



THINK ON THESE THINGS

BY PHIL MAUST

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“For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Proverbs 23:7a NASB). Is what I think about really that important? In our current cultural, political, and economic climate, scrolling through my Facebook feed, clicking on Yahoo to see what’s going on in the world today, or turning on CNN or Fox News to watch the evening news will likely lead me to think thoughts that are less than encouraging or inspiring. But does this really mean that “so he is,” or so I am?

Is it possible to really control what I think about? In 2 Corinthians 10:5 we see there is a way for us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (NIV). The context of this passage is Paul encouraging the church to use the divine power available to them to demolish strongholds in their lives. Our world is certainly an increasingly unstable, evil place and our tendency to dwell on this negativity can actually be a spiritual attack on us, a stronghold in our minds. But, thankfully, Paul says that it is possible to require these thoughts to be obedient to Christ. This can only be accomplished by the supernatural power of prayer and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

There are multiple ways of keeping thoughts of what we see in the news from turning into a stronghold. The first way is to give them much less space in our heads. While it is not wise to stick our heads in the sand and pretend that all is well around us, I believe many of us could handle a whole lot less of this type of information. Are we willing to “throw off everything that hinders” as we “run with perseverance the race marked out for us”? We have a calling to fulfill, and if our obsession with the news is hindering us from running well, we need to be willing to reduce or even eliminate it from our minds.

However, whenever we remove something, it is always wise to replace it with something else, which brings us to the second

way of demolishing this stronghold. In Philippians 4:8-9 Paul gives us the antidote for this kind of “stinkin-thinkin.” Here we will find what we can place in that void that is created when we give less attention to the mainstream media of our day. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Think on these Things

True	Noble	Right	Pure
Lovely	Admirable	Excellent	Praise-Worthy

These two verses make it clear that there is a way to clean up our thoughts. The things Paul encourages us to think about are all around us if we just start looking for them. We see a grandma taking her grandkids shopping, a police officer stopping to help a little boy put the chain back on his bike, or a youth group picking

up trash along the highway. As we begin getting accustomed to looking for these things and dwelling on them, we slowly begin seeing a shift in our overall outlook of life. And the beauty of this is found at the end of verse nine where he says that the God of peace will be with you.

Which will you allow to take up residence in the prime real estate of your mind? The depressing and corrupt news of our society which leads to depression and anxiety, or the good things that are happening every day all around us, which leads to peace from God? I choose peace! 🙏



Phil is lead pastor of Dayspring Mennonite Church in Midland, Virginia. He is the husband of Emily, and the father of three daughters and one son.



A Glowing and Gurgling Community

BY DARREN PEACHEY

*“This is the kind of fast day I’m after:
to break the chains of injustice,
get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
free the oppressed,
cancel debts.*

*What I’m interested in seeing you do is:
sharing your food with the hungry,
inviting the homeless poor into your homes,
putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad,
being available to your own families.*

*Do this and the lights will turn on,
and your lives will turn around at once.
Your righteousness will pave your way.
The GOD of glory will secure your passage.
Then when you pray, GOD will answer.
You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’*

*“If you get rid of unfair practices,
quit blaming victims,
quit gossiping about other people’s sins,
If you are generous with the hungry
and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness,
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.*

*I will always show you where to go.
I’ll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—
firm muscles, strong bones.*

*You’ll be like a well-watered garden,
a gurgling spring that never runs dry.*

*You’ll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew,
rebuild the foundations from out of your past.*

*You’ll be known as those who can fix anything,
restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate,
make the community livable again. “*

Isaiah 58:6-12 (MSG)

As the deadline loomed for this article, these words spoken by the Lord to his people through the prophet Isaiah seemed far more valuable than anything I could articulate. The Lord is quite clear on what is required to be a “glowing and gurgling” community. Stop. Go back and read his words again.

Engaging with CMC’s commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the commission to “mature and multiply churches locally and globally” has been a joy for me in my role as conference pastor. There have been seasons of vision-casting and regular, dedicated prayer asking the Lord to advance the mission. Strategy discussions with leaders from Rosedale International, Rosedale Bible College, and CMC have helped strengthen the resolve to work together towards a community of 160 thriving CMC churches by 2030. Recently, CMC and its agencies have collaborated to make the role of Church Planting Catalyst a full-time position focused on CMC’s Mature & Multiply vision. (See job posting on page 5.)

What is the connection between “glowing & gurgling” and “maturing & multiplying”?

The dedication to this commission over the past 5-6 years has slowly and steadily been moving CMC forward on its mission. But I admit, sometimes I have this nagging sense that something may be missing. And so I refer again to what God has said to his people in the past. Go back and read Isaiah 58:6-12 again. What do you hear God saying to you? to CMC? What needs our attention to be a “glowing and gurgling” community? What is the connection between “glowing & gurgling” and “maturing & multiplying”?



