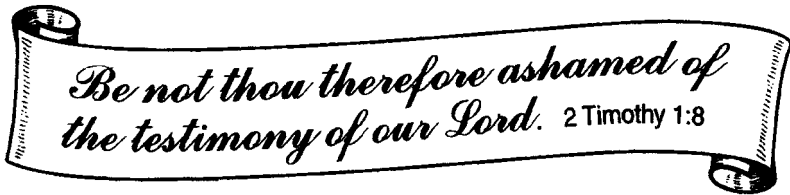


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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Editor: anabaptistmennonites.org.

As a young widow, Ruth gleaned after the reapers. When she returned home at the end of the day with nearly a bushel of clean barley, her mother-in-law was surprised! To be so richly blest by that which others had dropped was very unusual.

In a figurative sense, we are also gleaning. We pick up habits, expressions, and attitudes from our interactions with others. How are our lives affected by the influences we encounter each day? "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). The timeless principle of influence is true both in a negative and in a positive way.

Personal resolve and commitment to God and to the people of God were foundational in Ruth's life, and were keys to the blessings she experienced. Whole-hearted commitment is no less important in our day. We must completely renounce the world and a love for the world. The necessary—sometimes drastic—changes in our relationships with past acquaintances and ungodly family members is not an easy task.

Young children spend most of their waking hours imitating things that they glean through observation. They play doll, have "church" and operate their "farms" in accordance with the patterns they observe. As parents, we must exercise extreme caution as to how these impressionable minds are molded. Most importantly, our own example must be godly in word, action, and attitude. We must also screen outside influences that will either help or hinder our children's character development. By observing and listening to their play, we can easily notice what they have gleaned and, many times, where they have gleaned it.

When children go to school, their field is greatly enlarged. The teacher and the school board fill a vital role in protecting the children's environment for good. Parents help the children know which grains to pick up and which ones to leave. Wise parents will challenge and silence bywords and questionable stories or attitudes. Parents seek to direct their children without reflecting negatively against homes or individuals whose influences are less than ideal.

Lessons children have learned about gleaning are tested throughout the teenage years. First, their range of exposure continues to enlarge. Second, their awareness and perception of these influences is also increasing. Additionally, they are gradually making more personal choices. Early in these

years they will choose for or against God. Though not a once-and-done choice, the initial decision must be made.

Christian youth must choose friends carefully, welcoming parental assistance. Attitudes and actions dropped by others should not be picked up blindly. They must be evaluated in light of God's Word: Will this influence yield spiritual sustenance, or is it merely straw and chaff that will cause spiritual life to wither and die?

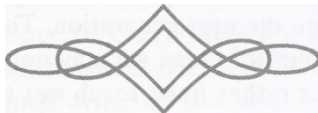
Adults are exposed to an even greater range of influences on spiritual, medical, and financial issues. In Ruth's experience, we believe that God providentially led her to the field of Boaz. Here she found bountiful provision for all of her needs. This was a safe work environment with pleasant employer-employee relationships. Love, generosity, and respect appear to have been the prevailing virtues in this setting. Ruth diligently seized the opportunities God provided for her, which proved to be a blessing not only for her and her mother-in-law but also for her posterity. Today we, like Ruth, have many rich opportunities.

Drinking at the fountain of God's Word each morning helps set the tone for each day.

The truth we glean from personal and family devotions aids us in sorting through the pressures faced throughout the day. Writing our thoughts on paper or memorizing verses can help retain the inspiration we pick up. As we go through the day, we are exposed to negative influences to a greater or lesser degree. We need to accurately analyze them and, by God's grace, not pick them up. On the positive side, we cherish the spiritual help we find in Christian home life and in a Scriptural brotherhood. For this reason we hurry home when our responsibilities away from home are finished, and we rarely miss the collective gathering of the brethren and sisters at church.

Not only are we constantly influenced by others, but our lives are also making impressions on those we meet. Let us, like Boaz and his reapers, truly love those around us and "drop handfuls of purpose" of noble influence and godly example for those following us.

—EMN



Fathers Who Say No

You may have heard the story of the schoolboy who struggled to pronounce the unwieldy name of a Mexican volcano—Popocatepetl. Upon mastering it, he berated long words. His father astonished him by remarking that the hardest word has only two letters! The next day, the son nearly drowned because he failed to say no to peer pressure. Fathers also wrestle with this important word. Sometimes the enforcing proves even more difficult than the saying.

