



## STRIKING THE MOTHER LODE

BY CHRISTA J. WOLF

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Motherhood is hard work. I can't say it more plainly than that. Of course there are physical needs to be met, but beyond that, the thing I find most "weighty" is the sense of responsibility I feel as a mother who wants nothing as much as to raise up children who will be faithful followers of Jesus in this dark world. I instruct, correct, encourage, train, discipline, fail, apologize...and repeat. I catch myself wondering, "Is it all for naught? Will they ever get it?" If I'm not careful, I become so serious that I seriously miss out on the blessing and joy that is right in front of me. Allow me to explain.

Among other ways our lives have changed this past year, we made the decision to begin homeschooling our three daughters. As part of our curriculum on U.S. history, we did a unit on the California gold rush, which I found fascinating.

### Parenthood feels a lot like mining for gold...a little nugget of hope here or there.

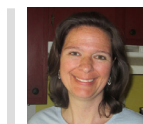
In contrast to more than 200 years of basically slow and steady population spread from east to west, the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, California in 1848 pulled nearly 300,000 people (a large number at the time) to our western shores in a mere seven years. Stories indicate that most people did not gain the riches they sought. However, the occasional discovery of a small nugget of gold was enough to fan the flames of hope and push them onward, tirelessly investing their lives in feverish pursuit of the mother lode (the principal vein or source of deposits).

Along another vein, when Andrew and I moved to northern Ohio last year (another item on our list of changes), one of the first things we noticed was how many maple trees were on our property. I commented that we could have quite a little operation if only I had a sugar shack. Before I knew it, Andrew had cleared a small out building, put in a wood burner,

purchased a few food-grade buckets, a couple stainless steel pans, some taps and tubing, and we were in business!

As you likely know, the ratio of gallons of sap to syrup is approximately 40-to-1. For hobbyists like ourselves, we found the process to be extremely time-consuming and labor intensive. But when we tasted the sticky sweetness that came as a result, we deemed the effort to be well worth it. The meagre fruits of our labor were the inspiration we needed to keep on going! We couldn't bear to waste an ounce of sap, knowing the potential goodness it contained. Perhaps a poor comparison, but I imagined we were like the fortune-seekers who went to California. We were in pursuit of liquid gold, mining in our own backyard for nature's hidden treasure.

So, how do the gold rush and maple syrup encourage me as a mother? Sometimes parenthood feels a lot like mining for gold. We spend hours praying over our children, instructing, disciplining, training them up in the way they should go...and our efforts are rewarded with what seems like minimal payoff - a little nugget of hope here or there. The thing is, those little nuggets are gold, too. We set our sights on striking the mother lode (creating obedient/polite/smart/godly/perfect kids), when motherhood is really more of a slow boil. The syrup in a half pint is to be savored because you know the work that went into it. Those moments of sweetness when your child says, "Thanks for supper," "I'm sorry," "Will you pray for my ouchy?" or you ask for help in the kitchen and someone joyfully volunteers, or when they are outside your bedroom door way too early and you overhear someone say, "Shh! Don't wake up Mommy," need to be valued as fine gold. They are evidence of deposits in their hearts from the Principal Source. They may be just the glimpse of hope we need to ease the weight of our mother load.



*Christa lives in Kidron, Ohio with her husband Andrew and their three daughters. They attend Fairlawn Mennonite Church. She spends her time homeschooling, writing plays, directing children's theater, and is a hopeful homesteader.*



# ✦ Thriving Churches

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER

CMC's Church Planting Team and other interested individuals have been meeting via Zoom every Thursday morning at 6:30 AM for an hour of prayer, crying out to God to move us from our current reality of relatively random, occasional church plants in CMC, to one where church planting is the norm among us. Something else has happened as we've prayed together. In addition to seeing new churches planted, God has stirred our hearts with a passion to see the existing churches of CMC thrive! This shouldn't surprise us. From the beginning, the church planting vision has been about so much more than simply adding to the numerical count of CMC churches. Rather, it has been rooted in the "mature and multiply" vision, a desire for God to do such a significant work in our churches that the reproduction of new churches is a natural outflow of it.

