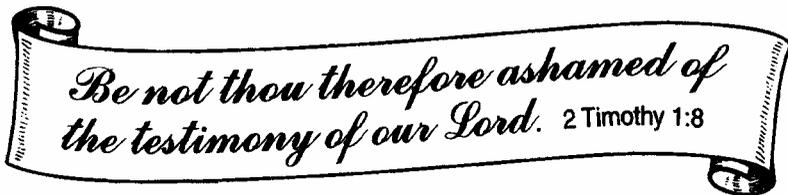


THE EASTERN MENNONITE TESTIMONY

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Life is a transition from being accountable to others to being accountable also for others. With this transition comes an increase in accountability to God. One of the challenges of life is to perceive and accept our accountability. Just as the baby chick needs the exercise of cracking out of its shell, so faithfully fulfilling the trust that God has placed upon us is an exercise that helps us to grow and mature.

God calls all men when they reach the "age of accountability" to submit to His lordship of their life. Everyone has received a pound to employ for the Master. A slothful person fails to realize his accountability for the gift of life and hides it in a napkin. A sense of accountability for one's own soul will motivate service to the Lord (Luke 19:11-27).

Youth face a test of maturity in their developing independence to also perceive their interdependence. It is a blessing to see youth mature as they strive to be "an example of the believers" (1 Timothy 4:12). They grow spiritually as they sense a burden to contribute to the safety and purity of the church.

Older unmarried youth are especially vulnerable to the destructive effect of perceived freedom from accountability. With an easy income and few expenses they may be tempted to waste the Lord's goods and live for self. Youth are safer spiritually as they embrace the rigors of forming a home. The challenge and responsibility of courtship sober one to cultivate his own life in the winning of a marriage partner.

The young couple at the marriage altar faces the sobering reality of charting the course of a home. They face life with a developing perspective. Ideals are now waiting to be implemented into reality—a reality that can perfect the ideals.

As joyful parents look into the face of their first child, they again reverently step into new shoes. A soul with an eternal destiny has been entrusted to their care. With renewed zeal they critique the concepts and vision for a family of faith.

The challenge of directing adolescents is again a gripping reality of the passing of time. Other influences have been increasing that either complement or compete with parental convictions. The window of using command is gradually closing, and the test of whether the faith has been inspired is rapidly unfolding. Are personal convictions strong enough for

parents to require the same things of the children? Or will they lazily fall prey to the deception that everyone must decide for themselves?

The call to offices in the school and church bring increased responsibility. The family of souls to nurture and influence for right has now been enlarged. Just as the driver of a large bus faces pressure and more regulation to drive safely, so it is with church leaders. Large buses stop at railroad crossings. The passengers are secure with the added cautions even though they at times peer out the window to see what is crossing the road. Leaders covet the patience and support of their constituency with the added cautions that their accountability demands.

With age comes a growing realization that passing on the faith is a collective effort. A church rises and falls together. Children are greatly influenced by their peers. We need to be our brother's keeper if we would keep our own souls. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7).

The exercise of caring for our brother can help keep us awake to danger. We personally need the safety measures that the church implements. We are not safe to govern our own life. An individualistic attitude that looks out only for one's own welfare is a seedbed for apostasy. The sorry state of Israel at the end of the era of the judges is conveyed by the summary, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

The sunset years of life with their declining responsibility are still years of accountability. The decline of responsibility can hide a snare. Can the vision and battle for truth continue to the end? Or will the urge to live for ease and pleasure lull to sleep those who once fought valiantly? A sense of accountability for the following generation, even at this hour of life, will promote a consistent practice.

The weight of accountability rests on all men for their individual realm of influence. When the day of reckoning comes, will our sense of accountability match God's verdict?

—BAS.



Comprehending the Incomprehensible Love of God

Studying the Bible can be somewhat like the experience of an explorer. When he discovers a new mountain whose cloud-covered summit is hidden from sight, he may begin by hiking around the base, looking for springs and streams or taking note of flora and fauna. The expanse of the whole is overwhelming; the inspiration of a portion is inviting. Exploring God's love is similar—too comprehensive to cover in time, yet inviting to explore.

The apostle Paul prayed that we would be able to comprehend this love "which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:14-21). He kneeled upon his knees, made his petition, and closed with a doxology. Let us consider God's love as mentioned in this prayer.

