

JOINING JESUS IN THE CLASSROOM OF LIFE

BY TIM YODER

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As summer winds to its end, the anticipation of the beginning of school begins to build in students across the country. Students are beginning fall sports practices. Most of us can remember the anticipation of that very first day of school - containing both nervous anticipation and sometimes a little fear. There was an anticipation of seeing friends again on a more consistent basis and maybe some uncertainty how those friendships would unfold. Some had a lot of dread because their style of learning did not fit into the structure of school they attended. Between being a student and a teacher, I am looking forward to my 35th "first day" of school. Some of the feelings are the same, the nervous anticipation of new experiences and a sense of a fresh start. The mistakes of the previous year are a memory, and the excitement of a clean slate stretches before me. As students learn academic lessons or practice on the sports field, every good teacher and every good coach has specific goals and skills they hope to teach and impart to these students. Everything they do is with that goal in mind. Learning is expected.

Learning is an adventure for our whole life. We often expect young children to learn and obtain certain benchmarks at certain ages. When these benchmarks are not met, parents naturally, and often legitimately, become concerned and worry that something is wrong with their child. Learning is expected as long as we are in some kind of formal school. At some point we can easily settle into a pattern of thinking that there is little more that we need to learn. We get a pretty good sense of what we are good at and what we are terrible at. The effort to learn new things seems to outweigh the benefits. The sense of anticipation begins to wane.

As we get older, the expectations to learn a new software program at work or a new procedure to do a familiar task can lead to stress and discomfort. The benefits of learning on brain health has been well documented. At all ages, learning new things helps create neural pathways within the brain. Brown University neuroscientist and psychiatrist Judson Brewer notes in his book *Unwinding Anxiety: New Science*

Shows How to Break the Cycles of Worry and Fear to Heal Your Mind that maintaining a curious and open attitude toward whatever is going on around you helps reduce the physical and psychological effects of anxiety. Brewer found that the more open a person was to new experiences, the less activity the brain had in regions associated with anxiety. "Tightness, rigidity, and a narrow view are all associated with contraction," he says. "But curiosity and openness tend to bring about lightness and freedom."

Accepting the invitation to live life with Jesus as Lord of your life is to accept a lifetime of continual learning. Jesus' call is to "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:29-30 NIV). Jesus' call is to join him in a learning adventure that comes without negative stress. This learning brings rest to our souls. The call to learn from Jesus is to trust his guidance and the curriculum and training program that he personally designs for each one. He knows exactly what each one of us needs to learn next and how difficult the tests should be.

As we learn new things the human brain builds new neural pathways. If we don't use certain skills, the brain prunes those pathways to make the brain work more efficiently. As believers, we are called not to be "conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds." In doing so, we will be able to "learn to know God's will for [us], which is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2 NLT).

As we learn to walk in step with the Spirit, we will not continue in old ways of thinking and acting out. We will learn to adopt the patterns of thinking and acting like Jesus. With the advent of the modern MRI machine, we can see that the interplay of action and thinking in the process of learning actually changes how the brain looks. It literally changes the way we think.

The Bible calls us to continually be in a training program. I Timothy 4:7b-8 calls us to "train [ourselves] to be godly. For physical

training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (NIV). We are often used to learning and training for some academic pursuit, but we forget that we are to also be in a training program for righteousness.

After initially finishing in second place two years in a row at the CrossFit Games, Matthew Fraser has been crowned multiple years in a row as the “fittest man on earth.” When asked what changed, he gave four things that helped him improve. First, he “cut the junk.” He gave up desserts. He changed his training schedule to see what his body was capable of doing in various states of fatigue. He found someone to analyze his weaknesses and help him improve. Finally, he embraced temporary pain.

As we are on this continual learning adventure with Jesus, we can apply those same principles to our own lives. If we are serious about training for godliness, we will be serious about what we bring into our lives. We cannot expect to learn the things God wants us to learn if we continually bring media and information into our minds that is contrary to Jesus’ curriculum.

We need to have an intentional spiritual training schedule. Carve out times of intentional Bible reading and prayer. We have more resources for daily reading than any generation

before us. YouVersion Bible app has multiple reading programs, sends reminders when you miss a day, and allows you to have an accountability partner. This is just one of many apps that are available to us.

Just because we are in Jesus’ training program does not mean that there are no tests or temporary pain. God disciplines and trains his children. As he does this, we need to trust that he knows it will bring the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” (Heb. 12:11 KJV) This training program has eternal value.

