano.

That's what she was doing one day when a resident in his mid-eighties approached her. "Would you be willing to teach me to play?" he asked. "Please," the man's

wife said. "He was always so busy with work that he never had time for a hobby."

"I'd love to," Marilyn said. She met with the man every week. Slowly he progressed from scales to simple two to three-note pieces until he was playing "Happy Birthday" and "Jingle Bells." "I wasn't sure I could do this," her newest (and oldest) student told her. "You gave me the confidence I needed."

Last year, Marilyn won statewide recognition for what she does at the Homestead from a nonprofit senior-services group—the Spirit of Aging award. She was chosen from more than 750 nominations. "Her optimistic view of life is contagious," Mark wrote to the selection committee. "She brings grace, beauty and gratitude to everything she does."



(Marilynn Moe, a one woman welcoming committee.) Marilyn Moe, and husband Darrell, moved here from North Dakota a few years ago. They reside in independent-living at the Homestead of Rochester.

Grief: Denied and/or Embraced? Yes!

By David Jamison



Perhaps it was Charlie Brown from the comic strip “Peanuts” that brought this saying into our everyday vocabulary. I suppose it could be said there are two kinds of grief. There is “good grief” and then there is “bad grief.” Let me finish that thought. Grief is good when I embrace the loss and the pain that comes from the significant loss. In my profession as a therapist, we encourage people to embrace their grief. This is done when I move from denial and let myself feel the pain, the hurt, the sadness, the loneliness and the aloneness, and sometimes when the darkness closes in at noon-day and tears are OK. Such as I did in the death of my wife, Judy, after fifty-two years of marriage. Grief on the other hand is “bad” when I refuse to call it for what it is.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language states that GRIEF is a noun. It is the name of something. The dictionary goes on to say that grief is “sorrow, acute sorrow, deep sadness, keen mental suffering, distress over affliction, loss, sharp deep sorrow, or painful regret.” These feelings come about from experiencing intense emotional suffering caused by significant loss, disaster, misfortune and suffering. Significant loss can come from many different events or happenings in our lives and these things are precursors to grief.

Significant loss can include any of the following; loss of a beloved pet, loss of employment, loss of health, loss of wealth, loss of a child (any age), loss of a spouse, loss of a parent, loss of friendship/meaningful relationship, loss of a sibling, loss of a marriage through divorce and loss of a marriage that never had a keen sense of attachment, and

emotional bonding and a passionate sense of thriving, the horrific experience of rape and sexual abuse as a child. This list is not exhaustive; you may add your own loss to the list.



My wife, Judy’s wish was to be treated with respect and dignity in the last of her days and hours (with loved ones encouraged to be there) and die at home. Mayo Hospice made this possible with in-home nursing and especially so with a Christian nurse, Erin Kittleson, from Calvary. Erin was a good friend before she was needed as a hospice nurse. Erin and her husband, Gary, became even better friends by helping us through this journey of grief and dying.

Very often, nothing needs to be said, just be a “presence of support” at the side of the dying person. Maybe an appropriate touch, an appropriate short Scripture read, and a short prayer is all that is needed.

Dr. Kubler-Ross’s book, “On Death and Dying,” was a landmark study about death and dying. From her study of death and dying came what is known as the Grief Cycle. Many have found this very helpful, still for others not so. I have used this Grief Cycle with church members when I was Pastor of Care. I have also found it helpful to know where I was in the process of dealing with my own grief.

The five stages are Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Let me use some self-disclosure to illustrate the cycle. For me these areas were not clear cut and finished before I moved to the next area of the cycle. Denial never seemed to be an issue for me, although as I

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look back, there was a lot of denial in the beginning and through the grief process. Anger – yes, bargaining – no. Why would I want to try to bargain with a Sovereign Holy God? Depression – yes; at times with tears, at times escaping into TV, at times just leaving an empty house, at times finding “comfort” food to eat. It was a good thing to have a “life style change-coach” or weight gain most likely would have been worse. I thank God for coach, Vicki Tiede, and best friend Rodney Mell; he has been my prayer and accountability partner for over 25 years. For the most part I sense I am in acceptance, but I can still find myself back in anger and or depression. Anger for the loss of things that never will be, and depression from the deep sadness and disappointment for the future that will not be.

This journey of grief started about 16-17 years ago when Judy had a stroke. It happened as we were coming into the house after watching the 4th of July fireworks. She had trouble using her left leg. Judy spent the next 45 days at St. Mary’s which included treating the stroke and going through a tsunami of physical therapy.

