

Feast

vol 10



FEAST

Vol. 10

Cover Photograph by Jonathan Morgan

This sunrise, Austin vista represents hope and change potential within our storied, urban lives.

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EDITOR'S APPETIZER

By Liz Morgan

I hope you look forward to perusing this Feast as you would anticipate a well planned holiday meal, an eclectic potluck prepared by conscientious chefs, shared with caring family. Each word and photographed gift is a much contemplated piece of creative honesty, blessing us with human insights into the God-pursuing soul.

We are so honored by these in our menu of contributors:

Written Contributions by:

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Kevin Daniel

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A special thanks to R. Carnie Littlefield, Kevin Daniel, and the art-supportive leadership at Hope Chapel who have enabled this publication!

ART ON BACK COVER

Quilt by Barbara Ledbetter

LITANY TO YHWH

By Amy Cogdell

YHWH, God of Salvation, I thank You.

YHWH, God of Righteousness, I praise You.

YHWH, God of Judgment, I fear You.

YHWH, God of Humility, I bow before You.

YHWH, God of Mercy, Grace and Compassion, I love You.

YHWH, Giver of Life, I rejoice in You.

YHWH, God of Holiness, I worship You.

YHWH, Creator God, I marvel at Your works.

YHWH, Bridegroom God, I yearn for You.

YHWH, Healing God, stoop down and touch me.

Amy Cogdell

AN EXCERPT FROM "OYSTERS WHO WRITE"

By Joe Friedman

Stories are planted in our hearts; seeds of love and truth, and thorns of loss and despair, and the Master Gardener waters them with sorrows and hopes, until they finally bear fruit in a Story – a Writing – something that has some of that truth, that positive grace and beauty and is, therefore, even if only to a small degree – holy.

It may be subjective, it may be opinion, it almost certainly won't be factual – that doesn't matter, as long as it's genuine and true...

Joe Friedman



NIGHT

-

Photo By

-

*Jonathan
Morgan*

Jonathan Morgan

THE ROCK TUMBLER

By Kevin Daniel

The rock tumbler continues tumbling...

For Father's Day this past year
My kids got me a rock tumbler.
They were excited; it came with
Silicon carbide grit, and
A pound of rocks to tumble.

When upon my mind fell
The pallor of grey granite,
When upon my face settled
The weight of quarried marble,
When all voices in my ear became
The dry clattering of settling talus scree,
When all the field of my vision occluded
In the burnt and sepia hue of rock dust,

And the air of my soul staled
Into that of a collapsed mine,
I don't exactly know. But it
Had happened by then.

The metamorphic bedrock of sleep,
For some months even earlier, had
Been crumbling, long since been being worn
down;
The igneous intrusions of long formed
emotions,
Through freezing and thawing, contracting
And expanding, through weathering, by
then,
Were transformed into slate behavior
With a precarious cleavage.

The obsidian lake of memory, subsumed
into
Such magmatic and molten flow, cooled
Into an ash-dry aquaphor of airy-pumice
remembrances.

He who was my father died, and then
I stopped sleeping. That is
All I know, what I only knew,
Of when things began to turn..

The rock tumbler continues tumbling.

The tumbler's contents, sealed from
view,
Continually turning, sliding, grinding,

THE ROCK TUMBLER, CON'T

By Kevin Daniel

Brushing, colliding, over and over and
over;

Wearing down in a matter of mere
months

What took ages to form;

What lay hidden, for just as many ages
more;

Wearing continually down in months

What would take ages naked before the
eyes

To smooth away.

What had been already aged to my eyes,

Having grown that way over decades
away from my sight,

Wore down unrecognizable before my
eyes

In those final few months.

In these current moments I don't know
which changes,

Which wearing down, His or mine, scare
me more.

The rock tumbler tumbles...

We had turned it on, that day...

We had, hadn't we? I can't remember
today...

To run its first stage of its first batch.

It made a sound that reminded me of how

My children's laughter felt ~ which itself
feels

Like the sound in untouched memories

Of their infant-napping on my chest.

I had followed the directions, an easily
practiced waiting ensued.

