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the Steel Valley Baptist Association COMMUNICATOR

December, 2020

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Executive Board Mtg

The next executive Board Meeting will be held January 11 at Youngstown Metro Church at 7 PM. More details to come later.



ACPs

Every church and mission is encouraged to complete the ACP. Call if you need help. Thanks.

So far only eight out of thirty-five have completed the ACP. This year fewer questions appear on the form.

The 2020 Stress Test

Gary Frost,
Associational Missionary

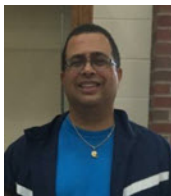


Lately I've been wrestling with finding the right words to describe 2020. There are numerous adjectives that I've employed hoping to concisely describe the last several months. I've used words like "peculiar, painful, unprecedented, challenging, horrific, perplexing, grievous, frustrating, disappointing and depressing"; just to name a few. I'm sure you have your own list as well.

But one word that has lately been surfacing in my thoughts is "revealing". The conditions, circumstances and events of 2020 have served to reveal and to expose the real essence of who we are, what we believe and how we respond as individual Christians and as corporate bodies (churches.)

Missions & Ministry

Acts 2:47 ... *praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.*



Rafael Cruz

What a wonderful time that was! The Church was alive and on fire for Jesus. The joy of the Lord was evident in their lives. There was something obviously different about the Church. They lovingly shared their testimonies and their possessions with strangers. The early Church were

see M&M, next page

Book Review

This section will be a little different because there is no book review this month. I'll have one for you next month. You may be thinking about what you would like to read next year so I would like to give you a little help.



Bill Mazey

First regarding your devotional reading, *Battlefields and Blessings: Stories of Faith and Courage from the Revolutionary War* by Jane Hampton Cook. I have recommended this book to many peo-

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Ohio NorthEast School of Theology

It is now time to begin planning for the Spring semester.

Leading a Life-Changing Bible Study

Ideal for Sunday School teachers or any other small group leader. Many principles taught in the course are the same for sermon preparation. Course runs from Feb 2 - May 18 using Zoom. Two classes will be offered: (1) afternoons from 2-5 pm and (2) evenings from 6-9 pm. Classes will be taught by Randy Langham.



Possible Courses

Do you or someone you know have an interest in two possible class offerings?

The first class would be regarding **Church Revitalization**. The subjects covered in the class are designed to get a better understanding of culture, contextualization, and communication and how they impact the change process. We would also study the important parts of leading a church through a healthy change process. One of the required textbooks would be *From Embers to a Flame* by Harry Reeder. The other textbooks have not been chosen yet.

The second class would be **Basic Biblical Greek I** class. This is a beginning level class and will help the student begin to have a working knowledge of Greek vocabulary and grammar. The required textbook and corresponding workbook are *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 4th edition, and its workbook. *Biblical Greek I* would be completed over two semesters.

Each class would need at least three people committed to attending weekly for the fifteen-week semester. The class will meet once a week for three hours.

Contact Bill Mazey as soon as possible if you are interested and have any questions (wjmazey@gmail.com).

Church Strengthening

The next Church Strengthening Team meeting will be third Thursday, December 17, 12 noon to 1:30 pm at Grace Baptist Church.



Word, from previous page

I can remember, some years ago, my doctor had concerns with a heart murmur that he detected during my annual physical examination. His prescription was that I needed to take a stress test in order to determine if this was a significant health challenge. In a stress test a person is hooked up to a heart monitor and then walks on a treadmill that is gradually tilted as the speed is increased. It helps the doctor find out how well the heart handles its workload under pressure. Thank God my test showed no major concerns.

I believe we can use the stress test as a metaphor for the steep and fast treadmill experience of 2020. This year has been an opportunity for us to have a revelation of our spiritual health as Christ followers and as members of Christ's body, the church. While there are many aspects of spiritual life that can be measured in the midst of this test, the one dynamic I would like to consider is "attitude." We need to ask ourselves the question "Has the stress of this strange experience increased a murmuring of our hearts or have we been able to detect a maturing and growth that is causing us to look more like Christ? In essence, has 2020 made us bitter or better?"