King David raised several sons who did not feel the force of Father's no. Amnon and Absalom made requests that should have sounded warning bells. David was angry at the disappointed trust, but apparently neglected due discipline (2 Samuel 12-14). Absalom knew how to play on his father's emotions without truly repenting and resolving issues. David also failed Adonijah. "His father had not displeased [rebuked] him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" (1 Kings 1:6).

Parental indulgence does not produce respect. Two sons lost their lives in high-handed treason against David himself. But Solomon gave a better testimony of his father's training. "He taught me also.... Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live Enter not into the path of the wicked.... Turn not to the right hand nor to the left" (Proverbs 4:4, 14, 27).

The Example of Abraham

God knew faithful Abraham. He would "command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD" (Genesis 18:19). When he sought a wife for Isaac, Abraham ruled out two options. Isaac would not have a bride from Canaan. Nor would he go in person to Mesopotamia to find one (Genesis 24:3, 6). But Abraham did not merely say no. He also demonstrated the deeper reasons behind the negative commands. What are the pillars that support a father's authority when he says no?

Abraham followed God's leading unconditionally (Hebrews 11:8, 17). Father Abraham said yes to the pilgrim lifestyle and to the sacrifices of fatherhood. Neither the wisdom of the world nor unanswered questions could turn him aside. Abraham's trail of altars testified of his walk with God. His family and the world saw a man in covenant with God.

Abraham himself said no to the world behind him and labored toward Canaan and beyond. When Father's focus is on the city that has foundations

(Hebrews 11:10), his back is toward the world.

He took the family along (Genesis 12:5). A father's covenant with God is intensely personal, but the family is part of the father. He is unwilling to leave his family behind. The heritage and the blessings of the covenant are for them too.

Abraham's faith blessed needy relatives, touched the servants of his household, and recognized God's work in lives outside his own circle (Genesis 14:14-20). He recognized Melchizedek as a spiritual superior, worthy of a tithe. Respect and benevolence for all men flow from those who effectively shepherd their households.

Abraham unselfishly allowed Lot the first choice of grazing land. He sacrificially went to rescue Lot, whose choice had ended in disaster. Later he earnestly prayed for Lot's safety. He did not say, "Let him reap what he sowed." How can a father give way to anger or hold grudges and still convince his children to give up their own carnal wills and sinful desires? Spiritual circumcision must be evident in Father's talk and walk.

Abraham communicated with God and with his family. He prayed about Isaac long before he had a name (Genesis 15:2). He and Sarah discussed things together and God directed Abraham to heed Sarah's counsel in relating to the children (21:12). Abraham and Isaac shared a spiritual discussion and a mutual submission to God at Mount Moriah (Genesis 22).

These pillars undergirded the negative directions Abraham gave regarding Isaac's marriage. Apparently Isaac shared his father's faith. He allowed Abraham to bind him and lay him on the altar (Genesis 22:9) and was found meditating in the field as the camels returned with his bride (Genesis 24:63).

The Abrahams of Today

Fathers, we must find rest with God's mandate to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Convinced of this platform, we must say no both graciously and consistently. How is this done?

Godly fathers care enough to provide godly alternatives. They do not create a vacuum with a barren no. They also say, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isaiah 30:21). Abraham had a positive solution to Isaac's need for a wife. We question organized youth activities. Instead, we sing, pray, travel, eat, and visit together as families and with other families. We forbid romance and mystery books and amusement rides. But we provide and read good books together and play constructive games. We guard against wrong influences in mission work and relief efforts. But we take time to spread

the Gospel and share in relief work with the family. Clear fellowship lines demand satisfying home life and regulated church life.

Father's authority is not self-contained; he is a man under authority. Families need a church setting where the prevailing influences give breadth and balance to the home. Father supports the consensus of the group. He neither avoids issues nor seeks to exploit them to gain spiritual stature. He accepts the negative directives of his spiritual authorities. He does not portray bishop statements as mere suggestions because this would eventually lead his children to do the same. When church standards encourage or discourage something, he cannot afford to be noncommittal. Father does not portray those over him in the Lord as lording or persecuting when they watch for the safety of souls and families. He cheerfully complies with civil laws as well.

Fathers may not relax and expect the church to enforce all the negatives. Are we concerned about fads or about a gradual loss of nonconformity? Does it matter if casual clothing replaces more formal clothing for our Sunday visiting? Will name-brand advertising on our clothing take a toll on simplicity? The home is the first line of defense against winds of negative change. If fathers are alert to the spirit of church standards, the dangers of technology can be arrested.

