

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | CHURCH OF THE LAMB, PENN LAIRD, VA



Grasp No More

by Scott Hansen

The Bible is filled with stories of rogues, schemers and righteous ones, many God's chosen people. We are all of these, if we are honest with ourselves. One of my favorite schemers in the Old Testament is Isaac's son Jacob, "the heel grabber." He had problems with trusting, or at least living like he believed in God's good plan. He had the choice to wait on God's provision or to fast forward things by grasping for what he believed to be his due, his share. Occasionally he had to run for his life, occasionally he had to pay for his folly with hardship and toil. But I wonder how much peace he lived with. Was he always striving, always wrestling, always wondering if he could do better than God's grace permitted?

The problem with living with the mindset of grasping, of impatience, is that you are like the barren womb or parched land: always on empty, always counting the cost, always comparing, never satisfied, never full, never at rest. This way of thinking and living is not the path of abundant life. It is the path of selfish desire and dissatisfaction, which leads only to soul hunger, emptiness—the pit.

The alternative direction, the path back to the Garden, our true selves, and communion with God, is narrow and steep.

It requires trust. Think of trust as a blindfold you willingly put on because you know your guide. He asks you to put it on because the way is rocky and treacherous. Like a horse with blinders, he does not want you to be spooked or distracted by the dangers along the way. He simply invites you to take his hand, forget yourself and let him lead you through the valley of the shadow to the promised land.

Once we learn to hold the Master's hand with confidence and discern his voice with humility, we find that we are free from the desire to grasp the things that never satisfy. With our hands outstretched and open we can give and receive fearlessly and abundantly, knowing that our good Father cares more for us than all the sparrows in the sky. It is with this trusting confidence that we become living vessels of his generosity and blessing, like pitchers overflowing, designed to pour out the goodness of God. This is a life of conscious dependence on Jesus. He is the rock from which the water of life flows, he is the heart from which the blood of salvation pumps, he is the bread which sustains us. He is our source, in whom we live and breathe and have our being. Just as God gave Jacob a new name, Israel, so too God gives us a new identity in himself. He equips us to be who we were always intended to be, his people.

"It is a law of the spiritual life that every act of trust makes the next act less difficult. Trusting becomes like breathing, the natural unconsciousness of the redeemed soul."

— Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*



Come, and Welcome to Jesus Christ

by Cara Huber

I grew up in the Deep South, but not just the Deep South.... Texas, where our pride over our hospitality was only rivaled by the height of the women's hair. Where I grew up, hospitality was a deeply ingrained practice, defined by perfectly balanced menus, elaborate tablescapes, and ambiguous rules of etiquette. While many certainly had kind and loving motives, I've come to believe that we got it all wrong when it came to hospitality. Is hospitality truly about just food, presentation, and etiquette? Or is there a higher purpose?

According to various sources (via google search, of course), hospitality refers to the *relationship* of the host towards the guest. "It is a friendly and welcoming reception where guests, visitors, or strangers are received with goodwill." Upon reading this definition, what came to mind was the title of a John Bunyan book I'm reading (meaning it's been sitting on my bedside table for 6 months and I'm halfway through the first chapter). The simplicity of the title speaks volumes though, "*Come, and Welcome to Jesus Christ*". Maybe this is the perfect definition of hospitality?

I don't deny the importance and power of beauty and creating, nor do I deny the act of love that can go into these preparations: I think we were overlooking the key word here —*relationship*. Hospitality is about the relationship between the host and the guest. And, while no one's tablescape has ever sparked a spiritual shift in me personally, I have had deep conversations with lasting impact over chicken nuggets eaten off paper towels. The details of the preparations paled in the presence of the connections with others.

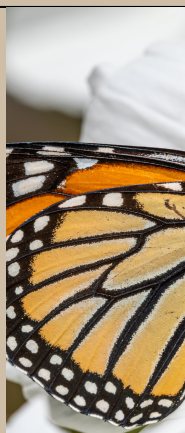
When we look at the definition of hospitality, we see these words: *friendly, welcoming, and goodwill*. Who else evokes these words in a relational manner more than Jesus Christ? Christ was and is the perfect host. He literally came to earth to walk in our shoes and put himself through unspeakable torture, pain and horror, all that he might create a safe, comforting space for us. He did this so that He could be with us and have us with Him. Christ is himself the definition of hospitality. Therefore, hospitality is a sharing of our lives with others and an extension of Christ's invitation to us. It's an echo of how our Savior gave His life for us.

Over the past few weeks, my family and I have had the opportunity to be the grateful recipients of much hospitality and care. Meals brought, rides given, front porch visiting, and more. I have been struck by the various ways different people have contributed and helped as they are able, keeping our family afloat during this time. The body of Christ stepped forward and has given of themselves to care for our family in ways we cannot do ourselves right now. It's been a humbling and beautiful process and one that has taught me much about the love of Christ.

We, as a body, are uniquely knit together, with all our individual foibles and gifts. to provide support, love, care, and yes, hospitality, as a means of reflecting the love of Christ to one another and to the world. So, as we all enter into this holiday season, I pray that we can find the particular ways God has fashioned us to offer hospitality and say to others, "Come, and welcome to Jesus Christ."

