



## THE FLEAS

BY AMANDA MILLER

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The fleas. They always come to mind when I think of giving thanks during hard times.

Fortunately, this mental association doesn't come from personal experience, but rather from a story that might be familiar to you as well.

Corrie ten Boom tells of her time in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, and of her internal struggle to "give thanks in all circumstances" as she had just read in Scripture. She was able to courageously give thanks with her sister Betsie for a few things in the midst of their horrific situation, but balked at Betsie's insistence on being thankful for the awful flea infestation in their barracks.

Weeks later, the sisters realized why their barracks had experienced relative freedom from the guards, why they had been able to share their Bible — the fleas were so bad that no one wanted to set foot in the place. Suddenly it was easier to be thankful for fleas.

This story does a lot of things for me, besides just making me itchy. I need the perspective it brings, as well as the challenge, since I understand I often fall so short of giving thanks in all circumstances. I love the "happy ending"—but there is so much more depth here, in a way that makes my soul ache from the bittersweet.

I don't know all the details surrounding the rest of Corrie's history, yet I'm certain her gratitude didn't always come with a lot of warm, fuzzy feelings. We think fleas sound bad, but they don't scratch the surface of her incredibly painful experiences. Betsie gave thanks for those fleas, and Betsie died in that camp. Rather than being tied up with a pretty bow, this example of hard-fought gratitude is tied up with immense suffering.

This is why it's beautiful. God did not rescue the sisters from their living hell; saying "thank you" does not magically lift us out of our difficult circumstances. Expressing gratitude doesn't make everything feel nice all of a sudden.

And actually, I'm not sure that we are called to give thanks for all circumstances, but rather *in* all circumstances.

My faith in Christ is based solely on him and not on what he does for me — my gratitude and ability to give thanks does not hinge on circumstances, whether they be positive or negative. My story has some hard elements to it, as I'm sure yours does, and I have a really hard time thinking God wants us to be grateful for all of it.



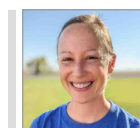
Four years ago, my husband was in a horrible farming accident. Brian was run over by a no-till drill, which for non-agrarian readers, is an extremely heavy piece of equipment fitted with sharp metal discs. It is designed to bust through rock-hard Kansas soil, and a human body doesn't begin to stand a chance.

I will never be grateful for the tractor that kept moving, for the way my husband's body was literally crushed. I am not thankful for his collapsed lungs, broken ribs, internal injuries; for the complications, infections, wracking pain.

And my Father God loves him even more than I do, so I don't think he expects me to thank him for some of those things. It would sound facetious, inane, and cruel for me to have said, "Thank you for the way his small bowel isn't working, and for the sepsis that is flooding his blood with infection." I don't feel gratitude for all the times Brian was truly at the brink of death, for the physical



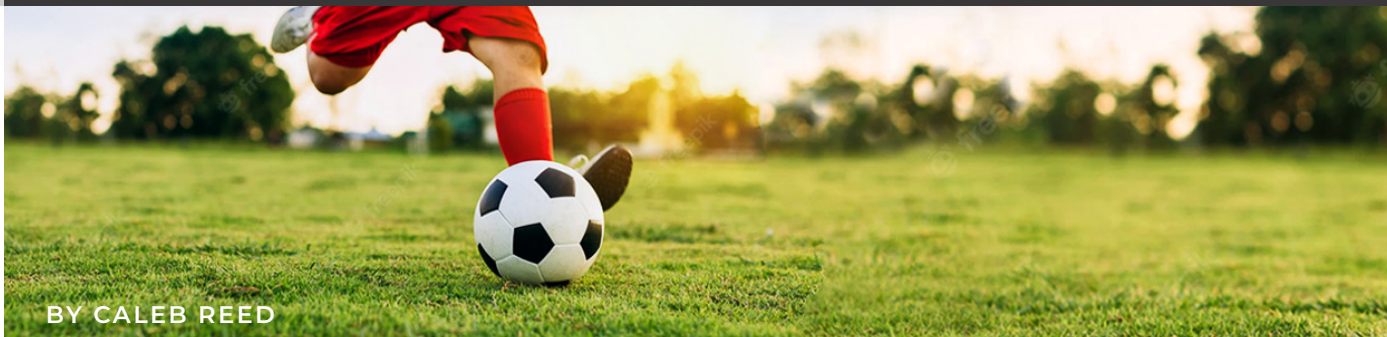
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*Amanda lives on the family dairy farm in Hutchinson, Kansas, with her husband, son, and whomever else God brings them through foster care. She enjoys doing some catering, teaching cooking classes, and freelancing, but mostly chasing after her kid(s).*