What became revealed, transformed in the
process of wearing down,

It caused wonder, a sense of something
having been done.

The rock tumbler tumbles ...

And the sloshing, muffled pebbly clatter

Of contents within its rubber cylinder,
Almost a white noise hinting of a shallow

river;

Suggesting a certain smoothing quicker
than

What a lifetime of wearing might reveal:

Hard sin-edges softened,

Broken and wounded surfaces polished —
some to

THE ROCK TUMBLER, CON'T

By Kevin Daniel

Near translucence, banded like agate mercy,
Or fancy like some jasper grace;
And there is something comforting in
The unobtrusively noisy machine sounds
That comfortingly never seem to stop
As today rock is tumbled.

Kevin Daniel

TRANQUILITY

-

Photo by

-

*Nance
Friedman*



*Nance
Friedman*

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

By Courtney Daniel

For whatever you are going through, he is enough.

Sufficient.

Worthy.

Whatever your stuff is; however deep and dark it courses, he is worthy.

He has got it handled.

When you are feeling unheard and unseen: he hears and he sees.

Deeply, also, far deeper than you even know you go.

Let him in - into the very marrow of your lonely soul.

That will be the moment:

When he steps forward as the answer to the question

"Who is worthy to break the seal?"

It will be deeply fulfilling.

Soul satisfying. And, healing.

Courtney Daniel

TELLING SECRETS

By Bonnie Watkins

Frederick Buechner begins his memoir of the same title with these words at the end of the introduction: "It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are—even if we tell it only to ourselves—because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing....It also makes it easier for other people to tell us a secret or two of their own, and exchanges like that have a lot to do with what being a family is all about and what being human is all about" (3).

Hope Arts Wednesday Family Night group is reading this book, along with Hebrews and another book. Here's a secret I'm sharing with you at Hope because we are family.

Yesterday I lied to a co-worker and close friend. She is maxed out with two jobs, four children, one who has now gotten a girl pregnant. She asked me to be a taxi service to her 20 year old son, probably to try to get him to another job interview since she's trying to make him become more responsible. On other occasions, I have been the taxi service for her. We have lent her money for a big ticket item lately (To her credit, she is paying it back over a year in small amounts.) In dozens of other instances of time and money, I have helped and willingly. Now, she is asking more and more often and bigger and bigger, and I'm beginning to resent her.

< ... continued on next page ... >

So I lied and told her I was busy during the time the next morning when she asked me for a favor. I wasn't. Her motives as a mother I totally identify with: all loving parents want to pave the way to make the bumpy road of life easier for their children. Did I do this too as a mother? Oh, yes. Do I still do it for my grown sons? Sure. Should I? Should she? Probably not the best example of tough love and making them responsible. Maybe he needs to learn to take the bus. This is the true conversation I really need to have with her, but I am worse than the Cowardly Lion in confronting people even when I know I could do it diplomatically. They still always have that crestfallen, hang dog look. No one likes to be told what to do or to be criticized. Or, easier I could email her the reason why I said no. No look to confront.

This brings me to all kinds of conundrums about the life of being a servant, of living in community, of loving our neighbor as ourselves, places I also don't want to go because the version I've grown to believe of myself is that I am a person who always does that. It's good to tell you that I'm not always and that, in this case, I'm liar-liar-pants-on-fire. Otherwise, I may begin to believe the polished-up, shiny, version of myself. Here's my secret. May it help me and others remember the truth for a healthy spoonful of humility, followed by another dose of forgiveness, chased with a prayer for Spirit guidance in our relationships.

Bonnie Watkins

CONSECRATION POWER

By Liz Morgan

"Wherever you are, be all there."-- Elisabeth Elliot, Through the Gates of Splendor

It is in our power to consecrate, because it is us choosing to remember the holiness of a substance...

Time...

Activity...rest...

Love...discord...

Peace...disquiet...

Wisdom's words...

Rain in drizzle and downpour...

Earth, wind, sky...

Sight, vision, hearing, taste, touch...

Essence...

*Cambodia teaches me to slow
Down;*

Consecrate the cathedrals of life,

Feel with gratitude,

Not just know.