A word picture I use with my clients to illustrate grief, I also found helpful as I became more familiar with what was happening to me. When Judy had her stroke, unwittingly I put on a back pack and started putting BBs in it. At first, I didn’t even know I had the back pack on, let alone that I was putting BBs into it. After all, how much does a BB weigh? There were a lot of BBs that went into the back pack the first year without me realizing it, and the back pack was getting a little heavier. As time marched on, so did the filling of the back pack. I just added more things to my “to do” list as Judy was unable to do tasks. We were still able to do our Friday night date nights, but in time that turned into bringing the meal home and then “I don’t know what I want.” Now there were BBs that represented more cooking, house cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, and coming home at noon to make sure Judy had a noon meal, and feeling pressured to be home very close to 6 p.m. when I finished with my last client. The BBs were symbolic of more grief going into the back pack. Little did I realize I had little, if any time, left to take care of me. I was busy taking care of Judy, fulfilling my marriage vows “for better or for worse” and this sure was worse. With the stroke, Judy’s day care business came to an abrupt ending and this added more BBs with loss of income.

There was a time when things seemed to stabilize and some of the BBs began to come out of the back pack. But more BBs were added when Judy needed a hysterectomy and a benign tumor removed from her abdomen. Judy chose not to use her morphine pump even once while in the hospital. Friends were there for me with support of prayers, a hospital visit and some strong hugs and meals.

Judy recovered from the surgery but never really got well. So, more BBs kept going into the back pack, most unknowingly. There were times when Judy and I talked about “who would do best as a surviving spouse?” and we would pray about it together and privately. One day, Judy said that she would not do well as a surviving spouse. So, our prayers reflected that awareness, not in some morbid sadness, but in confidence that God would supply strength for her journey of grief and loss in her gradual decline and for me with all the losses that would happen and discovering life as a single man after over 52 years of being married.

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As Judy’s health continued to decline, the BBs continued to accumulate in the back pack. I didn’t have time to check the back pack. I didn’t have time to check to see if it was getting heavier. I had to keep a vigil on how Judy was doing. Judy, being a very private person, did not share much of what was happening inside emotionally for her. Sometimes I could read the outward clues correctly and other times I would miss them by two or three country miles.

About 4-5 years ago, a dear friend, Dennis Schmidt, gave me a little book entitled “The Red Sea Rules,” by Robert J. Morgan, with a subtitle of: The Same God who Lead You In Will Lead You Out. Little did Dennis know, and maybe he did, that this was God’s leading to begin to prepare me for the storm that was brewing on the horizon. There are 10 chapters or Rules that are a series of 10 sermons dealing with the tough times the Children of Israel had leaving Egypt and spending 40 years in the wilderness. One thing that stood out so clearly for me in

Grief Continued

reading was: Don't ask God to get me out of the crucible but rather ask, "God what do you want me to learn while I am in the crucible?" Nobody likes being in a crucible and I sure didn't either. This book became so meaningful to me I decided to read it once a month for a year and I did. There were times I would pray "What do you want me to learn?" followed by, "I don't think I am being honest with you God, and I don't think I am being honest with myself. Help me increase my honesty." Seventeen years is such a very long time to watch a decline in a spouse's health, only to see it accelerate in the last two months. Holding on to the Sovereignty of God became a source of strength that helped to sustain me.

More BBs in the Pack

After another decline in health, again it was time to get Judy to the doctor, and that was not an easy task. Enter more BBs in the back pack. This was a hard visit for both of us. While sitting in the Doctor's office I had tears as I learned Judy did not want to burden me anymore with her needs. That was an element of care that I was unaware of. The doctor called in a nurse and little did the doctor know that we knew each other, yet another friend from church, Faye Wendland. Affectionately, Faye is a shaker and mover and things began to take place.

Now there was a team put together to come to the house and see to Judy's needs. In the care of the Lord, the crisis was avoided but still Judy did not get well. More BBs of grief, more concern, more fear and thoughts of "where is this all leading?" went into the back pack. I could answer the question, but I avoided giving myself the obvious answer, death.

Judy's appetite began diminishing and there was weight loss and weakness following close behind. More BBs in my back pack. I didn't take time or even think to make an evaluation of the weight I was caring. Why would I, I didn't even know I had a back pack on my back full of BBs. I was still giving Judy the best care I could. My best friend of 25 years and prayer partner (we met weekly), Rodney Mell, was there to share my grief and sorrow. Many other friends affirmed that I was doing just that even after 17 years. My colleagues at Compassion Counseling Center now were already my family. One friend even affirmed to me that I was a role model for him with his wife if she ever became ill. Little did I know that people were watching and

observing me in this journey of grief. In some strange way that seemed to take some BBs out of the back pack. God was using my grief and stressors to bring good out of it for His glory. This maybe is one of the "whys" of being in the crucible. I may never know of the others until I, too, am with Jesus.

One morning came when Judy awoke with weakness so profound I needed to call for an ambulance. Thank God for the Holy Spirit that interceded on my behalf when my sadness and grief were too great to even put words together to make a prayer. When the lead nurse or physician's assistant spoke, it was in hushed, very somber and professional tones. "We have

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a very sick lady here."

