



# Vestry Voices

## The Church Family Newsletter

First Congregational  
Church of Clinton

September 2022

Editor  
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### Gain Through Loss

[Jesus] said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Luke 9:23-24 (NIV)



Rev. Gary Kiontke



This double command from Jesus to His disciples that they must daily disregard their own interests and suffer on their cross even to the point of death is one of seven similar statements from Him in the Spirit-inspired Gospels (see also: Matthew 10:38-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:27; 17:33; John 12:25). Since seven is God's number of completion or perfection, we must conclude that it is God's will that the Christian life is difficult to live. Christians must expect difficulty in their lives. And, they should always prayerfully prepare to surrender to God ordained hardships with the same love to God and others that Jesus showed throughout His public ministry as He prepared for The Cross. He suffered to reconcile the world to God; and, Christians suffer to show a cynical consumer driven world the power of love through suffering. One of the dominant themes of Scripture is that we often gain a better understanding of God, and draw closer to Him, through loss (Philippians 3:7-11).

The Church of Jesus is being negatively influenced by the dominant culture around it. The United States of America is a media driven consumerist society. From every side people are being subtly persuaded they are entitled to have everything they want, and they are entitled to have their desires met. This is the same old lie, but now dressed up in highly attractive short videos that challenge no one's attention span. This has been done so effectively that many professing Christians have forgotten the seven Spirit inspired commands from Jesus scattered throughout the Gospels that directly forbid them from feeling they are entitled to have all their desires met by God.

Out of all the passages in the Bible (including the books of Moses) that speak of gain through loss, we will look at three more passages: one from Jesus and two from the church planting apostle Paul. These should be enough to establish the truth of Jesus' last Beatitude, "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12, NAS). The expectation and hope is that as you read through Scripture on your own you will find many of the other passages that speak to gain through difficulty and disappointment.

Just before Jesus left the Upper Room, after His last Passover with the apostles, He concluded a long discourse on what it meant that He was going to die on the Cross with these words, "These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye have tribulation; but be of good courage: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, Darby). Jesus spoke many uncomfortable things to His closest disciples, telling them how to have peace in Him. In order to have His peace they would have to fully trust Him, even in tribulation. However, He also said they are having tribulation in the world. With the death of their leader only hours away, this was certainly true for the apostles. And, it is also true that the same adversary who challenged God concerning the devotion of Job (Job 1), is accusing brothers and sisters of Jesus before God both day and night (Revelation 12:10). With this, Jesus warned all His disciples of every age until He returns, some of them will always be experiencing tribulation. By this He meant that somewhere in the world some of His followers are suffering for Him, not that all His disciples always experience tribula-

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## **Gain Through Loss** ( ... continued from page #1 )

tion. Still, sooner or later all Christians will have their time to suffer tribulation for His sake. Apart from Jesus, tribulation breaks a person; but, all who are in Him by grace through faith can have courage in tribulation because He has overcome the world.

As Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, at the close of their first two-year church planting mission, they revisited many of the churches they previously started, to strengthen and encourage the disciples. Of all the words they said, The Holy Spirit chose to have these words recorded in Scripture, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:21-27, NAS). We must heed these words. No one who desires to be in God's Kingdom and spend eternity with Him will escape tribulations. In fact, Jesus told Peter that even when people willingly sacrifice for Him, the blessings they are given will be accompanied by persecution, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age ... along with persecutions" (Mark 10:28-30). This too is in keeping with the theme of gain through loss.

As the time approached for the apostle Paul's departure from this earth, he wrote these words to Timothy, the young man he had mentored, who was now bishop in Ephesus, "all

who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 4:6; 3:12, NAS). Again, most Christians will not suffer tribulation and persecution all the time; but, all Christians must be aware of the words of Jesus and His apostles that at certain times in their lives, if they are living according to God's will, they will share in the sufferings of Jesus (Philippians 3:7-11).

We must all learn to read Scripture with the heart and mind of God through The Holy Spirit. It is a natural tendency of all people to interpret what they read to be consistent with the accepted truths of their culture which often contradict the Truth of God. Whenever people select passages that support the dominant beliefs of their culture, while ignoring passages that contradict what they want to believe, they open themselves up to heresy. One of the most dangerous heresies is that when people come to faith in Jesus they are guaranteed an easy life.