As children mature, we should explain the principles involved. We must show our daughters why we object to puffy shoulders sleeves, flaring cuffs, and extra elastic on dress sleeves. We should explain to our sons why we tuck in our shirttails, wear belts, and wear our trousers higher than some do. We need to plant an appreciation for the traditional patterns of dress, haircuts, and combing. Our bodies and our lifestyles must reflect the change of heart and loyalty that accompanies salvation.

The heavenly Father said no to our first parents. He gave many negatives in the Word. We must align them to our own times. "Touch not the unclean thing." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." "Be not conformed to this world." "Recompense to no man evil for evil." God does not say these things because He enjoys saying no but because He enjoys helping us to be holy. He has our highest interests in mind. Today we must gift our children with this pattern of caring foresight and oversight. Young people, your response to the negative directives of your parents has a tremendous bearing on how effective you can be when it is your turn to say no.

Parents, do you have a wayward child who refuses to respect boundary lines? Sometimes the efforts and tears of faithful parents seem to be in

vain. Some of God's children disappoint Him. Stand where you stood. Continue to look and to pray for the prodigal's return (Luke 15).

Saying no is essential to producing a godly seed. But also remember that, unless the Lord is both the builder and the keeper of our homes, we labor and guard in vain.

Brother Stephen



Minutes of the Conferring Fellowship Meeting
Held at the Denver Mennonite Meetinghouse
April 9, 2015

Brother Harold moderator for the morning session, welcomed those who gathered from near and far. Brother Joel led us in singing "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty" and "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

Brother Leon led in devotions, reading from Titus 2, which gives practical teaching for all ages. He emphasized the need for a Christlike character and a sanctified spirit at all times. We should leave a consistent testimony by our words and our actions.

After a kneeling prayer, the minutes of the September 25, 2014, conferring meeting were read.

For the first message, Brother Wayne used Matthew 5:19, Least or Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

He organized his thoughts in three areas.

I. Analyzing the passage

A. Spiritual ideals (5:1-11). If we are ready to hear instruction and respond in contrition, we can experience blessing in our lives.

B. Results of following these ideals (5:12-16). We become the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

C. The foundation of this ministry and instruction (5:17-20). Jesus' ministry was not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. There are three classes of people here:

1. Those who do not understand adequately—least in the kingdom
2. Those who carefully do and teach—great in the kingdom

3. Those who disregard the Law—not in the kingdom
- II. What the passage does not mean
 - A. That the Law tolerates known sin. Sin separates from God.
 - B. That every commandment is equally clear. One must honestly evaluate his own heart.
- III. What are the implications of this teaching?
 - A. We must not be satisfied with our condition.
 - B. Being the least must be only when we are in an imperfect state.
 - C. We can be mistaken or have blind spots.
 - D. We need instruction.
 - E. We should cultivate careful living and open our hearts to truth. We must not be satisfied to be least in the kingdom.

After singing "Teach Me Thy Truth," Brother Lester discussed Article II of the Articles of Faith, "Of the Existence and Nature of God." Faith is essential for us to relate to the one God, who has established what is right and wrong. He is eternal, existing outside of time. He is infinite, having no limits or boundaries. He is perfect and unchangeable, without flaw, completely dependable. He reveals Himself in three Persons. To ignore any of the three, we ignore God. "What a mighty God we serve!" We then sang "His Mercy Flows."

Brother Scott spoke on Evaluating the Unconditional Love Emphasis. He developed the message around three questions.

- I. What are the subtle suggestions of this emphasis?
 - A. That the drawing force of love brings desired results.
 - B. That love is the only essential for relationships, minimizing the standards of truth and godly behavior.
- II. What should we understand about God's love?
 - A. God's love always harmonizes with His other attributes.
 - B. God always expects and desires a response (Isaiah 5:2).
 - C. In love God profusely pours out natural blessings (Matthew 5:45).
 - D. In love God offers salvation to all mankind, but man must meet the conditions to receive it (Isaiah 55:6, 7).
 - E. Those who respond to God's provisions of love are responsible to maintain the relationship.
- III. What are the characteristics of Christlike love—especially in those who are responsible for others? (1 Thessalonians 2:4-12).
 - A. They pour their souls into those they love (2:8).

- B. They live exemplary lives (2:5, 10).
 - C. They labor sacrificially (2:9).
 - D. They nourish with gentleness in an uplifting and encouraging atmosphere (2:7, 11).
 - E. They expect submission (1:6).
 - F. They govern according to the principles of truth (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7). Although God loves all men freely, our relationship with Him is always conditional.
- After singing "O How Happy Are They," Brother Wayne led us in a closing prayer.