Liz Morgan



CAMBODIA

-
Photographer unknown

Katie Morgan

THE DANCE

By Nance Friedman

*Awaken in my soul
A thirsting for heaven.*

*Too long now I've drifted
Dull-hearted and deadened.*

*Your call is to Dancing
In sweetest belonging!*

*Not hiding, nor fearing,
Unworthy, yet longing.*

*Oh, shake me with your hand;
Your Spirit so tender*

*Blows shadows and cobwebs
From my heart surrendered.*

*Let tears fall from my eyes
Repenting and cleansing.*

*My true God, my Maker,
Your hand now extending*

*Invites me to join you
A joy dance unending.*

Nance Friedman

LET ME SLEEP

Sung to the tune of "Let it Be" (with apologies to Lennon and McCartney)

By Joe Friedman

When I find myself in times of slumber

all my kitties come to me

speaking words of urgency

Come feed me.

And in these hours of darkness

they are standing right on top of me

speaking words of hunger

Come feed me.

REF: Come feed me, come feed me, come feed me, come feed me

whispered meows of hunger

Come feed me.

And now the brokenhearted people

wakened in the night agree

This will be our answer:

Let me sleep. For though they may be wakened early

there is still a chance that they will sleep

This is still their answer

Let me sleep.

REF:

Let me sleep, let me sleep, let me sleep, let me sleep

This is still their answer

Let me sleep...

Joe Friedman

THE MOST POWERFUL WORD YOU CAN PRAY

By Betsy de Cruz

I didn't even notice the sounds of explosion and gunfire because it had been raining and thundering all day. But when my husband walked in the door and said, "There's been an explosion nearby!" I jumped.

"Are you sure it wasn't thunder?" I asked.

"No, it wasn't. Don't you hear the sirens?"

I realized I'd heard it after all. I could pinpoint the moment I heard abnormally loud, close thunder. A half hour had gone by, but we could still hear ambulance sirens from the streets around our house.

"Where's Andres?" Jose said. "Call him and tell him not to come this way."

My son was having coffee with a friend, and he didn't respond to my call. For the next few minutes, all I could do was hope the explosion hadn't happened anywhere near him. Jose turned on his computer, and we learned that it was in the other direction from where Andres went to meet his friend. My relief faded when we read it was a terrorist attack that killed three people and wounded seven.

I was shocked to realize it happened one mile from my home.

The rest of the afternoon I was on edge. I talked to my daughter at home to make sure she felt okay. I called several friends to check on them. I tried to reassure a younger woman in tears on the phone. I didn't have any good answers to her silent question: "If God is real, why does He let this happen?"

All I knew was to say was this: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1) And I kept saying it over and over to myself all afternoon.

All I could pray was one word: "Jesus."

And He came. I couldn't see Him, but my heart knew He was there. All it took was one word from me, and Jesus knew what I needed better than I did myself. He calmed, comforted, and strengthened me.

Have you been in situations where your heart is so overwhelmed that words fail?

Friend, your world might look different than mine, but you know as well as I do that life can explode in your face. Your child has an accident or your husband sends a text you never imagined. Your boss asks to speak with you or your doctor calls with bad news. Sometimes even the stress of daily life leaves us feeling choked and powerless.

When words fail, one word is all we need: Jesus.

His name is above all names and it holds more power than any name on earth or in heaven.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth...

Philippians 2:9,10

So if you're feeling overwhelmed today, call out one word: Jesus.

Jesus, come be with me.

Jesus, calm my fears.

Jesus, quiet my heart.

Jesus, meet the needs that only you know about.

Empower me now.

When words fail, one word is all we need: Jesus

If stress has beat you down during a busy season or a life challenge has knocked you down, pray the name Jesus. Even if we're just having a bad day, we can call on His name. He knows better than we do what we need right now. He'll come and meet us wherever we are.

Betsy de Cruz

PERSPECTIVE

-
Photo by

-
Jonathan Morgan

*Jonathan
Morgan*



FROM MY JOURNAL

By Ryan Hayes

A glimmer of hope.