Darren travels extensively with his wife, Caryn, visiting churches in his role as conference pastor of CMC. They live in Belleville, Pennsylvania, and attend Locust Grove Mennonite Church.



“Mistakes Were Made”

(Part 2)

BY REUBEN SAIRS



How Can We Get “Nonconformity” Right?

When was the last time you heard a sermon about nonconformity? How many of the younger generation of Mennonites in CMC can claim that nonconformity to the world was a special emphasis in their development—reinforced at every turn?

Nonconformity to the world, until fairly recently, was an intense preoccupation for Mennonites. You might say it is a gene in the Anabaptist DNA.

Coming into this historical stream from outside the faith, I felt a strong need to sort the issue out for myself to see if I could adopt this group and could legitimately call myself a Mennonite. I had been formed spiritually as a young Christian to engage the world boldly, not avoid it.

I did a fair amount of study—J.C. Wenger’s *Separated Unto God*, and many other now less well known books. I read confessions of faith and special statements. I tracked the minutes and read the tracts of the standing Nonconformity Committee in one Mennonite conference. I tried to track down the old guard and hear from them, and so on.

Nonconformity went a long way toward making Mennonites an ethnic group rather than a living expression of New Testament faith.

Without going into painful detail, what I found was that in the last century nonconformity became a “doctrine in distress,” and then in the big Mennonite bodies essentially died. Throughout Mennonite history, before nonconformity died, it led to lots of division and pain. As you probably know, there are many break-off groups who still practice the “plain” ways.

What happened? Perhaps nonconformity had not been well-understood in the first place and thus got off to a bad start. In any case, the doctrine deteriorated. Far more often than not, it became “frozen in time.” It ceased to be a renewable discussion in which each generation worked together to decide on sound practice. It was rarely taught gently as part of the discipleship process. Instead, nonconformity

became a bundle of rigid, tacked-down rules that could show measurable compliance.

The heart of nonconformity in Christian character development was reduced almost exclusively to rules about dress and entertainment. Nonconformity markers in dress and activities became social boundaries, and dictated who was in or out, and who could take communion. Do Christians have TVs, radios? Do they wear neckties? Have Christmas trees? Go to the movies? I read tracts that challenged going to bowling alleys and farm shows.

As practiced among North American Mennonites, nonconformity went a long way toward making Mennonites an ethnic group rather than a living expression of New Testament faith.

Pride entered into it, and outward compliance seemed to devour the sense of what people were actually like. A very unloving, greedy, judgmental, or harsh person could conform to measurable rules, but still be something of a spiritual basket case. The rules were heavy-handed and extreme, and they became increasingly unpopular and regarded as unnecessary, unhelpful.

I noticed something else that troubled me. Adults were treated like children, personal prerogative was unthinkable, and exposure to anything non-Mennonite led inevitably to sin. The doctrine died, and it remains a question how severely this death separates many modern Mennonites from their own past. Can we be Anabaptists without practicing nonconformity to the world?

Surprisingly, I don’t think we can be Anabaptist—in a meaningful historical sense—without this doctrine. Nonconformity is biblical, not just an historical or cultural quirk.

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To Help Fellow Pilgrims

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

In 2013, Rosedale International (RI) workers Art and Paula made an unplanned return to Canada after a number of years overseas. As they settled back into their community, they realized that even there, unreached people lived not far away. Called to reach out with the good news in their own region—where more than 25 percent of the population were born in other countries—they moved into a densely-populated immigrant neighborhood. Over the past eight years, they have developed friendships with their neighbors, advocated for newcomers, and shared the hope and love of Jesus. They have a heart for the stranger, and wisdom to offer to those interested in this local ministry opportunity.

**“The Word became
flesh and blood,
and moved into
the neighborhood.”**

(John 1:14a MSG)

As Art and Paula stepped into this new ministry, God led them to helpful people who were already working among newcomers. The facilitator of their active community center recognized them as people of peace, and strongly encouraged them to become involved. He also asked them to serve as members of the neighborhood association and assist in planning activities for the community. In addition to Art’s job as an ESL instructor and Paula’s employment with a discipleship ministry to Afghans, they began to lead an English Conversation Circle, participate in a Resource Café for immigrant women, and provide assistance with a food distribution program—all excellent ways to get to know their neighbors.

Living among those they desire to reach has opened the door to many opportunities for friendship and service. Art and Paula have found many ways, both large and small, to walk with newcomers as they navigate a new culture. From providing opportunities to practice basic conversation; offering assistance in receiving legal, banking, educational, or medical services; to helping prepare a resume, accompanying a friend to an appointment, or guiding a newcomer through their first trip to the grocery store—the opportunities to be neighborly are endless.