Brother Wilmer moderated the afternoon session, calling on Brother Linford to lead two songs. We sang "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" and "Awake! Arise!"

Brother Merlin shared the devotional reading from Matthew 22:15-22. He emphasized the need to give to God what is God's. He made us; we bear His image; we no longer have rights; we belong to Him. We must be willing to give all to our Lord.

The first message of the afternoon, brought by Brother James, was Thinking About Church Loyalty.

He used Psalm 84:1 and Psalm 137:6 as references to finding delight and identity with God and His people. He expanded his thoughts in three areas.

I. General observations

- A. Loyalty does not prove the rightness of a cause.
- B. Loyalty does not mean believing in blind loyalty.
- C. Loyalty or disloyalty often reproduces itself.
- D. The ease of our time can bring independence that works against loyalty.
- E. The multiplicity of churches can cheapen the value of loyalty.
- E Loyalty does not mean that we must be hostile to others.
- G. Loyalty is best won rather than demanded.
- H. Loyalty is a choice rather than a feeling.
- I. Loyalty can grow stronger over time.

II. What is sound church loyalty?

- A. Loyalty starts with a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and a love for the Scriptures.
- B. Loyalty involves a responsive attitude to sound church leadership.
- C. Loyalty calls for a positive bias toward the church.

- D. Loyalty means being loyal to our home church—even when we are away from home.
 - E. Loyalty means having a burden for the church without sowing discord.
 - E Loyalty will honor principles upon which practices are based.
 - G. Loyalty means being able to contend for the faith without being contentious.
- III. How can we encourage church loyalty?
- A. Have a strong loyalty ourselves.
 - B. Be humble in our leadership.
 - C. Discipline consistently and draw clear lines.
 - D. Be consistent with our own families.
 - E. Consistently feed the flock.
 - E Faithfully pastor-taking time to listen and knowing when to give space.
 - G. Keep a high view of the church.
 - H. Keep a historical perspective.
 - I. Have Holy Spirit inspired enthusiasm for the work.

The open discussion included various comments on the messages. We should be careful in trying to understand an infinite God. How does God repent when He has perfect foreknowledge? Since unconditional love is not a Biblical term, would it be better not to use that term if we cannot explain it? Can loyalty be enhanced by involvement in church life? We then sang one verse of "For Christ and the Church."

Brother Kevin brought the last message of the afternoon, titled "The Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy," taken from Revelation 19:10. The Scriptures bear witness of the glorious character and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures gives us confidence that the prophecies of future events will also be fulfilled. Brother Kevin noted the three divisions of the Book of Revelation (1:19).

I. A declaration of the "things which thou hast seen"—a vision of the glorified Christ (Revelation 1)

This testimony of Christ's holiness, purity, and power should cause us to fall at His feet in humility.

II. A declaration of the "things which are"—the message of Christ to the churches (Revelation 2; 3)

Christ testified to the church of the need for repentance, spiritual cleansing, and holy living.

111. A declaration of the "things which shall be hereafter"—the divine testimony of events which will highlight the work of our Lord Jesus Christ

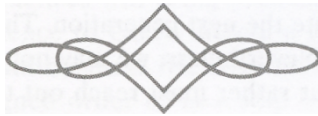
(Revelation 4-22)

- A. The redemption of the Lamb
- B. The wrath of the Lamb
- C. The marriage supper of the Lamb
- D. The testimony of Jesus ("Behold, I come quickly.")

Brother Kevin challenged us personally about our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

After singing "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee," Brother Harlan led in a closing prayer.

Submitted by the assistant secretary, Brother Daryl



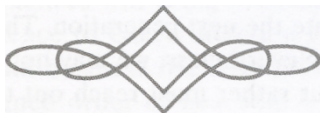
Church Committee Report – Liberty Ridge Farm

The Liberty Ridge Farm facility is based on a ninety-acre farm in the picturesque hill country of Juniata County, Pennsylvania. Since the inception of the work in the fall of 2011, we have been reminded time and again of the gracious direction of the Lord in this effort. The facility provides a farm-family environment for boys (ages 13-19) who are in need of a more closely structured setting than a typical family setting can provide. Currently, we have four resident boys along with four mentors who live side by side and work continually with them.