We are willing to take on the training program of Jesus because he is our hope. He is the program director and the source of the power, through the Holy Spirit, that allows us to be successful in the training program that he designed.

So if you are going back to school, been out of school for years, facing a need to learn something new at work, or retired and given a new opportunity, embrace it as a gift from Jesus in his curriculum of life and watch him transform your life. 📖



Tim pastors at Maple Glen Mennonite Church, Grantsville, Maryland and teaches at Northern Garrett High School. He is married to Londa and enjoys spending time with their four children.

Multiply 2021 Tidbits

To watch a sermon, listen to a workshop, or view photos from Multiply 2021 weekend, visit our website at www.cmcrosedale.org and click on the Media tab in the top menu.





BY ABBY YODER

Reprinted from Connections, August 2021.

After months of work, meetings, and preparation, our annual Multiply Conference has come and, seemingly in the blink of an eye, gone for another season of time. Attending the event, one of the questions that came to mind as I observed a busily conversing crowd in the foyer was “What are we doing here?” (This is a common thought for me when I enter a room and look blankly at what lies before me!) I also wondered why I came. What did we all expect to get out of this? I asked several people this question and received varying answers, but the major overlying theme of the responses was connection: the desire to see people *face to face* with adult conversation, and sweet renewal of fellowship with friends. Perhaps it was because this conference was close to home for me, perhaps simply because I am learning to know more people, or because I am learning to overcome my introverted tendencies, but the conference was one that I felt welcomed to personally, like I was surrounded by friends who cared and that made it easy to be together and enjoy the setting.

Breakout sessions are one of my favorite elements of conference. These inspire me to pursue lines of thinking and learning that stretch me and give new perspectives on my life and the world. This year since I was assisting in childcare most of the time, I was only able to catch the second session of Conflict Resolution 101 (Preston and Liz Yoder) and thoroughly enjoyed this engaging presentation. We discussed how communication and pressure levels can work together at rising levels until a certain point when the intensity will override the ability to relate. The input was well researched and shared so that I found it easy to correlate with my own conflicts and identify red-flag situations before they blow up.

Sunday morning’s message from Merlin Miller (of Riverview Mennonite Church) refocused me on the message I am communicating to the world: Is it Christ? Is the whole being of who Christ is exuding through my words, my social media posts, my connections with my children? The message was shared not as a hammer, but as a gentle touch from a friend and is so timely for me. My three children are young (ages 4 and under) and in my striving to get my life in order, it is so easy to push them aside, communicating that my current task is more important than hearing them. Some aspects of the fruit of the

Spirit of God *living in me* come to mind: *kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control*. On some days, when everything flows smoothly and no one gets in my way, I may think that this following Jesus thing is going great, but it takes testing and trials to see what is really inside of my heart. Anyone can be pleasant as long as they aren’t pushed, but it takes a miracle of Jesus to take a hardened soul and produce gentleness when natural instincts want to rage.

One personal conversation with a friend remains present in my memory as she described learning to connect with people over the past year on Zoom meetings. My friend described the screen being like a wall between people and how difficult it can be to communicate kindness through that to the hearers, especially when in a face-to-face setting you might want to wrap an emotional person in a hug. Some of the ways that she learned to overcome these blocks was with facial expressions, using more voice tone changes along with eye contact to communicate, “You matter to me. I’m giving you my complete attention. I care about what you are saying.” It occurred to me that while Zoom is on a visible screen between us, hundreds of invisible walls exist in our daily lives that we have to navigate to truly connect with souls. Some may seem simple, like meeting a new person and pressing through the newness of learning to know them in order to gain a friend. Others could be much more complicated, like gaining back the confidence of a hurt friend, overcoming age barriers, personality differences, and personal histories. One will never overcome these obstacles of connection by force or manipulation.

Keeping this picture in my mind as I approach relationships gives me inspiration on how to truly be together with others, when the walls between soul and soul are no longer there. Breaking down the divisions that keep us apart, I can open the way with kindness and love as Christ did in giving his life up for others.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14 NIV). 🕊️



Abby is married to Dean, pastor at Townline Mennonite Church. Alongside being a mom of three daughters, Abby thrives on life outdoors, which includes caring for the myriad of animals on their small farm and maintaining a working retriever training/breeding kennel.