As Art and Paula invest time in their neighbors, friendships begin to develop. They’ve found that simply being a caring, helpful friend who is willing to listen is key. “Our stories about life and family are important to us,” Paula reflects. “When one takes a real interest in their stories, trust develops. Then we can enter into these ‘holy moments’, and are provided with opportunities to pray for them.”

“We often find that newcomers are very open to issues of faith; these friends don’t turn us down when we offer to pray for them,” Art adds. “We may not explicitly speak of our faith in every conversation, but we have no reason to be silent. It’s who we are and we feel no need to hide.”

At times, these relationships are deeper than friendship; Art and Paula have become family to some whose biological families are far away. In many cases, immigrant families are scattered, and visits to their home countries are impossible. “It’s a big loss. Imagine the excitement of your first child, or a crisis in your home country, but you have no family to experience that with you. These are opportunities to rejoice or weep with them.”

This familial bond is demonstrated through the question of a young neighbor boy: ‘Why don’t I have a grandfather like my classmates?’ One grandfather had died a natural death; the other had been executed by Iranian authorities in front of his family. His mother responded, ‘Don’t worry; Art will be your grandfather.’ While Art and Paula can’t literally replace grandparents, they can still fill a need for a child, from celebrating their birthday to walking with them in the local nature preserve.

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This article is a collaboration between Madalyn, Media Coordinator, and Art and Paula, workers in North America.

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Mistakes Were Made part 2

Romans 12:2 “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV).

But this doctrine needs to be reconfigured if it is to ever again blossom and be beautiful in our world. Some earlier leaders saw the problems developing but their advice apparently went unheeded.

Nonconformity is first of all something that God is doing in us, not something we are doing for ourselves. Our evaluation of culture and what we’re trying to become as nonconformers has to be seen first in our character. Then our practices will follow somewhat naturally.

We need to give people personal space and personal prerogatives with regard to many areas of life that are matters of application rather than clearly accepted biblical boundaries. Nonconformity has to be a discussion renewed in each generation, and not a dictation from an older, quainter form of practice. The discussion needs to be steered by moderate, prudent minds and voices, not authoritarian leaders.

Mistakes were certainly made. The question is whether it is too late to correct them. 📖

Photo and play credit, Vicki Sairs

From the play Remember Us, which explores what happens when a contemporary woman tries to figure out her church’s Amish heritage and her spiritual ancestors’ focus on rules. Here, Newcomer (Elizabeth Yoder) disagrees with Framework Man (Ryan Freed), left, while Historical Man (Preston Yoder) tries to mediate.

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To Help Fellow Pilgrims

For those interested in stepping into local cross-cultural missions, Art and Paula point to the example of a Toronto-based ministry which trains and sends teams of young professionals to live in the neighborhoods of the unreached urban poor around the world. These individuals keep their jobs, but are deeply involved in their neighborhood and meet weekly to pray over the needs of the community. Art and Paula have often worked and prayed with these teams in their own neighborhood, and wonder whether CMC churches with a heart for newcomers might have interest in adopting a similar strategy.

God has given the western Church an opportunity—or perhaps, a responsibility—to reach these people who have come to our countries. Art and Paula are convinced that God has brought people from many ‘closed’ nations to our doorstep for a purpose: “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him” (Acts 17:27a ESV). Will God’s people view these immigrants as a threat, as some do, or will we embrace this opportunity?

“In both the Old and New Testaments, God makes it clear that his people are to have compassion on foreigners and strangers,” Art reflects. “In fact, Jesus says that one of the things that separates the righteous from the unrighteous is how we respond to strangers in need (Matthew 25:31-46).” Elsewhere, the Word reminds us that we too are strangers; we’re pilgrims—and it’s a privilege to be able to help fellow pilgrims. 📖

Names have been changed for security.

Job Posting for Church Planting Catalyst

CMC and its agencies are seeking a full-time person to help catalyze a multiplying movement of disciple making and church planting across the CMC network of churches. Qualified candidates will possess a deep and sincere love for the local church, executive-level experience in leading a ministry, a history of working well in a team environment, and a proven track record of engaging the lost and caring for “the least of these.” Other important qualities and characteristics for this role are: excellence in communication and casting vision, expertise

in building effective systems and structures, life experience in disciple making and church planting ministries, and affirmation of CMC’s *Statement of Theology* and *Statement of Practice*. This position is an appointment of CMC in collaboration with Rosedale International and Rosedale Bible College. The person filling the position will work under the supervision of the CMC Executive Director. For more information, a job description, or instructions for applying for the position, please contact Brian Hershberger at brian@cmcrossdale.org or 740-506-4682.