Let us accept the truth of the passages discussed in this article. Then we will be equipped to endure the hardships that are guaranteed to all Christians at certain times in their lives. This is one more reason why all Christians need to be active members in a local church. This involves members meeting together informally in smaller groups, even one-on-one, several times during the week outside of formal times of prayer, study, fellowship and worship.

## **Sundays in September**

We will have Communion on September 4 and 18.

In September we begin our survey of the Gospel of John with fourteen weeks of Old Testament narratives linked to portions of John's Gospel.

Starting on the last Sunday of Advent, we will focus on large passages from John's Gospel linked to portions of Psalms.

Here are the details on the sermon texts and themes for each Sunday in September:

Date	Scripture	Title
September 4	<i>Genesis 1:1-6, 24-28, 31; 2:1-3 &amp; John 1:1-5</i>	God created by His Word
September 11	<i>Genesis 21:1-3; 22:1-14 &amp; John 1:29</i>	God provides for those with faith to obey at any cost
September 18	<i>Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17 &amp; John 1:50-51</i>	God reveals Himself to those trying to outrun sin
September 25	<i>Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17 &amp; John 8:58</i>	God's covenant name is I AM

## ***It Just Happens\*... “The man after God’s own heart”***

By Petros

The Bible Study group has voted to study the book of Psalms. David, the young shepherd boy who would become King David – the man after God's own heart, is credited with composing about half the Book of Psalms. David, the brave young man of God who killed the giant Goliath with a single stone. David, the adulterer and murderer who was forgiven by God. David, who danced before the Lord, praising his name. David had the ability to maintain a direct line with God as he went through the high and low points in his life. I personally want to study how David managed to be a man after God's own heart; 24/7. Obviously, David knew God more than the average bear because of the extreme lifestyle he had.

\*..., I heard that the book of Psalms is mainly composed of David's prayers to God and all were written in praise of God. At first, I thought David had a way of prayer that developed a relationship which was based on communicating with God; unlike Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua – godly men whom God spoke to one on one. A search online reveals, “David had the heart of a warrior for God and the Lord was with him. (God sees our heart. We can choose to have faith in God and live a life that glorifies God or nothing. God knows when our heart is sold out to Him or not.) David was unashamed of his faith and believed God would give him the victory. In the story of David and Goliath, we get a clear glimpse of David’s heart and life.” “David went up against Goliath in the name of the Lord Almighty, ... believed in his heart that the Lord would hand Goliath over to him ... recognized that the battle before him was the Lord’s battle ... knew the world would soon learn and know that there was a ... victory that God was about to bring ... advanced towards Goliath with full confidence in God Almighty.” <https://agfaithchapel.org/sermons-messages/how-to-be-like-king-david-with-a-heart-for-god-life-is-a-journey-part-10>. “God views partial obedience as disobedience.”

\*..., this month was quiet with progress on the barn for a house of praise and worship. It makes me relate to the quietness I put myself in when I try to get too many things done before my love returns home from work. The Deceiver knows which button does the most separation with me. I feel the need to pray like David. I know in my heart there is a purpose and Kingdom life for all who love God. \*..., when I searched online for the promise of Romans 8:28, I also found Paul discusses the differences between living by the Spirit and living by the flesh. He points out that living by the Spirit makes us sons and daughters of God. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Romans 8:16, 17 (NIV)).

Then Paul compares the sufferings that we face in this life with “the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). He entreats us to wait patiently and to trust that the Spirit intercedes for us when we don’t know what to pray for. <https://www.fh.org/blog/what-is-meaning-all-things-work-together>. After last month’s revelation on how to live the Kingdom life, I did a poor job to live “as one who's been forgiven ... my debts are paid ... I know my name is clear before my Father ... Your Hallowed Name, O may I bear with honor.” I’m down but not out. Praise God for His Word, grace and mercy.