# Just What We Need



BY CALEB REED

Earlier this fall, I decided to do something adventurous and volunteered to coach my son's soccer team. How hard can it be to coach a bunch of 8- and 9-year-olds? I have coached and helped to coach in the past, so I was pretty sure I could accomplish it. But walking onto the field for our first practice, I was nervous and unsure how it would turn out. Am I even qualified to do this? I was afraid we wouldn't win a game all season! As the season has progressed, I have seen a group of kids grow together as a team. Each player on my team has improved in multiple ways. Things vital to soccer, like passing the ball, throwing it in from the sideline, and kicking goals, are much easier than they were eight weeks ago. I might not be the most qualified person to coach a soccer team, but we have had a successful season. By making myself available and investing a few hours in watching YouTube videos, I have learned a lot of new things and feel confident in my coaching. As of now, we have had three wins, two ties, and one loss.

**Live every day with confidence that the Holy Spirit is living inside each of us and he will provide everything we need to accomplish what he is asking us to do.**

In Matthew 10, Jesus called the disciples together and gave them power and authority to drive out demons and heal every disease and sickness. Later in the chapter, Jesus sent the 12 disciples out in groups of two. He told them not to take any gold, silver, or copper, and he told them not to take any extra sandals or clothing. In verse 16 Jesus tells them, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves" (NIV), and describes how they will most likely be beaten and arrested. Verse 19-20 says, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

I'm sure the disciples panicked when Jesus gave them the list of items they couldn't take on this trip. If you are anything like me, you tend to focus on what we don't have versus what we

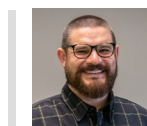
do have. Scripture shows us what we do have. Romans 8:11 says the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, is living in me (paraphrased). Do we live our lives this way? Are we fully trusting in the Word of God and the promises that are given to you and me? Or are we striving to live a "comfortable life"?

When God sends you out, he may be asking you to move to an impoverished neighborhood. God may be asking you to give up your dream job with a salary that you dreamt would never be possible. He may be asking you to move thousands of miles from your family and friends. Live every day with confidence that the Holy Spirit is living inside each of us and he will provide everything we need to accomplish what he is asking us to do. There is nothing wrong with living in a safe neighborhood or working a dream job, but if that is all taken away, we still have what we need to live out and accomplish the will of God.

What is the Holy Spirit asking you to do? Is he asking you to connect with a neighbor who doesn't know Jesus? Is he asking you to move to the inner city and live incarnationally in a community that seems scary? Is he leading you to plant a new church so we can see the kingdom of God expanded?

Stepping out of our comfort zone and trying something new can be challenging; moving to a new city or community can be scary, but I can tell you it is worth it. Start small and work your way to "bigger things." If God has placed church planting on your heart, begin connecting with the unchurched in your city or community. As you take steps toward what God is asking you to accomplish, your confidence will grow, and before you know it, you won't think twice when God leads you to do something new and exciting.

This year's soccer season has been the reminder that I needed—God provides what I need to accomplish what he is asking me to do!



*Caleb serves as the church planting catalyst for CMC. He loves a quality cup of coffee and spending time with his family. Caleb and his wife, Stephanie, and their two children live in Resaca, Ohio.*





# “Mistakes Were Made...” (Part 10)

BY MERLE NISLY

## ***A Tale of Unintended Consequences***

Beginning in 1953, mission-minded Mennonites from various communities in the United States moved to a region of Northwestern Ontario, Canada. News of the remote Ojibwe and Oji-Cree villages of the area drove the powerful vision for a significant missionary movement radiating out of Red Lake, Ontario.

Within a decade, the new mission agency had recruited dozens of willing workers to live in communities accessible only by air travel—villages where modern conveniences were mostly unknown. The culture and message of the missionaries were shaped by Anabaptist history and conservative Mennonite faith and discipleship.

For at least two decades, this mission endeavor was favorably received and there was an encouraging response to the message of the gospel. Local churches formed in numerous indigenous villages. Faithful indigenous leaders actively led local churches. Mennonite missionaries worked hard to learn local languages and share life in remote villages.

The education of indigenous children was an ongoing concern in a world that demanded fluency in English. Most indigenous parents had not had much opportunity for formal education. In a rapidly-changing world ordered by the values and demands of the *wemihikooshiwak* (common term for all white people), the indigenous elders and parents seemed open and accepting of many of the recommendations offered by church and government authorities.