Becoming Anabaptist

BY JESSICA MILLER

Heinz Gaugel/BehaltCyclorama

Photo used with permission from Amish and Mennonite Heritage Center

I was not raised Mennonite. In fact, when I first met my husband Jeff, I was immediately turned off by the fact that he was a Mennonite. My experience with that tradition was extremely limited. I just knew they dressed very differently than me and they probably didn't use electricity or drive cars. They also thought they needed to do certain works to earn their salvation and they might not be saved.

After addressing the worst of these misunderstandings I had, Jeff and I began to discuss theology. When Jeff explained to me that one of the distinctives of Anabaptist theology is a Christ-centered hermeneutic, I countered, "That's not distinctive to Anabaptists; that's just biblical!" As we discussed and compared our theology, I couldn't find very much difference. I'm sure it helped that we had both received formal Bible training at non-denominational schools.

As we discussed the theological distinctives of Anabaptism, the only one that seemed unique to me was the doctrine of non-resistance. Though I personally believed in non-resistance, I had never been part of a church or organization that included this in their doctrinal statement and I wasn't sure how I felt about that. Out of concern for unity in the body of Christ, I worried that this was an unnecessary and highly controversial doctrine to emphasize. My concerns were elevated in the first year of our marriage when Jeff was rejected from a pastoral position he applied for because of his views on non-resistance. At the same time, I grew in my respect for him and his convictions, and I saw that there is a cost to standing on this teaching of scripture. I also grew increasingly aware of how much Christian nationalism had replaced biblical Christianity in many American churches. At the same time, I often felt like an outsider in our conference because I wasn't sure I fully embraced making such an emphasis on this doctrine that seemed to be so central to what it means to be a Mennonite.

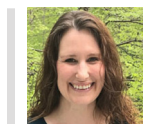
Enter 2020 and the most polarizing political climate in my lifetime so far.

My respect and appreciation for our conference grew by leaps and bounds as I watched many in the Evangelical world descend into an abyss of unsubstantiated conspiracy theories and a politically-motivated apocalyptic cult. After scrolling past post after post of bizarre Facebook feeds, I found myself increasingly blessed and refreshed by the words of wisdom in the CMC women's Connections Group on Facebook and in the Beacon articles.

Only recently, however, did the dots fully connect and I understood that the very different, Christ-centered messages being promoted by CMC were related to this controversial doctrine I had initially had reservations about. At this year's Multiply conference, we heard numerous messages on this topic. In one of them, Roger Hazen explained that non-resistance is more than simply avoiding military service. Our doctrine of non-resistance is closely connected with the belief, based on Christ's teachings, regarding the separation of church and state. I realized that while Anabaptists are not the only Christians who believe in the separation of church and state, their emphasis on this distinctive, coupled with non-resistance, has seemed to keep CMC anchored in a biblical worldview focused on Christ while so many other Christians have become distracted and embroiled in politics.

Prior to the conference, Jeff and I visited Menno-Hof (an information center on Amish and Mennonites). I was choked to tears numerous times as I reflected on the history of our movement and the boldness, courage, and sacrificial love of the early Anabaptists—men and women who deliberately chose not

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Jessica is the pastor's wife and outreach director at Bean Blossom Community Church in Indiana, where she loves serving the Lord together with her husband Jeff. She is currently a contributing writer for Christianity.com.



Birth Control: A Christian Perspective

BY MARIETTA RENNE

CMC's vision to mature and multiply churches includes learning to think critically and biblically about issues in our culture. When we eagerly seek for God's Word to speak to every aspect of life, we learn, we grow, and our gospel witness expands. -BH

Part 2

Last month in Part 1 we looked at God's purpose for sex as it relates to birth control. Here we consider:

Is Birth Control Fundamentally Opposed to God's Purpose for Sex or Can Birth Control be Incorporated into God's Purpose for Sex?

Camp 1: God's Purpose for Sex is Two-Fold

This camp holds the conviction that procreation is as equally important to God's purpose for sex as is marital intimacy. This camp further divides itself into two subgroups:

Subgroup 1: This group concludes that every act of coitus must be open to procreation. Thus, this subgroup believes birth control is fundamentally opposed to God's purpose for sex. From here, Subgroup 1 divides even further. Some say natural family planning (NFP) is acceptable because it is cooperating with nature. The Roman Catholic Church falls into this group. Others say even NFP is not acceptable because it is not so "natural" (must avoid sex when fertile, which is when female libido is high) and it boasts a 98% effectiveness rate when used properly. Thus, much motivation and effort are employed to assure coitus occurs only when there is almost no chance of conception, which, they reason, makes it the same as any other birth control. Some in the "full quiver movement" hold to this view.