\*..., I heard in Revelation that everyone has an account that numbers our prayers – even our smallest prayer. And it will be used in a significant way during the last days. It made me realize that God is counting the times we reach out to Him. How merciful is our God who desires. But more important is that we are missing the opportunity to build a relationship as David had with the God who wants to be our God. Meanwhile, living in the Kingdom of God is only near.

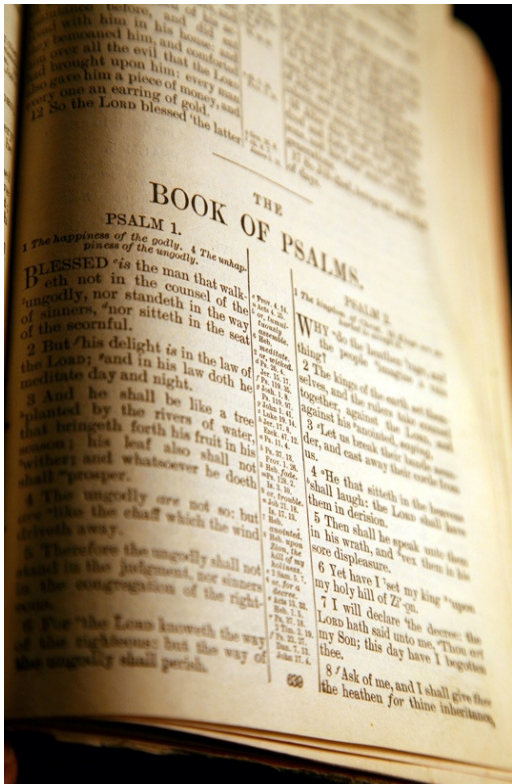
**Author’s note:** This article’s title “It Just Happens\*...” counters the cliché ... things just don't happen. “It” will stand for the world view one chooses to abide in. “Just” is the character of the God who wants to be our God. He has made us in His image – righteous; by faith in God. “Happens” will be the events and experiences God uses to grow our faith. All things work for the glory of God. When we turn from our ways and we look to God and live His Word – His plan for us unfolds.



## **FCC Will Have a Table at Olde Home Day** **Saturday, September 10 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM — in the Park**

FCC will have a table at Clinton's *Olde Home Day* on Saturday, September 10. We are on the side of Walnut Street across from the church, close to the Russian Icon Museum.

## **Results of Bible Study Survey** **Psalms**



Eight final ballots were received to choose which topic we would study from the top three choices of the first round of voting. The result was close, but Psalms was the clear winner.

Any of the three finalists would be difficult to teach. There is little biblical data on angels. The Greek of Hebrews is difficult for Greek scholars to understand. There are many passages where Study Bibles do not give a clear explanation because there is not one. (Hebrews 6:4-12 being just one such passage.) The difficulty with Psalms is that there are so many (150) psalms of so many different categories: at least ten categories, maybe fifteen!

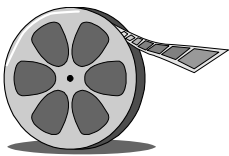
I have consulted over ten reliable sources. It makes sense to study fifty Psalms in fifty weeks, taking about a year for the study. And we sample three to five Psalms of each category.

It is essential that everyone know the basics of Hebrew poetry, especially the three types of couplets: similar, additional and contrast. I will have a basic handout by Sunday, September 4.

Walter Brueggemann has the best overall structure for the book of Psalms. He sees three large categories he calls Psalms of: orientation, disorientation and reorientation. He says it is helpful to think of the overall Bible story of: creation, fall and the Gospel of Jesus.

The first Study would be Wednesday, September 14 at 6:00 PM. It makes sense for us to start with Psalm 1. It is a Psalm of orientation, describing the blessing to people who live by God's Word.

## **Movie Night — Part One and Part Two** **Friday, September 23 and October 28 at 7:00 PM**



We show a movie once each month, in Fellowship Hall, usually on the fourth Friday. The movies shown in the past have covered a range of genres, and were usually thought provoking.

We are able to show these movies based on the church's CVLI® license. However, this license does not allow us to advertise or publicize the names of these movies to the general public, and they are always free of charge.

We usually have free snacks available, and you are also welcome to bring your own meal, if you wish (many of us do!). So, please join us for a night out at the movies!