We missionaries were enthusiastic about advancing educational opportunities in these far-flung villages. We also promoted technological and mechanical advantages—introducing machinery, tools, methods, and skills that expanded possibilities and raised levels of personal comfort and health.

In those early years, provincially-funded schools were quite limited. They were only provided for communities with larger populations, and did not include secondary schools. A few church-run schools had operated for short periods of time in some villages.

Nearly a century earlier, Canada had adopted policies to assimilate indigenous peoples and their cultures into mainstream Canadian culture. The goal was to eliminate the tensions and competing value systems between the

Indigenous and Euro-Canadian peoples. For the “Indian,” there was deemed to be no viable purpose, future, or autonomy.

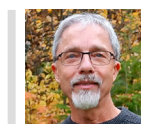
“Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the Aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the state... It is clearly our wisdom and our duty, through education and other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship” ([Annual Report of the Department of the Interior \[1876\]](#)).

Is such a statement outrageous? After more than 50 years of interacting with this region and its peoples, I believe that we missionaries often operated from a parallel mindset to that of this government policy. We viewed our North American Anabaptist culture as an exceptional expression of Christian discipleship. This gave us permission to enthusiastically support the residential school model as well as an aggressive child adoption campaign now known as “[The Sixties Scoop](#).”

Our mission organization took advantage of the opportunity to partner with government agencies to begin a boarding school and children’s home where missionaries freely taught and modelled their beliefs. It seemed too good to be true: provincial funding made available to advance the gospel. Sadly, we didn’t carefully compare the long-range goals of the state and the mission.

The mission school, an isolated and self-contained social system, allowed us to completely design and control the experiences of indigenous children: the external image of a person, the daily rhythms of life, the permissible outside influences, the minute details of all messaging, the specifics of how God is described, the modeling of gender roles, the values by which a human is validated, the measures of success, the language of the dominant group—even the details of diet and hygiene.

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*Merle is a retired CMC minister. He and his wife, Rita, live in Red Lake, Ontario. They have four married daughters and 14 grandchildren.*



# The God Who Sees

BY ROSEDALE INTERNATIONAL

*Esta, RI worker to the Mediterranean, recently retired after 20 years of service. While in the Mediterranean, she wrote and directed dramas and trained believers in the art of theater. She also worked with a group of young people to create video projects that were broadcast on social media and a Christian television station that reaches millions. As she completed her time with RI, she visited the Rosedale International Center (RIC) to share her story. Below is an excerpt from her conversation with us.*

Since I'm retiring after twenty years of doing this ministry, it makes sense to ask myself, *what is the most important thing you've learned during this time?*

The easiest way to talk about this is to remember when I was on sabbatical a few years ago. I met a professor who taught in a very small Bible college, and he asked me to come share about spirituality on the field. I thought, *okay—that's a really broad topic. I wonder what he means.* I started meditating on it, and I prayed about it, of course—and God showed me images that gave me a way of talking about it. He gave me the picture of opening one's eyes in the desert and seeing Jesus.

There are phases when we open our eyes in the desert and we see Jesus, and of course, we're very relieved to see him. But we're also looking around, asking, *but where are my friends? Where's the community I'm used to? Where's that thing I do that makes me feel good about myself?* We see Jesus, but we're not focused on him.

Other times when we open our eyes in the desert, we see Jesus and we're comforted—but at the same time, we don't really want him to see us. We're like, *don't look at me, I'm a failure. I can't get the language; I culturally offended someone today; I can't do this, I'm not enough.* We're relieved that he's there, but we don't want him to see us.

And then there are times when we open our eyes in the desert and see Jesus, but it doesn't feel good. We wonder, *where are you? I don't know who you are, I don't know what you're doing.* It's not a good feeling. We ask, *how many times do I have to have that conversation with my neighbor? Or, I did this, but nothing came of it. Why aren't you doing your part?* Some Christian writers call this the dark night of the soul. Like Jacob,

we wrestle with God through a very long and dark night, and it ends with us clinging to him for dear life in the morning.

## First came a blood-curdling scream, which brought his mother back into the room.

I remember being at a friend's house when her youngest was about three years old. I watched him put together a LEGO creation on the floor until she moved him to the table to eat lunch. He was trapped at the table while his LEGOs sat vulnerable on the floor—and then one of his brothers borrowed from it, which was the worst thing that could happen.

First came a blood-curdling scream, which brought his mother back into the room. She crouched down and just looked him in the face. She didn't say anything; she didn't have a particular look on her face; she was just right there, calm and loving. Over a period of about five seconds, I watched his face go, bit by bit, from contortion to calm. He wiped the tear off his face, turned, and started eating his sandwich. It was one of the most amazing things I'd ever seen.