Subgroup 2: While believing procreation is equally important to God's purpose for sex, this group argues that not every conjugal act must be open to children, but rather the sexual relationship of the married couple must be open to and welcoming of children. Thus, this group concludes that birth control can be incorporated into God's purpose for sex, with some restrictions:

1. Both husband and wife must come to a mutual agreement.
2. Abortive means of birth control are not acceptable.
3. The couple must *continually* submit their fertility to God.
4. Children must be welcomed and seen as a blessing.

Those in this group make no allowance for the life goal of DINK ("double income no kids"). However, they consider some reasons legitimate. For example, a married couple *who highly values children* might prayerfully conclude they would exercise

better parenting skills if their children were not spaced too closely together; a married couple called to be missionaries might prayerfully conclude spacing out children would be wise; or if, due to a medical condition, pregnancy would put the wife's health at serious risk, a married couple might prayerfully conclude the Lord would not ask them to take such a risk *at this time* (while they wait for healing, medical advancements, God's call to take such a risk, or menopause).

Kevin DeYoung, Mark Yarhouse, Dennis Hollinger, and Denny Burk are some prominent Evangelicals in this subgroup. However, like Subgroup 1, Subgroup 2 also further divides, but this time over sterilization. Most find the likely permanence of sterilization contrary to the principle of *continually* submitting one's fertility to God and maintaining openness to his leading in a new direction. The idea is to not be *willfully* infertile. However, some find sterilization an option under certain circumstances.

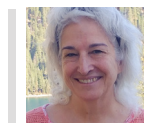
Camp 2: God's Purpose for Sex is Primarily for Intimacy; Procreation Is Secondary or Optional

Those in this group argue God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply no longer applies, either due to the Fall or because we have "already filled the Earth." They believe birth control can be incorporated into God's purpose for sex, and sterilization is not an issue. Dan Allender is a prominent Evangelical in this camp. Most in this camp still object to methods of birth control that are abortive.

What are the Mechanisms of Action of Birth Control and What are the Theological Implications?

Many forms of birth control are abortive, and the marketing of them is opaque. In the 1960s, with the introduction of the pill, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

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Marietta holds a Doctor of Nursing in nurse-midwifery. She worked as a certified nurse-midwife for 23 years and CEO of New Life Nurse-Midwifery Care in Marysville, Ohio. She is working toward becoming a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). She and her husband are members of Shiloh Mennonite Church.



The Rock, a Firm Foundation

BY MADALYN

Nearly forty years ago in Southeast Asia, a young Buddhist boy named Alex grew up in a small village in the shadow of his capital city. Like many rural children, Alex traveled long miles each day to gain an education. He worked hard, and after graduating, decided to attend college and become a teacher.

After obtaining his degree, Alex found a teaching position at an international school in the capital city. During his fifteen years at this school, he found faith through the lived example of his coworkers. It was also during this time that a dream grew in the hearts of Alex and his wife Lydia—to return to his village and establish a school that would offer a quality education and foundation for the children of his community.

As this dream took shape, the couple began to share their hopes with Rose, an American coworker and friend. Though they never asked her for help, Rose began to look for ways to become involved. She connected with Rosedale Business Group (RBG), which decided to partner with the couple to bring their dream to reality.

Their school will be called “The Rock,” in honor of their son by the same name. In August of 2022, they will open as a nursery and kindergarten with four classrooms and twelve teachers. As students grow older and as enrollment increases, the school plans to expand to include grades one through five.

Alex and Lydia’s thirty years of combined experience at the international school prepared them well to operate a school and provide an excellent education. The school will offer English classes, allowing students to become bilingual. Teachers will prioritize hands-on learning, motor skills, and reading—factors which will set them apart from other schools in the country. A safe, encouraging environment will enable students to learn, grow, and gain access to further educational opportunities.

Beyond a quality education, the school will provide fertile ground where seeds can be planted, watered, and matured. Many in their village have no understanding of the good news, and Alex and Lydia know that their day-to-day lives can be an

authentic example of love and faith. This relational approach brought transformation to their own hearts years ago.