## Short Remembrances of:

Norma Gonet, Nancy Moody, and Joe Donnini

### Norma Gonet

Sally Camara: “One incident that stands out in my mind was a trip Norma and I took into Worcester for a doctor appointment. We were chatting away and unfortunately missed our exit, and being unfamiliar with Worcester at the time, had no idea where we were. We drove around awhile hoping to recognize where we were in relation to the doctor’s office, but nothing was clicking. We finally drove into a Dunkin Donut parking lot and stopped to pray, asking the Lord to direct us. A woman pulled in next to us and I got out and asked her if she knew where Dr. X’s office was. Her face lit up and she announced that she had just come from there! Of all the places we could have pulled over and the people we could have asked, God had gone before us and provided the directions we needed. She gave us directions and off we went! Through all this, Norma never displayed an anxious moment or voiced a concern of being late. She remained calm and composed through all the confusion. That was Norma! She certainly had the character of Christ.”



Above: John and Norma Gonet

Allie Cooper: “Really made me feel welcome from day one. Always acknowledged me with a hug and a smile. Always had a wise and Godly word to say. I enjoyed conversing with her. A great and kind Christian lady. I do miss her.”

Pastor Gary Kiontke: “I first met Norma Gonet when the FCC Search Committee came to the church in Lexington, where I did mentored ministry, to hear me preach on Father’s Day of 2001; and, when I later had a long meeting with the Search Committee she asked good questions ... For the first

four to five years I was here, Norma was a regular at the 6:00 AM prayer meetings at the church on Tuesday mornings; she was a prayer warrior; but being a Berkshire County boy, I especially loved the many ways she thanked God for His beautiful creation ... She had a sharp sense of humor and could turn a phrase as only a native New Englander can; I benefitted from this when I needed correcting, but I always knew I had her support ... In 2004-2005 I would go door-to-door in the church neighborhood with different deacons on Saturday mornings; she amazed me with her attention to detail by pointing out unique architectural features and details of many houses as we approached them ... I loved to hear her tell of how she and John danced to many big bands live in Shrewsbury when they were young (I had a collection of big band albums by the time I was thirty years old) ... I also remember a phrase she would use from time to time, ‘I wonder what *He* thinks of this,’ with the emphasis on *He*.”



Above: Norma Gonet with Pam Windward



### Nancy Moody

Sally Camara: “What stands out most to me about Nancy is her steadfastness. With her age and numerous health issues, it would have been easy for her to skip church and stay home and no one would have faulted her for it. But no ... not Nancy! She loved to be in church and was committed no matter what. She was one of the great “overseers” in the kitchen. Thanksgiving dinner had to be with real china....no paper plates with Nancy in charge! I can recall numerous stylish outfits of hers being ruined by the bleach we added to the dish water, but she took it in stride ... a brief frown and then that great smile!”

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## Short Remembrances ... ( ... continued from page #5 )



*Above and right: Nancy Moody*

Allie Cooper: “I considered Nancy a wonderful Christian friend. She helped me so much when I started the coffee hour here. She was always laughing and so kind. I was blessed to have known her. A wonderful family and church family lady. I will miss her.”

Dorice Bowman: “I have so many wonderful memories of Nancy. She was always smiling her warm and generous smiles. When we had worship upstairs, Nancy sat in the pew right in front of me and we would chat ‘over the pew;’ chat about our families ‘till service began. Nancy and I were one of the teams to ‘set up’ for coffee hour. She was a great co-worker and we planned what we would bring for ‘goodies.’ Our friendship goes way back and if there ever was a time I didn’t have a smile, she gave me one of hers.”

Pastor Gary Kiontke: “Nancy Moody loved her two families: the one she started with her husband Everett, Sr. with six children, and her church family ... In my early years

with the church she told me about a special Christmas Eve when she was a girl: as everyone walked out the doors after closing the Candlelight Service with *Silent Night*, they all noticed that a gentle snowfall had begun while they were worshipping and by morning there was a few inches of snow on the ground, she told me, ‘That is the best Christmas’ ... Her family, including great-grandchildren from Jen and Adam, came together every Christmas Eve for the Candlelight service; she was always beaming that night, and together her family made up more than half the people attending the most attended church service of the year ... I visited my brother in Christ, her son Ray, many times over the years; Nancy would let us visit, but when she sensed our visit was nearing the end, and she had something on her heart she wanted to talk about, she would talk to me – and good things for the church came from those times ... She was only one month older than my mother, but she lived the love of Jesus more than any person I have known since my mother’s mother.