I've seen it in those who are happy to see me and in kind words from those around me - Amy and Luna (my daughter), my roommates, my parents and friends. I hold onto hope - in my innocence - in tiny moments of joy. In my sweet and carefree daughter who knows nothing but trust, love, and the most innocent play. I will continue on in my innocence knowing that the only thing I've done wrong was in my words. I have hurt feelings in my words. In that I am guilty. But the last five years I have worked to tame my tongue and God has granted me this as a gift. I have made good friends in my family and my roommates - in my connections at church. I only hope it's enough. I long for freedom and I have had the first taste of it on Easter Sunday.

I only hope it is genuine.

I only hope it is enough.

Ryan Hayes



POPPIES

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Photo by

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Nance Friedman

*Nance
Friedman*

HOPE WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE GOD AT WORK

By Betsy de Cruz

The Christmas story is good news when we wonder if God hears our prayers. Celebrations, carols, and lights bring tidings of joy, but some of us might be battling discouragement. As the year comes to an end, we may see things in our lives we wish were different. Maybe we asked God to change them, but it doesn't look like He did.

We carry around inside the ache of unanswered prayer.

In the opening pages of Luke, we find an elderly couple familiar with that same ache. Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for years that God would give them a child. They had no way of knowing the child they were praying for would play a key role in preparing the way for God's Son. They had no idea He was waiting for the perfect time to answer their prayer. Surely, they knew the heartache of prayer unanswered while they waited on God.

I know it too, and tucked in this story, I find a truth that encourages me.

Zechariah was gripped with fear when he saw the angel of the Lord in the temple.

Some of us may be gripped with fear that our lives will never change, our hearts will never heal, or our prayers for loved ones will never be answered. We fear God will never come through.

That's why the angel's words to Zechariah are good news for us:

If you're praying, but don't see God at work, take heart. Look for small answers, and remember that God's love and light always win.

Can we just stop a minute and insert our own names into that verse?

"Do not be afraid, ___ (your name here) ____ ; your prayer has been heard..."

Maybe you've been praying for a baby, like Zechariah and Elizabeth, yet God hasn't given the answer you hope for. Perhaps you're praying for a child you already have, yet you can't see God working. Maybe your marriage needs a miracle. Or your broken heart needs healing. Friend, I don't know what you're praying for, but rest assured, God hears and treasures every word you lift up to Him..

What good news! God hears our prayers. We may not have the answers we hope for yet, but God hears, and He cares. We can trust He is in control, and He is at work for our good.

If you're praying, yet don't see God at work, take heart: Look for small answers

Last week I fasted and prayed throughout the day for one of my children in a crisis moment. At the end of the day, I sensed no perceptible change. "Do my prayers make a difference?" I wondered. Yet a week later I received a small answer: a 6-word text message from my young adult child that let me know God is at work. He hasn't forgotten me or my children. He'll complete the good work He began.

Take courage and keep praying.

Remember. Light wins over darkness.

Love wins over fear.

Grace wins over guilt and shame.

God is on our side, and He will answer in His perfect timing. We are blessed as we believe.

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Even when my heart aches with the pain of unanswered prayer, help me to believe you love me deeply. Strengthen my faith. Open my ears to hear and my eyes to see the quiet, small answers I may be missing. Help me to see more of your glory, power, and love at work in my life today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Betsy De Cruz

SNOW ON OLD BONES

By Kevin Daniel



*I rushed outside, an as yet outgrown
Childlike excitement with snow.*

*The night was veiled in
A thousand-thousand-thousand
Shrouds, the clouds from whence they
Were cut made un-visible.*

*Thusly closeted from the heavens,
The sky felt so close that I risked bumping my head upon it.*

*The night was cloistered in
Myriads upon exponential myriads of myriads
Of surfaces, the ceiling of stars by which
To number each, one for one, screened and latticed
From thought.*

*Thusly curtained from the Universe,
The night felt so blanketed as to appear,
To my soul, confessional.*

*The snow fell on old bones -
The transitory hijabbed in the transitory -
It was a grace for walking outside that night.*