A farm setting provides the opportunity for the residents to learn many life skills that will be an asset to them through life. Two broiler houses require daily attention while providing the development of animal husbandry skills. A pallet-building project was also initiated in the summer of 2014. The owner of a local pallet shop is very kindly subcontracting the building of certain sizes of pallets. This provides a steady supply of work with about two thousand pallets being produced per month. Firewood processing is also an enjoyable project for the residents. Quite a bit of energy is expended by splitting much of the wood with splitting mauls. The wood is then re-tailed by local shops. Gardening and lawn care around the Farm also occupy the boys during the warmer months.

Brother David and his wife are serving as full-time house parents in the main house with the residents and mentors. We appreciate their contribution in the large task of caring for "their family." Brother Ethan and his wife continue to live in the smaller of the two houses on the Farm, with Brother Ethan serving as administrator and work coordinator. A very important part of the daily schedule is the classes that are held after lunch for Bible instruction and character development. Brother Ethan is the regular teacher, with Brother Aaron coming in once a week. Bible memorization is also promoted. A number of residents have memorized quite a few contiguous chapters. To alleviate the lack of sufficient kitchen and bedroom space, we plan to build an addition to the main house this summer. We will solicit volunteer labor to help with this project. We very much appreciate the efforts and funds that are contributed on behalf of this work. A special note of appreciation is given to the regular staff as well as to the fill-in mentors and house parents. Continue to pray for this work as we endeavor to lead souls to higher ground spiritually.

Brother Lamar for the Liberty Ridge Farm Committee



"Come Out of Her, My People" (Part 6)

Contemporary Music

"Mother, do you think Uncle Marlin will come to our wedding?" Janice added another envelope to the invitations she was addressing.

"I expect he will," Mother answered. "Remember how he enjoyed the singing at your brother's wedding?"

"I wonder why he likes our singing so much," Janice mused aloud. "We certainly are not professional."

"No, we're not," Mother agreed. "It seems strange, but that is often how apostasy works. Uncle Marlin loved to sing in his youth, but his interests took him into worldly music tastes. He traded a heritage of congregational singing for the world's modern music with highly trained singers."

"And now," Janice finished Mother's thoughts, "Uncle Marlin misses what he lost. How sad!"

How sad indeed when Christians allow shifting worldly influences to destroy their love for solid worship patterns! Contemporary music is one of the present-day influences among us.

Contemporary music is welcomed by those with professional music interests. They have wandered off to "Christian" bookstores and purchased elite recordings of nominal Christianity. Such recordings become popular, and soon we forget where they came from.

Contemporary music uses subtle lyrics. The words appear rich in worship, praise, and adoration. Worshipful phrases are often repeated again and again rather than the traditional poem of a hymn with thought-provoking verses. One such song repeats the phrase "Our God is an awesome God." Many of these songs also replace the archaic "Thee" and "Thou," which have Scriptural overtones, with "You" and "Your."

Contemporary music gives a romantic feeling to the believer's relationship with Christ. Here is a typical example: "You are beautiful beyond description, too marvelous for words, / Too wonderful for comprehension, like nothing ever seen or heard." Such lyrics are empty of discipleship and cross-bearing.

This style of music is complemented by grand, new harmonies with decidedly unusual chords compared to traditional worship hymns. Talented singers with dedicated practice display what the human voice really can do. Softly hummed preludes and strategic solos add an emotional imbalance. This is not a music style to sing in church! Nor does it belong in our schools or homes. This music leads down a path to pride, individualism, and a casual, disrespectful attitude toward the directives and cautions of the church.

Often this music is printed as sheet music. Because each verse often has its own complicated variation, the music is stretched out over several sheets. Frequently a familiar song is clothed in a novel tune, making it hardly recognizable.

Where will we be if this Contemporary Music influence is left to do its subtle damage? Like all other wrong music, this music will destroy our appreciation for traditional congregational singing.

Fathers and mothers, we dare not be passive. Most of these dangers come through the purchase of recorded music. We should avoid the productions of nominal Christianity and those who copy them. We should also scrutinize the songbooks and the sheet music that slip in the door. One of the

questions should be, "Where does it come from?"

Music taste is not merely a matter of taste—such as flavors of ice cream—where you may like one flavor and I another. Instead, we must deliberately choose safe music interests that abide by our church directives, are consistent with Biblical principles of worship, and help us to appreciate congregational singing. Let us not relax our guards!

As children of God, we live in this world, but are not to be a part of this world. God's call rings clear: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

—*Brother Christopher (end of series)*