God's love has immeasurable dimensions. We are familiar with three-dimensional objects. We multiply length times width times height to find volume. In describing God's love, Paul uses four dimensions. How can we understand the fourth dimension?

Some materials are ranked by quality. For instance, stone is graded by hardness. Sandstone, marble, granite, and diamond are listed as increasing in hardness. Perhaps the fourth dimension is descriptive of the quality of God's love. It is superlative in purity, longevity, and equality. Man may be fond of an animal, love his wife, and exercise Christian love for the brethren and for God. God's love, however, has a quality that supersedes all levels of human love.

God's love is the ultimate in intensity. Light varies in intensity from the chemical glow of a glowworm to the blinding brightness of the sun. How intense is God's love? "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Part of God's glorious light is felt in the warmth of His penetrating love. We are enlightened by His love. The intensity of God's love was manifest in the burden and sacrifice of Christ (Romans 5:5-8; 1 Peter 3:18).

We appreciate God's love all the more when we perceive how unlovely we were (Ephesians 2:1-3). We were dead, serving God's enemy, and selfishly pleasing ourselves. "But God" (Ephesians 2:4), knowing our condition and realizing many men would refuse the offer of salvation, still loved us and proceeded with His redemption plan.

The devil, in evaluating man, said, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). He was not totally correct. Some men

will die to keep the faith. But this is basically true of man—man protects his own skin. Christ willingly gave His life for our selfish race, which does not easily risk its own skin. What an intense love! "For love is strong as death. . . . Many waters cannot quench love" (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).

God's love is preeminent in its endurance. We treasure old relationships, like a friendship from school or Bible school days. We appreciate our parents' love that was given even before we were born. Sometimes this love fails because of misunderstandings, changing interests, or geographic separation. Can it possibly continue when we no longer live? God's love surpasses the limit of time. His love, which He had for us before we were born, will envelop us through eternity (Romans 8:35-39).

So what is four-dimensional love? It is infinite—beyond limits. It is beyond the math book formula, the yardstick, or complete human comprehension. We are totally surrounded by His love. The poet wrote that if the sky were a scroll, the ocean were ink, the stalks of earth all quills, and every man a scribe, the description of God's love would not fit on the scroll, and the ocean would run dry. Because God is self-existent and eternal, His love has no beginning or end. His holiness means that His love is pure. His infinity means that it has no limits.

God's love is received by faith. What are the steps of faith in Paul's prayer that enable us to scale the summit of love?

We must "be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

We need life by the new birth, and we also need Holy Spirit vitality. This is a gift according to the riches of our King. It would be a disgrace for a gift of a king to be no greater than the gift of a blue-collar worker. Just the same, God's giving is in keeping with His sovereignty. He is able to give "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." God gives enough give to overcome the enemy who opposes the operation of God's love.

We must allow Christ to "dwell in [our] hearts by faith."

We desire not only a picture of Christ but also the Spirit of Christ in us. This step takes faith. Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Although God loves every soul and Jesus' blood is sufficient to cleanse every sin, so few know the love of God. The love is emanating from God, but it is reflected back to Him off the hard hearts of the wicked. When we invite Christ into our hearts, we begin to comprehend the love of God. It becomes a stability in our life. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

We must "be filled with all the fulness of God."

Our hearts are a bit like a sponge dropped into the ocean. The sponge becomes full, but the ocean is still full. When we experience the love of God, we are filled but God's love is not diminished. God's sanctifying love will perfect and fill us if we are emptied of self-love. The challenge is to remove self-love and soak in more of God's love so we "may grow up into him in all things" (Ephesians 4:13-15).

We must testify, "Unto him be glory." Everyone who is blessed by God's love is not only duty bound but also constrained to return all glory to God. And when we reach the summit in the world to come, the clouds will have disappeared. We will "comprehend with all saints" the full dimension of grace and glorify God "throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Brother Stephen.

For fainter than the pale star's ray
Before the noontide blaze of day
Is all of love that man can know,
All that in angel breast can glow,
Compar'd, O blessed Lord, with Thine,
Eternal, infinite, divine.

Author Unknown



Maintaining Our Mission Vision

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" —Proverbs 29:18.