*Some time later, unlike the boy I could not be,
I entered into the 2-room home-hospice cavern in which my
Father was to soon die,
He laying upon his rented hospital bed;
I prayed for his second wife - a mother whose son I had never been -
And there, amidst that, a cathedral-presence, palpable.
It was a grace, I felt, for him entering his darkness
(And before the oratory window shut, a sense:
"If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.")*

Kevin Daniel

WHEAT IN THE WIND

-

Photo by

-

Nance Friedman



*Nance
Friedman*

SUMMER GOD GIFTS

By Liz Morgan (dedicated to Honey-Bear's short life)

*Sunrise skies, clouds molted like blue-white marble,
Winds whisper warnings of cooling downpours to come,
Swaying trees dancing to silent rhythms;
Warm summer rain fed pools
Swirling water kisses around my ankles.
Times so still sparrow songs enchant my ears;
Pigeons, somehow graceful, glide--
Filling me with scientific wonder as I contemplate their well-fed middles;
Puppy pounces, bounces, and lively licks;
Upbeat music played for fostering exercise;
Unsolicited smiles of acceptance,
Welcoming, broad and open
Spontaneous laughter;
Carefree cart rides with bumps and turns;*

*Sumptuous mouthfuls tasting food crafted with generous intent;
Conversational insights into life highlights;
Puffs of fan blown air cooling gently;
Quiet, calm patience offered freely to the bewildered curious;
Seeing hesitant daughter finally swim slick,
Smooth across azure water,
Her husband encouraging--
Love in action;
Bittersweet see-ya-later embraces that sing, "I love you;"
Blessed bookmarks in my life.*

Liz Morgan

THE BELLS OF ST. STEPHEN'S

By Amy Cogdell

The bells begin tolling ten minutes before Mass at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. One bell at first in a steady, rhythmic peal. Then a second bell rings in a higher voice, sounding in its own cadence. Soon a third bell joins the chorus, this one even higher and faster. Then the bass tones chime in, one after another and another. Ten bells in all, rolling over one another in waves. Reverberating through the walls of the church, bouncing off the floor, echoing from neighboring rooftops, vibrating in my head and chest, carrying me off to distance places, to the outward rushing edges of the universe.

The joy of the Lord is strong, like a torrential river. It is forceful, like storm waves breaking against a cliff. The joy of YHWH is the power which drives creation and expands the universe. It rushes forward, accelerating, bringing matter and life into being. Truly, "of the increase of His government there is no end."

We humans cannot fathom the tumultuous, unstoppable joy of God. We tend to think of joy mildly, as happiness, or contentment, or even hope for the future. But there is a visceral reality to God's joy. A few years ago, in His great kindness and eagerness to be known, He granted me a taste of this joy.

It was a Friday afternoon when I was working hard to get dinner ready for guests. The house needed cleaning. Dishes needed washing. There were vegetables waiting to be chopped, but I was tired with a headache coming on. Determined to do my work, I kept rushing through the house, asking the Lord for help, telling Him how tired I was. It was prayer of sorts, I suppose. But honestly, I was surprised when the Lord responded. He had something to say.

"Amy," He said. "You can keep on running around in your own strength and you will finish your work. People will come, and go, and you will be left with a headache, as you so often are. Or, you could let Me be your strength."

Intuitively I understood this was an invitation to lie down and rest. More than an invitation, in fact. How could I be so ungrateful and rude as to refuse help from the Almighty? So I lay down on my bed.

Much to my surprise, the Lord had more to say. "Amy, what is your strength?" He asked.

"The joy of the Lord is my strength," I replied.

Immediately, I felt a rush of energy hit my gut, rise up through my heart and run of my mouth in a gasp. "So this is joy," I thought. I didn't know joy could hurt! It was His joy I was feeling, so real that it was physical, not only emotional. It was more than I could contain. I thought I might break apart, but what a way to go!

All the while I felt the Lord standing nearby laughing. On the one hand, I knew He was holding back. If I could not stand that trickle of joy, how would I, how we we react when we experience the fullness of His joy? Our Father does hold back in His wisdom, for a season, until all things are accomplished. But someday we will see Him as He is, and He is more eager for that day than we are.