Meet the Huber Family

Joe and Cara have been members of Lamb for about 5 years. Joe enjoys working with the Youth catechesis and driving the golf cart on Sundays. Cara loves volunteering at any event where she gets to feed people. They have 3 children, Daniel (13), Lottie (11), and Haven (7). Joe works as a Truck Driver for IDM Trucking and Cara is a Counselor at Journey Counseling.



The Blessing of the Tithe

by John (and Debbie) Bennetch



“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” Malachi 3.10

The time was the early 1980's. The place was the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington D.C. We had been married in March of 1979 and were both Sergeants in the U.S. Army Chorus, stationed at Ft. Myer, VA. But since there was no military housing available there we found ourselves living in one of the more expensive economies of the U.S. on relatively low salaries. Both of us had second jobs to make ends meet. We started out in a tiny duplex in South Arlington on a 4-lane highway with a cement median and NO parking. (We walked around the corner and parked on a side street on the other side of our block.) In 1982 we moved a bit further out to a small house in Annandale that had some space around it and a DRIVEWAY and a garage. Financially things were tight, but we were making it.

It was in this season of life that we both came to know Christ in a small group Bible study using J.I. Packer's book, *Knowing God*. Our life was changing! We were learning what it meant to trust in Christ.

One Sunday we both heard, for the first time, a sermon on tithing, based on Malachi 3. Debbie was quickly convicted and her response was swift. “That's something we should do if we really are going to follow the Lord. That's pretty clear.”

My response was swift as well. “That's for rich people. There's no way that can apply to us. We cannot do that. There's no way we will be able to balance our budget.”

Debbie's conviction was deep, and somehow (Holy Spirit?) I decided I would follow her lead and we should give this tithing thing a try. We began by giving 5% and increased it incrementally with encouragement from some more mature Christians who also shared amazing testimonies of how the Lord had blessed commitments to tithe. We were able to reach the 10% mark much more quickly than we ever expected, and there have been many unexpected blessings along the way as we've continued our commitment to the tithe. We've never been in need; the Lord has been faithful and has even brought our desires and dreams into line with our budget.

We've found the tithe to be a very tangible expression of trust in and commitment to the Lord. And we've also discovered the delight of being free to give offerings over and above the tithe to those in need and to support friends who have gone into full time mission work. We've marveled that the Lord has worked in our hearts and lives to provide richly for all of our material needs.

It's been about 40 years since that day when Debbie came under conviction and we embarked on the adventure of tithing. Honestly, it feels pretty normal to us. But there's nothing normal about the very windows of heaven being opened for us. It is truly a spiritual discipline that brings inexplicable blessing.



“...put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

A Garden of Joy

by Kate Glick



Kate's original vision sketch in watercolor.



Our first workday in April. We've come a long way in a short time thanks to so many of you! Extra help has come from a crew of Redeemer Classical students and some JMU students as well.

The flower garden on the hill has been an evolving vision. Linda, Kappy and I were asked by Daniel Zimmerman if we would like to help add some color and vibrancy to the grassy slope beside the driveway that leads to the parsonage and church offices. We gladly accepted the challenge and began discussing options for this space. I started brainstorming names such as, VERDANT, LUSH, CALM, SERENE, SPLENDID, MAGNIFICENT... the Church of The Redeemer in NC who we are using as one of our inspirations has called their space New Garden Park, just FYI.

Well, we got together and discussed the plans and then the first workday on April 22, 2023 rolled around. We had a great team who helped level out the dirt, make post holes, assemble the terraces, lay down mulch and wood chips, purchase and plant trees and shrubs and flowers. We also had helpers who kept it watered all summer throughout the drought. We thank all the workers and the donors who gave some of their extra plants or donated money to help buy some of the beauties on the hill! We are still working on bulbs for the spring and winterizing the plants that we have already brought in to help reach our goal of a beautiful space.

We have monarchs, birds, and bees visiting our flower garden. Did you know there are 4000 species of bees in the US and over 400 in Virginia? We need these creatures to help all the plants that are grown in order to feed the people and animals on our amazing planet. As Billy Graham said, "When we see the world as a gift from God, we will do our best to take care of it and use it wisely, instead of poisoning or destroying it." I encourage you to think of what words you would choose that describe our emerging gardens that showcase some of God's magnificent creation. Consider this song from David, Psalm 65, "*The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.*"

Note from Selah Academy

Dear Church of the Lamb:

Selah Academy opened its doors on September 5 with four beautiful students, plus three who join us on Thursdays for Sports and Nature Day, which mostly takes place on your property. We are so grateful that you let us come. We have caught a baby catfish, chased minnows downstream, played Pooh sticks, picnicked, played sports and backyard games, and collected and identified flowers and leaves (did you know the trees Cole and Kayla got married under are Sycamore trees?).

It's truly our favorite day of the week, so thanks, Church of the Lamb, for your hospitality in sharing your extraordinarily beautiful property with a small start-up school. Our foundational goal at Selah Academy is to create an environment where kids can connect to Christ. The environment that Lamb's property creates for our students certainly helps them feel God's creativity and love each time we get to come. May God richly bless you for welcoming Selah Academy this fall!

Paula Cook,
Director