This proverb very aptly applies to our mission vision. Without a mission vision our children perish, our churches perish, and many out in darkness perish for lack of hearing the message of truth.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" has been called Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus also commanded that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Paul, by inspiration, states, "Now

then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Our mission is to be Christ's instruments to make the message of salvation available to all men, continuing the work that Jesus began. We will accomplish our mission only to the extent that we maintain a vision for the work.

The words mission and missionary are not found in the Bible, but the Scriptural meaning of ambassadors ("to act as a representative") is directly related. Unfortunately the meaning of the word missionary has too often been narrowed to mean someone traveling to a distant country to carry the Gospel to the poor who never heard the message of salvation. Jesus' command to His disciples was rather to begin "in Jerusalem," or simply at home. If we see every soul as needing salvation, then our mission begins right in our own homes and communities. It is noteworthy that the apostle Paul spent possibly ten silent years in his home community before Barnabas brought him to Antioch. From here he was sent on his first missionary journey (Acts 11:25; 13:1-3).

The vision of our mission sprouts in the heart with gratitude for our deliverance from sin and eternal death. Our gratitude blossoms into love for God and our fellow men, which results in a burden for the unsaved. This burden should weigh on us whether it is our unsaved youth, erring church members, our next-door neighbors, or someone in a distant land.

Our burden should naturally be greatest for those closest to us. If it is not, we may rightly conclude that a "missionary zeal" may be more for adventure than for souls. It is noteworthy that the mission vision awakened in the Mennonite Church in the late part of the nineteenth century followed an interest in evangelistic meetings and Sunday schools for the sake of the youth. This is the kind of mission vision that we want to keep alive.

How can we maintain our mission vision? At the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus instituted the ordinance of Communion to help us remember His great sufferings and His blood that was shed for our sins. This great price was paid "not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Considering Jesus' work in contrast to the few that are saved should compel us to do our part in sharing the Gospel with as many as possible.

To accomplish this monumental task, we must first of all be involved in the mission efforts of the church, and especially the activities of our home congregation. Outreach activities are often voluntary. Our involvement may indicate the intensity of our vision. Our mission fields continually

need personnel and are glad to welcome those who have been so involved in local mission activities that they can hardly be released to come.

Personal contacts with needy souls help to stimulate our vision. This may include visiting a neighbor or following up with a contact with someone we met through our work or travels, or through literature distribution, street meetings, or other church activities. Becoming personally involved with another's needs naturally increases our burden for him. One way to inspire others who may seem to lack this vision might be to invite them to accompany us when making a visit and help them to become personally involved. This should increase their burden and sense of accountability.

God motivated Ezekiel's vision by challenging his accountability (Ezekiel 33:1-9). First of all, our accountability comes from our indebtedness to God for saving us and then to others who were instrumental in leading us to God. Secondly, we are Christ's body to accomplish His physical work here on earth. Sad it would be to hear Him say, "His blood will I require at thine hand," because we failed to have a vision for saving the lost.

Keeping alive our belief and understanding of the future will also sharpen our vision. When we read in Revelation of the Great Tribulation that is to bring great destruction to this earth, and then of the eternal destiny of mankind, only a dull mind would not receive an increased burden for the lost. We are part of a generation that has been privileged to live peaceably and comfortably, making it difficult for us to identify with the terrors of the evil day. Nevertheless, the challenge still comes, "Knowing ... the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

How then will our mission vision be evident in our congregations and in our personal lives? The requests given at prayer meeting and our eagerness to pray will reflect our vision. It will also be evident in our involvement in literature distribution, community visitation, street meetings, and other church-sponsored outreach activities. When these activities are well supported, it should not be difficult to find qualified and willing individuals to meet the demands of our more distant mission efforts.

We meet many individuals while we journey through life. How many lives have we touched? How many have we personally challenged with their personal needs? How many of our neighbors know that we have a concern for their souls? How much time do we spend in prayer, interceding for those with whom we have contact? Are we attending informative meetings, reading the Testimony reports, and praying for those laboring in our mission fields? The mission vision of the church is only the sum of the vision of its individual members. Is our personal vision adding to or

subtracting from this sum? May we be inspiring one another to a greater vision.

Finally, the greatest evidence of our mission vision is our willingness to sacrifice self, time, and earthly values to help others reach heaven. The Scripture warns of the dangers of riches and the cares of this life, which stifle kingdom interest and can extinguish our vision. May we ever be inspired with the sacrifice Jesus made to save our souls. Christ was willing to sell all that He had to purchase His bride, the church. How much are we willing to sacrifice in our effort to add members to His church before the door is shut and the time of opportunity is eternally ended?