That was the other reason the Lord was laughing. I could sense how happy He was to give someone a small foretaste of the joy set before us all, the joy that issues forth from His very Being. The joy that imagined us and fashioned us, the joy that made Jesus despise the cross, the joy that will carry us home and wipe away every tear. The joy before which the universe must expand and make more room for Him to fill.

Hearing the bells of St. Stephen's carried me back to that day when I felt, for an instant, the endless, raucous, rolling, creative joy of our God.

Amy Cogdell



REFLECTING

-
Photo by

-
Christina Hastings

*Christina
Hastings*

GRACE RECIPE

By Liz Morgan

True grace is like cocoa powder:
So easy to swallow when sweetened
With the sugar and cream of life;
Yet bitterly unpalatable in the cold raw powder of existence...

In the presence of consuming hatred,
Malice,
Materialism,
Depravity,
Deprivation,
Injustice,

Inequality,
Jealousy,
Judgmentalism,
Self-absorbing sin...

However, it can always be in our recipe,
If we choose to stir it in,

While God's portion is always prepared as a bottomless serving cup.

Liz Morgan

NOT THE AMERICAN WAY

(INSPIRED BY NUMBERS 16-18)

By Andrea Edwards

The pressure in the office was intense. The staff was sharply divided. On one side the duly appointed leader, the brother of the boss, and his supporters tried to do their jobs as they had always done—following company policy to the letter. They showed up every day and faithfully executed their duties.

On the other side, rebellion raged. The opponent was no upstart. He and his supporters had been doing the job according to the manual for years but it wasn't working. Expectations were not being met. Progress toward the goal of relocation was slow or stalled. They were living off of savings and the costs of moving the headquarters was high. Time to throw the old guy out. New ideas and approaches were needed so he was ready to take the bull by the horns.

The boss, standing firmly behind his brother, plans a press conference. "Okay, you want a big show—airing our dirty laundry in public? Fine. Make your case to the stockholders."

On the appointed day, each side showed up ready to fight. The grumblers, noisy and making the most of the attention, came with their prepared remarks, picket signs waved in the sun. Families gathered to witness the spectacle. Reporters took notes, cameras rolled. The brother of the boss, confident in his position stood by with his contingent all business in their work uniforms, and along with the stockholders and spectators, watched to see what would happen.

No one could have predicted what then occurred. The ground shook. The earth split as though the venom of office politics entered into nature itself. The bitter talk moved from whispers in the break rooms and hallways onto center stage. At the company mixer, in full view of everyone, the rebel faction was utterly wiped out. In cataclysmic fashion they and their families were literally swallowed up by the earth. In one sunny afternoon, disaster rendered them and their cherished positions irrelevant.

When the dust settled, the brother prevailed--his job intact but his reputation in tatters. What now? How should he proceed after such an unexpected reduction in his workforce? On the one hand, he was relieved to be rid of all the toxic complainers but the sudden reality following the chaos of emergency response was daunting. Something had to be done to reestablish his authority.

The boss issued an order to the division directors. Submit your five-year plans, your big ideas, your projections and suggestions for change. My brother will do the same and we'll let the Chairman of the Board examine them. His decision is final.

In the darkness of the late-night hours, each of the plans was considered. The very next day, the decision was rendered. The Master Plan would remain as written. The brother's loyalty was revealed and celebrated as his fidelity to leadership came to light. Budded, bloomed, and fruitful--an overnight success.

Andrea Edwards



FALL COLORS

-

Photo by

-

Nance Friedman

*Nance
Friedman*

FLOWER NETS

By Liz Morgan

God,

Did You build a netted terrace just for me

To support the vines of my existence

So I might be free to flower above the earth, come flood?

Are you the Gardener who smiles at my vivid petals,

Trims my wilting leaves,

And prunes my wild tendrils,

All the while fertilizing the hidden, gnarled roots,

Even as I squint ungratefully at your strong sun

Thinking it scorches too hot at times,

While cringing at intervals of seemingly relentless rain?