Now two boxes of BBs went into the back pack. Judy's liver was not working correctly and her kidneys were beginning to fail. Her body was developing a mass of extra blood vessels and Judy was in danger of bleeding out if any of these blood vessels burst. There we were, getting the whole dump truck load in 7-10 minutes. How does a grieving husband and wife team respond? Only with numbness and shock. Decisions were made by being on auto pilot and following the medical staff's directions. After two weeks in the hospital, the entourage of doctors informed us there was nothing more they could do for Judy. To which Judy replied, "Unhook me. I want to go home to die." Somewhere, somehow, there came an acceptance that only peace from God can provide.

Now, Mayo Hospice came to the house on a regular basis. They were so kind, gentle, patient and skilled. These were times I didn't even know I was numb. I think these times increased as death came closer to our dwelling. I think I was too numb to even think of questioning "Why?" of God.

If I were to personify grief, I would call him a “Thief” because a thief steals. This thief stole my peace, joy, stability, clear thinking, comfort, sleep, health, and my sound mind. I could also name this thief, “Fear,” as fear chokes out trust, hope, joy, confidence, and peace.

Night time had its own routine. Prepare myself for bed, check to see if Judy was comfortable or needed anything, I would tell her I loved her and pray a short prayer with her. This prayer included a request for good sleep, for both, inner peace, and thanks for His presence. Strangely, it did not include a request for healing. Judy didn’t want healing; she wanted to be with Jesus.

Going Home

Judy continued to decline. One night the Spirit of the Lord came quietly into the bedroom where we were sleeping and whispered in her ear, “Judy,” Jesus said, “It’s time to bring you home.” Obviously, I didn’t hear the whispered message as it was Judy’s personal invitation from her long time Savior, Jesus. I learned that the Holy Messenger had been there and left. I knew the heavenly homeward journey had taken place and was completed. My back pack was very full by now. The necessities that followed were rote and routine.

Our son, Dan, and daughter, Jori, arrived from Texas and now some of the BBs began to come out of the back pack. Other family members and many friends arrived the day of the Memorial Service. Many offered condolences and healing hugs. Somewhere along the journey to healing I started to say to the hugger, “every hug is a healing hug.” The Lord has provided many hugs from both genders.

Many of the BBs in the back pack came out following the memorial service. So much so that I felt a freedom I had not known for many years. This new-found freedom was so new and refreshing and invigorating it just bubbled out. So much so, as Pastor Tim and I had lunch around 10 days later, as he listened he responded with “It sounds like you are in respite,” and I was. The back pack was not empty, but nearly so. A lot of grieving had taken place over the 17 years that followed Judy’s stroke.

One thing Pastor Larry shared with me in processing his grief after his late wife, Tammy, died was to read through

all the sympathy cards that people sent. The first two times I did this I needed a Kleenex box. Another thing I found very helpful was to listen to the CD of the Memorial Service; again, I needed a Kleenex box. I have listened two times and needed a Kleenex box both times. I also needed Kleenex while I was writing these last few paragraphs. I find Psalm 136 helpful and comforting; “Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever...” J. Hudson Taylor said it this way: “I know He tries me only to increase my faith, and that is all in love, well, if He is glorified, I am content.” Robert J. Morgan gave me this lesson as I coped and lived with all the BBs in my back pack. So now instead of asking, “How can I get out this mess?” ask, “How can God be glorified in the situation I’m facing?”

Another purpose in God’s timing is found in 2 Cor. 1:3-5, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows (to others).”

The back pack is off my back, but not all the BBs are gone nor will they be gone. Judy is a major loss after 52+ years of marriage. The back pack is gathering dust in a dark corner of some closet some place but not totally empty. Thank God, and may He be praised!

Helpful Resources

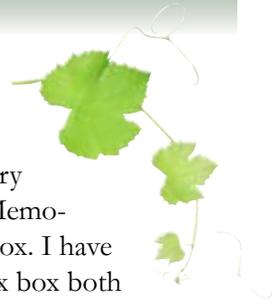
Kubler-Ross, MD, Elisabeth, [On Death and Dying](#)
A layman’s insight on death and dying

Manning, Doug, [Discovering Comfort](#) book four
A short booklet offered to Hospice survivors

Morgan, Robert J., [The Red Sea Rules](#)
Ten short sermons dealing with “What does God want me to learn while I am in the crucible”?

Sittser, Jerry, [A Grace Disguised](#)
A very personal and transparent account of Mr. Sittser’s loss of three family members in one moment of time. Open Christian struggle.

Timms, David, [Sacred Waiting](#). Mr. Timms seeks to learn the importance of waiting on God.





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Submitting Articles

If you would like to submit an article for an upcoming issue, email Pastor Tim Nelson at tnelson@calvaryefc.org or Nancy Sobczak at nsobczak@calvaryefc.org. Share with us how the Lord has worked in your life or in your ministry.