The world is watching us as we manage this strenuous stress test; they want to see what we are really made of. I believe Paul's words to the church in Philippi are apropos for us as we exit a peculiar 2020 and enter into an unpredictable 2021. In Philippians 2:14-16, Paul wrote "*Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.*"

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difference makers. The persecutions didn't stop them. The persecutions actually empowered them to rise up and speak more boldly for Jesus - Acts 4:29.

The result of all of their spiritual boldness was the daily salvation of those around them. Can you imagine seeing people come to Christ daily? It happened! What if the Church today had the same spirit as the early Church? What if our lives were obviously manifesting the joy of the Lord? What if we loved others so much that we had favor with all the people? What if we gave of ourselves and our possessions for the benefit of others? What if we shared the gospel with full boldness? If the Church today would be that committed to Jesus that the Holy Spirit would move powerfully once again. Lives would be transformed in the name of Jesus and our communities would be blessed by God's presence.

I would like to ask you to begin praying with your congregations about being

committed to outreach ministry in 2021. Pray for someone who would step up and be your church's evangelism leader. Pray for the Lord's direction in reaching out to your community in ways beyond your comfort zone. Do more than Vacation Bible School without cancelling it.

If you have evangelism leaders in your congregation, I would love to have them on the Missions and Ministry Team so we may plan events and serve together. I would also like to have a team committed to assist churches in the use of the block party trailer. Youth are definitely needed for this as well. I would be happy to provide training for any Church, ministry team or ministry leaders. So pray, plan and prepare to be the Church we have been called to be in Christ in 2021.

Don't forget to lead your congregation in the "Who's Your One?" ministry program. Everything you need is found online at whosyourone.com. Pray for the Lord's direction in reaching the lost for Jesus, and let's get into the battle.

Book Review, from previous page

ple. It is filled with quotes and stories from men and women who lived through and or fought in the Revolutionary War. The research done for this book is amazing. The bibliography offers more books than you can imagine. There is a source quoted for everyday and placed in endnotes. It is set up to read daily.

Voices from the Past: Puritan Devotional Readings, volume 2 edited by Richard Rushing is set up to read daily. It is filled with short excerpts from puritan pastors and theologians. This book has a bibliography which will give you many ideas for future reading. Other helpful parts of the book are the Author Index, Topical Index, and Scripture Index. This was recommended to me and I am planning to read it in 2021 as part of my devotional reading.

Devotions on the Greek New Testament: 52 Reflections to Inspire and Instruct, volume 1. Many different authors contributed to this volume and there is a brief description of each one at the end of the book. I read one a week this year. Some devotions were more helpful than others but each one was worth reading. I have recommended this book to other pastors whether or not they have a working knowledge of Biblical Greek.

Second, regarding your pastoral ministry, especially if you find yourself in a situation of leading your church through a

spiritually healthy change process. *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* by Harry L. Reeder III. This book is very encouraging to pastors and church leaders who find themselves struggling to help their churches change in a healthy way. The leadership team and I read through this book a couple of years ago. We discussed each chapter at our monthly team meetings and found things to apply in our lives and in the church life.

A Missionary Mindset: What Church Leaders Need to Know to Reach their Community by Douglass Ruffle. This book will stretch your thinking about your pastoral ministry in your church. The author was a missionary and when he came back to the United States he got involved in helping churches work through change. He applies principles that he learned and used on the mission field and how they can work through churches here. You and I may not agree with everything the author says, but reading it and learning from it will be a good investment of your time.

There are many more books I could recommend. I am planning on reading more in 2021 than I did in 2020. Many people have said this and I'll repeat it, "leaders are readers." Invest your time wisely in reading good books. Read and learn from your reading in many different areas. Read for fun and relaxation. Read to develop a hobby. Oh, and make sure you read through your Bible.