In the beginning stages of the church planting initiative, the Church Planting Team drafted the following statement:

"We are compelled by Christ to enter into the darkness of our world to proclaim the good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, healing for the broken, and freedom for the oppressed. We will prevail against the darkness by mobilizing everyone, everywhere, every day to help people find their way back to God. We have a sense of urgency to see every church intentionally making disciples to multiply the gospel. We long to see every church engaged in praying, preparing, and planting (or replanting) new disciple making churches that reach lost people and transform neighborhoods, communities, and cities."

What might it look like for CMC churches to thrive in such a way that our proclamation of good news spills over into disciple making, and our disciple making spills over into new churches being planted, and our church planting spills over into the transformation of neighborhoods, communities and cities? I believe there are several things that would mark that kind of movement:

- 1. A renewed commitment to prayer.** Because prayer is the work!
- 2. A renewed commitment among us to lay down our lives for the sake of the gospel.** There is a constant pull in our culture away from meaningful discipleship

and toward the empty promises of materialism, comfort and the American dream. We need a fresh experience of true fulfillment that comes from surrender to the will of the Father and the power of his Spirit.

- 3. A renewed commitment to the priesthood of all believers.** Church as a spectator sport where only the professional pastor and a few other gifted individuals perform while everyone else consumes the product will not cut it. Pastors must become equippers who entrust meaningful ministry to other leaders, who in turn seek out and equip others, and so on. I suspect that thriving churches as described in the church planting vision statement above are diligent in their efforts of developing leaders, equipping the saints, and engaging their members in the work of ministry to each other and to the world.
- 4. A renewed commitment to the community outside the four walls of the church.** In a blogpost about church planting, pastor and author Tim Keller suggested that as a church ages, more and more of its resources and energy are typically allocated toward the concerns of its members. What if all CMC churches would do an audit of their budget and their church calendar? I suspect that when it comes to finances, many of our churches allocate a significant percentage to mission endeavors. But what about our church calendars? What percentage of our activities are devoted to "entering into the darkness of our world to proclaim the good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, healing for the broken, and freedom for the oppressed?"

What would you add to this list? I'd love to hear your thoughts on what a movement of thriving churches might look like.



*Brian, executive director of CMC, is married to Sharla and lives in Marysville, Ohio. Brian and Sharla have four adult children of whom three are married.*



# Resting in a God Who Guides

BY DION GINGERCICH

Looking back over my short life, I can think of six distinct junctures where I had to make a major choice about my future. What makes these six crossroads in my life stand out is that each of them carried a weight. The weight was so strong I could feel the gravitational pull they levied, as no part of my life escaped the ramifications of what I had to decide. For each of these choices I knew that whatever decision I made would change the path of my life from that point onward. This creates an enormous pressure for decision-making.

When the first of these choices confronted me, I was only seventeen. I felt the weight of that decision and experienced a deep sense of inadequacy as I pondered the multiple paths that lay before me.

## We must patiently trust where God has placed us and attempt to live life faithfully in these moments.

When I look back over such points in my life, I realize I overcomplicated the process of making these decisions. I am a person who can overthink the ramifications of any choice. It is not uncommon for me to have a five or even a ten-year plan for how my life should work going forward. Though I believe planning is good, the illusion that we have the ability to plan in this way is deceptive. If I would have followed the plan my 17-year-old-self thought up, I would not be the person I am today. The person my journey has made me into is not one I could have envisioned, because I could not have envisioned the journey on which God has directed me. Making choices for the future and releasing the outcomes of these choices is a difficult but willful act of submission—an act of purposefully acknowledging our own limitations and submitting ourselves to a God who cares for his people.

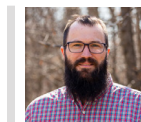
As the people of God, we are entrusted with faithfulness within our means and not for that which is beyond our ability to control. For me, my wife Krista has best exemplified this ability to be faithful in the present moment. Often when I attempt to discuss important future matters, Krista will look at me exasperated and exhausted, and wisely state, “I can’t

think that far ahead. I’m just trying to figure out what is for supper tonight.”

I understand that Krista rarely has the luxury of thinking far into the future, but she attempts to be faithful daily in the present moment in which God has placed her. Here lies the wisdom I think we finite people need to embrace: we must patiently trust where God has placed us and attempt to live life faithfully in these moments. When choices for next steps come, we trust that God has led us to that moment and we make a choice, trusting he will lead going from that moment. We rest in the God of the future to guide his people to his future ends.