Brother Roland.



Enriching Our Personal Devotional Life

Within each of our hearts is a God-given desire for fellowship and a relationship with a being higher than ourselves. When that desire is directed toward God, we will have a fulfilling relationship with our Father. The enemy of our soul knows that a time of daily Scripture meditation and prayer makes us a difficult target. He therefore tries to hinder this connection. Far too often he is successful. How can we protect and enrich this important time of fellowship with our Father?

We first need to understand our intense need of this time alone with God each day. "Teach me thy way, O LORD, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Psalm 27:11). Victorious Christians will not attempt to face life's battles and blockades without daily communication with the great Commander. After all, He does understand what we face each day and will gladly give us direction if we but seek His face. Christ "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Is there an ideal time of the day that we should spend alone with God? The time we choose will depend on our individual responsibilities and schedules, but it needs to be given top priority in our daily activities. Regularity and diligence are more important than the time of the day. God is available at any time for those who seek Him. Unlike God, we are more alert at certain times of the day than others. This is the time we should set aside for God.

Falling asleep regularly during our personal regular devotional time is a good indicator that something needs to be adjusted. Perhaps a change of posture is all that is needed. One dedicated brother concluded that he needed to stand up to stay alert during his personal devotions. Surely God will hear the prayer of His child whether he is standing or kneeling, but hardly if he is sleeping.

Another help in enriching our personal devotional life is to vary our method of study. Reading through the Bible, studying characters, researching word meanings and applications, or following a devotional guide are a few of the many ways to vary the routine. Devotional books can be helpful as a supplement to our personal study but should not replace the personal study of the Word of God. The Bible alone has the answers to our heart's need.

We need to be careful not to allow our devotions to become so commonplace that we do not benefit from this personal touch with God and His Word. This time will lose its vitality if it becomes a chore to us. It should rather be viewed as a personal encounter with God. And when God shows Himself to His children through His Word, it is difficult for them to come away the same person. Can we afford to lay down our Bible or rise from our knees without hearing God's voice? Dare we answer the telephone or allow our minds to plan the day's agenda during this important hour? Do we sense that we are on holy ground when we open God's Word and share our burdens with Him?

Consider Job of old. The Scriptures are clear that his victory and stability were directly related to his personal devotional life. His commitment to God was a source of irritation to Satan. While we may never face the trials that Job did, Satan's intent remains the same for each of God's children. How is it with you, friend? Is God saying of you, "Hast thou considered my servant?" (Job 1:8).

Brother Owen.



CHURCH COMMITTEE REPORT

TRACT RACK EVANGELISM

Christians of all ages have received a very compelling command from our leader Jesus Christ. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This command stands as the basic call for all the various forms of Christian evangelism. The call is clear. Go, show, and tell those who have not heard the great news of salvation, which is available to all men.

A tract rack ministry is a good way to share the good news of salvation. As true followers of Jesus, we are inspired by Christ's love in our hearts and want to reach out to all who are lost. This drives us to turn over every stone of opportunity to reach as many souls as possible.

This type of evangelism has some definite advantages. Put yourself in the shoes of lost souls plagued with guilt. They normally try to cover their guilt. But, if opportunity affords, they will quietly slip a Gospel tract such as Steps to Salvation into their pocket. Folks can take in truth without much, if any, publicity. Racks often do well in a visible but quiet location.

Many folks are religious or Christian, but find themselves in a Biblically unsound setting. Many important Bible subjects are completely overlooked. Interested folks can broaden their Bible knowledge by reading tracts on a variety of subjects from current issues to Bible doctrine.

Cultivating the project by a systematic rotation program keeps interested folks coming back for more tracts. Monthly rotation is an easy system to remember and will keep the subjects fresh. Do not allow the rack to become shabby, but remove tattered tracts. The message of the Gospel should be kept as attractive as possible. When you choose tracts, cover a variety of subjects such as simple salvation concepts, current issues, Bible doctrine, and comfort and hope.

This is an excellent work in which to involve our young brethren and sisters, along with older Christians. A tract route can be a taxing load, but there are blessings in this work. It is rewarding to keep track each month of how many tracts were taken and from what location. A report can then be given to the congregation once a year to keep each member inspired with the work.