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## Short Remembrances ... ( ... continued from page #6 )

### Joe Donnini

Sally Camara: “So much can be said about Joe. Where to begin? I was privileged to be his friend for the past 10 to 12 years. Most Sundays after church he could be found with the ‘girls,’ having brunch, taking a drive, playing cards or having coffee at McDonalds. He could strike up a conversation with any stranger and somehow, point blank ask for the age of any woman he met and them not be offended. It was a special skill he had! :) One such encounter with a stranger stands out to me. We were waiting outside at Over Easy to be seated for lunch. Joe had his Navy hat on and there was another 90-plus man who also had a navy hat on. The two of them got in quite a conversation, sharing stories of where they were stationed and what they did. It seemed so profound to me that these two were the very few left who had those memories and experiences to share. Joe always got a ‘Thank you for your service’ whenever he wore that hat, but to hear these two relate to each other was quite a touching moment for me. I’ll always appreciate Joe’s common sense approach to life, his wit, his helpfulness (especially in the church kitchen) and his commitment to prayer.”



*Above: Joe Donnini*

Allie Cooper: “The nicest man I ever met. He was Christian love at its finest. We had a great relationship – fun and respectful. I liked to kid with him. He truly was my brother in Christian love. I miss him very much.”

Pastor Gary Kiontke: “I first met Joe Donnini with his wife Betty (Nancy’s sister) on the Sunday in July, 2001 when the church called me to be its pastor ... As we drove up to the parsonage in our rented U-Haul in August, a team of mem-

bers was doing last minute yard work and there was Joe, patiently and perfectly rolling up a garden hose. Debi looked at me, smiled and said, ‘He is just like your Dad;’ I was blessed for over seventeen years to have two earthly fathers: one in Clinton and one in the Berkshires ... Another early story that was typical of Joe: sometime in late October, 2001, I heard noises in the sanctuary from my nearby office, I went to investigate and there was Joe on the floor with a can of white paint, a brush and some newspapers, he said, ‘I noticed the baseboard had a lot of scuff marks so I’m repainting it’ ... Joe never missed a Thursday evening prayer meeting until a few years ago; everyone always shared before we began to pray, and it was in these times I got to know much about Joe as a person – in addition to his prayers which were so personal and full of concern for others ... I never heard Joe say a bad word about anyone, he would sometimes express disagreement with something someone said (no name given) and how he could not understand how some people could do some things; but, it was always clear that he liked people and liked to be with people.



*Above: Joe Donnini with Nancy Moody*

# SEPTEMBER 2022

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 (**)	2	3
4 Communion Sunday (Note #1)	5 LABOR DAY	6	7	8 (**)	9	10 Olde Home Day (Note #2)
11 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #3)	12	13	14 (††)	15 (**)	16	17
18 Communion Sunday (Note #4)	19	20	21 (††)	22 (**)	23 Movie Night (Note #5)	24
25 FCC Worship; Coffee Hour after Worship (Note #6)	26	27	28 (††)	29 (**)	30	

## Calendar Notes:

- #1) 9/4 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #2) 9/10 — *Olde Home Day*, in the Park, information table (set up at 8:00 AM), runs until 4:00 PM.
- #3) 9/11 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- #4) 9/18 — Communion Sunday: **10:27 AM.**
- #5) 9/23 — Movie Night — in Fellowship Hall: **7:00 PM.**
- #6) 9/25 — FCC Worship: **10:27 AM. ALSO:** Coffee Hour after Worship.
- (††) Wednesday Bible Study: **6:00 PM** (in Fellowship Hall). ***Psalms study begins on 9/14.***
- (\*\*) Thursday Prayer: **3:00 PM** (in FCC Parlor).