Sometimes, just like that little boy, we open our eyes in the desert and we see Jesus—and we see him, seeing us. And like Hagar, we can say, *you are the God who sees. Now I have seen the One who sees me* (Genesis 16:13).

And I feel that it's in being seen that we are healed. It's in being seen that we feel the love, the trust, the understanding. When we see the God who sees us, we stop looking around. We stop looking for anything else. It is that face that we will see

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*Rosedale International is the mission arm of CMC, working to take Jesus to the ends of the earth by fully engaging CMC churches in maturing and multiplying disciples, especially among the least reached.*



## **The Fleas** *continued from page 1*

agony he was in and the emotional agony the rest of us were in, and I don't think I need to.

However, I am awash in gratitude. Partly because, by the insane grace of God, my husband is walking around essentially completely healed—with just a little less intestine and a lot more scars.

But my gratitude goes deeper than that. If I were only giving thanks for the happy times, that wouldn't be in all circumstances. God and I had some really honest, raw moments together during those awful months, and I started to learn the lifelong process of giving thanks for who God is—despite what he's doing to/for me. He is the only constant in all of our circumstances, and he is the One in whom and to whom we give the thanks. This gives us absolute freedom to be thankful all the time, because God always is, regardless of whatever else is going on.

Tying our gratitude to Christ does not ask us to discount the suffering and grief we or others experience in our broken world. Through that lens, however, we can find grace in unexpected places. Again, I am not thankful for the actual elements of Brian's accident, yet I am so grateful for the deep joy God brought out of that deep sorrow. I can absolutely say thank you for the way God walked with me in the valley of the shadow of death; for the way thousands of his people came alongside as we mourned and rejoiced together; for the things as little as a cup of hot chocolate in the middle of the night and as big as the way Brian woke up from a coma just as Brian as he ever was.

I thank God for the severe mercy that gave me better vision, to take more delight in daily grace because I have been in a place where all I wanted was to care about the little things again. If we look around, we *can* find things to be thankful for, even if we're not thankful for all the things.

What are you thankful for today? Find the little things, find the big things, and most of all, find the God who is in all of our circumstances.

I just hope you don't find any fleas. 🕊



## **"Mistakes Were Made..." Part 10** *continued from page 3*

Without realizing or acknowledging it, our mission agency became an unwitting partner in the national plan for assimilating indigenous children into mainstream society and the belief that "... as far as the adult Indian is concerned, little can be done with him" ([Davin Report](#)). Most of us had no idea of the long-term ramifications of these policies and methods.

While modeling strong family values, we seemed to say to indigenous families: "Your children are better off spending most of the year with us, rather than in your own homes. It will work out better in the end."

In addition to those factors, we had only a minimal grasp of the depth and intensity of the historical effect, the societal PTSD of colonialism, domination, and subjection that had been inflicted on the indigenous peoples of Canada. We did not explore nor attempt to understand how these realities shaped their perception of the "gospel" that we were introducing and demonstrating among them.

To this day, those of us who live and interact in this region must face the unintended consequences of our history. We must be honest about the details, and listen well to how the story is told by those whose lives were involuntarily shaped and changed forever. We want to own the distortions of the gospel message, and the violations against human dignity, personhood, and identity that occurred.

As I listen to the Indigenous people in my world, it's a story of mixed outcomes. For some it's a story of unimaginable loss and unresolved grief due to separation from family and community. Others look back on their experience at our mission's residential school with deep appreciation for their exposure to the Scriptures and the godly examples of staff.

It's a story with different versions that we as missionaries can't tell by ourselves. Some parts make us sad and repentant. Others cause us to rejoice. Even as we celebrate the good fruit, we want to be humbly transparent about our mistakes. 🕊

*Merle and Rita Nisly have been an integral part of this story since 1971 when they began serving in the mission-run boarding school. Later they transitioned to church planting, focusing more intentionally on language and cultural studies. Their ministry has included pastoring, mentoring, administration, teaching, and consulting. Questions or feedback are welcome at [merle.nisly@gmail.com](mailto:merle.nisly@gmail.com).*

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## **The God Who Sees** *continued from page 4*

every single time—the face of a parent who is so loving, full of understanding, eternally patient, just waiting on us.

I've learned that I don't have to wait until I'm in the desert. I've loved to turn to that face all the time. I think that not only through this ministry but through my entire Christian life, God was bringing me to that point of knowing that is really, truly the one necessary thing. I love looking to God throughout the day for everything—anything. Nothing can separate us from that. 🕊