*Is that You audibly crooning in satisfaction
When I finally let go of the beautiful blooms of achievement
To succumb
Suffering change-
The only kind that leads to fruit?*

*Yes. I now see You stand and jump,
Joyous in my letting go of once luscious fruit
Fading to yield
Seed:
Relinquished life for another.*

Liz Morgan

EITHER/OR, NEITHER/NOR

By Bonnie Watkins

In the world of grammar nomenclature, correlative conjunctions are those that always go together if you care about such things. “I will have neither grits nor hash browns this morning with my #2 breakfast platter.” You might say, “I will have either fruit or oatmeal instead.” While the waitperson at Jim’s or IHOP probably doesn’t give a pancake flip either about your decision to eat healthier or your correct usage of correlative conjunctions, some people who are affectionately called Grammar Nazis might actually care if you use these conjunctions paired rather than alone. “Either” feels cold and lonely without “or.” Another until-death-do-us-part married pair is “not only/but also.” Just so you know. Right now, you could be opting for an open-ended sentence such as the following one: “Not only do I not care, but also...”

Instead, let’s take these pairings in a spiritual direction that will bring us to reminders of Brett’s sermon on Faith vs. Works as well as Geno’s Hebrews messages. Faith and works are forever friends who link arms and walk the spiritual journey together. They aren’t “either/or” types of companions; instead, they are more: “not only/but also” buddies. And, to mix metaphors as handily as Brett used to mix up a big batch of soup at Family Night when we had not only a children’s wing but also a Family Room (coming again soon: isn’t it exciting?), faith and works go together like soup

and cornbread, pancakes and syrup, peanut butter and jelly. Either you see where this analogy is heading or you are heading into the kitchen for a snack.

Still, the apparent dichotomy in James makes us reflect and dig deeper. The apostle James asks us “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? (2:14). Then he gives the less esoteric, practical example of claiming faith but sending a hungry or needy brother away empty-handed. He moves on to the biblical examples of Abraham’s works in moving forward toward the very last moment of the apparent work (actual act) of sacrificing his beloved son Isaac on the altar. He gives the additional example of Rahab the harlot who continued in works to receive the messengers and send them out another way. James couches all these difficult questions as rhetorical ones, not intended for a vocal answer. He gives us cause for pause to contemplate, to think through what appears at first glance to be a spiritual choice, an either/or, we think.

As ever, it is helpful to me to consider the entire chapter as well as previous verses in James to piece together a tapestry of his particular bent, writing style, and subsequent message. James is a practical brother and apostle. He scoots right on to Chapter 3 quickly to cover the practical matter of the wayward tongue. Then, pressing on with his usual writing economy he launches into Chapter 4’s subject of another practical matter of covetousness that continues on into Chapter 5, which returns to his theme of Chapter 1, suffering. Then he finishes his short book of five economical

chapters with a passing swipe at the practical admonition not to swear and wraps up with another very efficient checklist for how to pray effectively.

James, it seems at first glance, is either stretched for time, papyrus, ink, or all three. However, his terse, efficient style is a reminder to check the depth of a quick phrase sprinkled in among the others in his race to spill out quickly all the God-inspired words before he has to go cast his nets not only for works of physical fish but also for faith in fishing for men. That tiny phrase of seasoning that could easily be missed is “the perfect law of liberty” (1:25) that helps us to connect the dots of his whirlwind rhetorical questions. Because Abraham had such great faith, he could continue in confidence with the apparently dreadful work, knowing by faith and trust that God “was able to raise him [Isaac] up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19). And even Rahab, a foreign woman with a questionable reputation, also has her picture in the Hebrews Hall of Fame, more notably so because, like Abraham, she died “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off...and embraced them (Hebrews 11:13).

Faith and works are not “either/or” choices but rather gloriously “not only/but also” ones that exist because of the “law of liberty” provided for us through Christ Jesus, our “not only/but also” Savior.

Bonnie Watkins

NOT YET

By Liz Morgan

*I'm a basket leaking liquid;
God, show me how to plug the holes.
Holy Spirit, coach my bad memory
To truly think and discover;
Tutor my language of love;
Help me learn the peace of patience,
The grace of genuine giving.
There's hope in You,
Who shows me how
To tighten my warp and weft,
But I'm not there yet.*

Liz Morgan



WEAVING BY SHARON BRAMBLETT

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