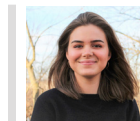
The opportunity to plant seeds could travel farther than their village, however. In recent years, as the capital city of this Southeast Asian country has grown denser, the government has relocated several departments. Many government officials now work near the site of the future school. It’s a strong possibility that many of their children will attend—which in turn could create a unique opportunity for the school’s influence to reach those who make decisions for the country.

Looking even further into the future, the school hopes to provide a stepping stone for many other young “Alex’s”. Through his education and career as an educator, Alex found faith and a desire to bring Truth to others. It is our hope that Alex’s school will raise up a new generation of Southeast Asian leaders who will take the light into their own careers, meeting those desperate for Truth and direction.

Through the generosity of CMC and other investors, much of the \$90,000 loan needed to build the school has been met. Now, we invite you to discern how you might partner with RBG in committing to the school’s future. As the school opens in 2022, opportunities will arise to provide school supplies, sponsor students, or serve in the school. As always, we ask for your prayers of blessing over Alex, Lydia, and their school. Their work will influence many in Southeast Asia, and we’re excited that CMC has a small part to play.

To donate or to find more information, visit <https://rosedaleinternational.org/rbg/therock/>. 

Names changed or omitted for security.



Madalyn lives in Rosedale, Ohio. She recently graduated from Grace College & Seminary and serves as Media Coordinator at Rosedale International.

Becoming Anabaptist *cont'd from page 4*

to seek power or safety in government, but rather to sacrificially follow the example of Christ.

This year's Multiply conference was the first conference where I no longer felt like an outsider in CMC. Even though I will probably never feel comfortable calling myself a Mennonite (since I want to be identified with Jesus and his global church rather than a specific tradition), I have realized how much I deeply embrace Anabaptist theology,

believing our doctrines to be consistent with the teachings of Jesus, and I am passionate that we have something unique to offer a world that is hungry for Jesus and weary of political division. I also love our emphasis on reaching the lost in unreached people groups and planting churches in America. I'm excited to be part of a conference that is aiming to focus on Christ and proclaim HIM! Let's keep moving forward in this mission together! 🙏

Reprinted from Connections, August 2021.

Birth Control: A Christian Perspective: Part 2 *cont'd from page 5*

adopted a new understanding of "conception" to be synonymous with *implantation* and a new definition of "pregnancy" to mean *once implantation has occurred*, thus shrouding the abortive effects of birth control.^{1,2,3}

If a method of birth control acts *after* fertilization, the method is called an *abortifacient*. No barrier methods (such as condoms and diaphragms) are abortifacients. However, the IUD is an abortifacient, and many forms of hormonal birth control are abortifacients. All hormonal forms of birth control have three mechanisms of action, and they are: 1) anovulation (inhibits ovulation), 2) thickening of cervical mucus (inhibits sperm passage), and 3) thinning the uterine wall such that if conception were to occur, the newly conceived child could not implant and would be expelled with the next menstrual cycle (early abortion).

Regarding many, if not all, hormonal forms of birth control, what we do know is that women still ovulate sometimes (anovulation fails). What we do not know is how often and how these methods still maintain a 98-99% effectiveness rating. Estimates of how often ovulation still occurs are anywhere from 2% to 60% of the time, depending on method used and expert cited.

When ovulation does occur, the concern is that one of the

other mechanisms of actions acts as a "failsafe." While thick cervical mucus may be helpful, most would not be confident in thick mucus alone as an effective form of birth control. But a thin uterine lining such that the newly conceived child could not implant? Seems more likely.

One will not find any definitive answers. Unfortunately, for those outside of Camp 1, Subgroup 1, the question becomes, how much ambiguity about the abortive potential of one's birth control is acceptable? For more specifics, check the following link:

https://media.focusonthefamily.com/topicinfo/position_statement-birth_control_pills_and_other_hormonal_contraception.pdf 🙏

¹ American College of Obstetricians Gynecologist. (2021). reVITALize: Gynecology Data Definitions. ACOG. <https://www.acog.org/practice-management/health-it-and-clinical-informatics/revitalize-gynecology-data-definitions>.

² Gens, K. (2011, November 17). When does pregnancy begin? Doctors disagree. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-when-does-pregnancy-begin/when-does-pregnancy-begin-doctors-disagree-idUSTRE7AG24B20111117>.

³ Issues of Conscience. (2012). Clearing Rhetorical Minefields: Abortifacient vs. Contraception. Pamphlets: Minefields. <https://www.consciencelaws.org/publications/pamphlets/pamphlet-minefields.pdf>.