Tracts are taken usually by persons who voluntarily take the truth and read it. The potential is far-reaching, and we will never know how many souls were helped because of a well-placed tract rack that God could use.

Tract racks are a constant, silent witness, offering help to a large number of folks whom we may never meet otherwise. It is important, however, that contact information is included on each tract. In the event that a soul is

seeking help, he can contact a spiritual advisor.

Many of us who work with the public can have a tract rack in our business place. When spiritual questions are raised by a customer, we can back up our conversation with the help of a fitting tract. It is a resource from someone who studied the subject. It may answer questions that you have not had much time to think about.

The devil does not like this work, and sometimes he inspires hate to the point that people destroy the rack and trash the tracts. But the Lord can even use tracts in a waste can if the right person finds them. If vandalism occurs repeatedly, try changing the location or remove it for a while and try again later. It is worth the effort and perseverance. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

May we be inspired as individuals and as congregations to pick up this work of touching souls and use this opportunity to witness to our communities with the pages of the printed Gospel tract.

Brother Michael.



PRAYER POINT

*“The effectual fervent prayer
of a righteous man availeth much”*

Thank God for His Word that He has preserved for us.

*Pray that as we read and study it daily,
We may grow more like the Master.*

*Pray for those who face emotional and physical illness
That they may find God's grace sufficient and experience healing
according to His will.*



In the Swelling of Jordan

Jeremiah 12:5

And, say, art thou wearied,
 When peace is thy lot,
With brethren to shield
 From the enemy's plot;
And tables of bounty so daintily spread
From which famished souls are so graciously fed?
 Yea, others have never so richly received,
Though stronger their faith in the God they've believed.

How then art thou wearied
 Oh, how canst thou be?!
Thy soul, will it fare
 In the turbulent sea?
When higher than ever the waters have swelled,
The enemy's power still doomed to be felled,
 And faith may be all thou art given to hold,
In hope of God's Word and of glories foretold?

Oh, soul, don't be wearied;
 Arise in His strength!
The burdens today
 Will prepare thee at length
For battles tomorrow, unknown yet today.
Build strength through this time for a fortress and stay,
 For times that are scarce when the warfare is fierce,
When swords through your soul or your body may pierce.

—Sister Joanna

Ordering the Child (Part 2) Emotional Stability

Eight-year-old Emily sat staring at her plate. "Is something wrong?" probed Mother with concern. "I thought you felt just fine a bit ago."

"My belly hurts and I can't eat," sniffed Emily, as a tear threatened to spill over the rim. Father and Mother looked at each other. This was the third morning that Emily could hardly eat breakfast yet seemed herself again as soon as breakfast was over.

Emily's queasiness is likely not a result of the flu. Her parents will need to identify the source of her emotional distress.

Jacob said, "The children are tender.... and I will lead on softly, according as ... the children be able to endure" (Genesis 33:13-14). Children's emotions are more transparent and fickle than adults. What had been a rain cloud when Father drove out the lane to town can just as quickly bring sunshine at the prospect of being Mother's big helper.

Emotional struggles should be considered from the child's point of view. The imaginary bear in the dark utters an almost audible growl. The school friend who moved or the pet that died creates a genuine loss. The fear of underachievement can generate frustration (and much homework besides). As parents discern the root of the problem, they can give constructive help.

Emotional patterns reflect the outlook of a child's parents. If Father comes home tired and tightlipped, no one feels like talking. When Mother sings while she works, everyone works a little faster. But when Mother wears her frustration, some children cling to her skirts, making the problem worse. Verbalized frustration with school, church, or even our partner, will be mirrored in the little lives that follow us.

Emotional stability is not generated automatically with medication or counseling. Professional help may be needed at times, but it can quickly become a crutch that detracts from the real help that children need. What children need more are parents who are loving, steady, and firm. Discipline must be kept current. Such children will find the security they crave.

Emotional stability is a product of self-discipline.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). Expressions of anger, resentment, and disrespect must be held in check at all times. The child must learn that euphoria and even fear or worry can be controlled.

Emotional stability comes from God.

Jacob's commentary on Joseph was, "The archers have sorely grieved ... shot ... and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob"

(Genesis 49:23-24).

Brother Philip