Speaking of trust in this way can seem nebulous because it does not tell us how to go about making decisions when choices need to be made. Resting in the truth that God guides the journey of his people means we rest in the options he has given us. We rest in a God who guides and who provides choices, and rest in the truth that any or all of those choices may be okay to choose. To be faithful in the present moment means we rest in God’s leading up to that moment and rest in his leading from that moment. This does not mean we are not asked to do difficult work in discerning for next steps. Even as we rest in God’s faithfulness, we need to be introspective and examine ourselves.

For myself, I often find my own selfish motivations interfere in my ability to rest. As with any decision, one of the best remedies to my selfish motivations is to trust that God guides me through his people, and I must avoid making these choices apart from the Body of Christ. For any of us in the church, the choices we make are not just our own but have consequences for our local Body. We must not divorce our individual choices from the Body to which we belong. When making choices for next steps, we, the people of God, rest in the God of tomorrow and trust in him to lead us through the options he graciously provides. Resting then is a willful act of submission to the God who guides his people.



*Dion is a student at Providence Theological Seminary in Manitoba, Canada, where he lives with his wife Krista and their four children. Dion taught Introduction to Counseling and Marriage and the Family during the 2020 winter term at RBC.*



# Though the Mountains Be Shaken



***This article is a collaboration between an RI worker in the Mediterranean and our Media Coordinator. For security reasons, the names and locations in this piece have been changed.***

“Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion for you (Isaiah 54:10, NIV).

To those who make a practice of reading the Bible, this promise of the Lord to his people is a familiar one. Those who have never read the Bible cannot expect to recognize the passage—and would certainly not expect the prophet Isaiah to appear in their dreams to recite it. Yet as unusual as this story may be, it is the recent experience of a Mediterranean man called Murat.

**Three men had appeared to him—one who called himself Isaiah, one a silent young man, and a third with a dark, shadowed face.**

Murat’s story began last year when COVID-19 forced his country into lockdown. As a result, many Christian organizations began online ministry, drawing thousands of people from across the region. Murat’s wife, Demet, was one of these—a seeker who came to know Jesus through an Instagram Bible study. Murat was not against her decision to convert, but had no interest in seeking Jesus himself. In secret, Demet prayed that he would have a change of mind and heart.

One night, Murat awoke, unsettled after a vivid dream. Three men had appeared to him—one who called himself Isaiah, one a silent young man, and a third with a dark, shadowed face. Isaiah had spoken to Murat about the Christian God. As he recounted the dream to Demet, Murat remembered the words “mountain,” “compassion,” and “unfailing love.” He also recalled that Isaiah had shared some numbers—likely the verse’s reference. Troublingly, the shadowed man warned that if Murat read this verse, he would be murdered.

Although disturbed by this warning, Murat asked Demet if she knew the name Isaiah or recognized this verse from the Bible. After some searching, the couple located the verse. Demet read aloud, “Though the mountains be shaken, and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed.” Astonished, Murat confirmed, “That is the verse Isaiah gave to me!” He had never heard the name Isaiah, had not read the Christian Bible, and was not seeking to know Jesus—yet the prophet had appeared in his dreams to speak of God’s love.

To speculate who the other men in Murat’s dream may have been is interesting. Perhaps the young man was Jesus, silently waiting to receive his son. Perhaps the shadowed man was a representation of fear, threatening Murat with the danger of seeking Jesus.

How joyful it would be to report that Murat and Demet are now walking together in faith—but not all stories are tied with a neat bow. Currently, Murat remains afraid of conversion. Although his dream was miraculous and he has so far remained safe, fear maintains a strong hold. As someone from a conservative Muslim family, Murat is familiar with the consequences of becoming a Christian. He fears that his family will disown him, or worse.

Friends, please join us in prayer that Murat will be released from fear and would come to know our Father. Pray that he would have peace as he steps into faith. Pray that he would be protected from plans of harm against him. His story is far from over, and we trust that God will continue to work in his heart.

*As you lift up Murat and Demet, pray also for the Bible study through which Demet found Jesus. Pray for the others who are seeking Christ through this study. Pray for more dreams, for physical protection and protection against fear. Pray that RI’s workers in relationship with Murat, Demet, and other seekers would know how to support them in their journeys. God is moving in the Mediterranean and among Muslims worldwide—may your prayers provide momentum to the work.*

