

July/August 2026

Today

refresh, refocus, renew

CONSIDERING THE BEES

ALSO: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: WORDS OF LIFE

Dear Friends:

All good things come to an end, and in July 2026 I will be retiring as the director of ReFrame Ministries. After 14 years leading ReFrame, leaving feels a bit bittersweet. Throughout this time there have been successes, challenges, and even a few disappointments, but through it all I have immensely enjoyed the honor and privilege of serving with ReFrame's gifted, dedicated staff. I give thanks and praise God for each member of the team and for the passion my colleagues have for sharing the love of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly the greatest privilege and joy the ReFrame team has is in hearing how God has used our efforts and content to bless people around the world.



So what's next? A few years ago I wrote a series of *Today* devotions while hiking on the Appalachian Trail, a 2,000-mile pathway stretching from Georgia to Maine. In August, I plan to hit the trail again and complete the entire journey. When I'm not on the trail, I'll be teaching two courses at Calvin University next year. I'm also looking forward to picking up a stalled book project on missions in China. Beyond that, I look forward to new opportunities for serving the church as God leads.

As I look forward to new adventures and challenges, I humbly thank God for the honor of leading ReFrame, and I look forward to seeing how God continues to bless and use this wonderful ministry.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kurt Selles

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“Considering the Bees”
Don Byker



**“The Ten Commandments:
Words of Life”**
Kurt Selles

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TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 76, Number 4, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 300 East Beltline Ave NE, Grand Rapids MI 49506-1208.

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**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

Considering the Bees

july

Don Byker

In my younger days I learned from relatives that my family name, *Byker*, means “beekeeper.” Then, about 20 years ago, one of my sons and I started beekeeping. We took a class, got hive boxes and other equipment, and purchased a batch of live bees. Our experiences and observations, along with learning from other beekeepers, has been fascinating. For me, this has reinforced my commitment to care for bees as well as all of God’s creation. Thanks for joining me in considering the bees. Enjoy!

Don Byker has been a pastor, a chaplain, and a seminary administrator. Now retired, he serves as a neighbor, church member, and community volunteer. He and his wife, Donna, have four married children and four grandchildren.

The Ten Commandments: Words of Life

august

Kurt Selles

In August let’s explore the Ten Commandments as the words of life that we receive from God. God’s law given in these commandments supplies the basic foundation for how God calls us to live in his world. If we want to summarize these commands in one word, it would be “love.” That’s because, just as Jesus indicated in Matthew 22:37-40, the commandments teach us (1) to love God with all of our being and (2) to love all the people around us.

Kurt Selles is the director of ReFrame Ministries, which publishes these devotions. Kurt has served as a missionary in Taiwan and China and has also taught missions. Kurt and his wife, Vicki, have three adult children.

IN THE BEGINNING . . . BEES!

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.
—Hebrews 11:3

I started beekeeping about 20 years ago and then dropped out of it for a while. After a few more years, however, I got excited to start into it again.

A problem that occurred earlier was that my previous hives became "dead-outs." I needed new honeybees. So I called my beekeeper friend and ordered a couple of boxes of bees. He said he could prepare a couple of "nucs" (small nucleus colonies) of bees to begin new hives, but I would need to wait till they were ready for transport to my beehives.

I wonder if God was excited to put all of the pieces in place when he created this wonderful world. Genesis 1 is so full and bursting with life that we can barely begin to describe the vast and marvelous variety of things God created. Among the many unnamed creatures, honeybees are often over-

looked. "In the beginning . . ." God created them too.

And what's truly amazing is that God did not order the first batch of honeybees. He created them at his command! This is what Hebrews 11:3 reminds us about.

Out of God's creative genius and far beyond our imagining and ability, God created this universe and all living things, including bees. Along with bees, you and I have our beginning from that original creation. I invite you to join me in gathering glimpses of these things and to be amazed.

Creator Spirit, we praise and thank you for creating everything—including bees as well as us—so that we can reflect your goodness and glory. Amen.

A HOME FOR BEES

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”
—Acts 17:26

Our reading from Psalm 104 paints a picture of all God’s provisions for the creatures in his wonderful world. But when we look around us, it’s easy to find hungry people and other creatures without shelter or food. Homelessness—for beleaguered people, habitat-deprived creatures, or even hiveless bees—is not the way it’s supposed to be.

Honeybees have lived in a variety of homes over the course of time. A hollow log in a sheltered area can provide a great home for bees. People have also provided homes or hives for them. In earlier times a pot or basket would work well. Beehives for producing honey today are commonly made of stackable boxes with removable frames.

Last spring, my son and I installed two small colonies of honeybees in our bee boxes.

The process is fairly simple. We transferred frames from a couple of “nucs” (nucleus colonies of bees) into our boxes. The bees quickly settled into their new home.

As a family, my wife and children and I have lived in many different places, and God has supplied all that we have needed. We find strength in knowing that God has been with us in all the places where we have been called to live.

From the abundance God has given, may we open our hearts and hands to help people who need a home today.

Lord, thank you for providing us with homes and so much more. Fill us with gratitude and generosity, that we may share with people in need. Amen.

A TALE OF TWO HIVES

Since you excel in everything . . . see that you also excel
in this grace of giving.
—2 Corinthians 8:7

When we installed two new “nucs” of bees in our hive boxes last spring, both seemed ready to become strong colonies. After a few weeks, one hive seemed to be doing better than the other, but we were not worried. Both were still growing and improving.

During summer—when bees build up and increase their honey stores—we kept adding boxes to the stronger hive. By comparison, the weaker hive seemed to languish. A more careful inspection toward the end of summer revealed that the queen of the weaker hive was gone! A hive cannot survive without its queen, since she is the only bee that lays eggs to produce offspring. So our neglect in watching over that hive led to its death.

The missionary pastor Paul noticed strengths and weaknesses in the churches he served. Were the Christ-followers in

Corinth somewhat stung by the comparison Paul made in today’s passage? They excelled in many things, but Paul had to point out that they could be more gracious in giving. Failing to give generously for the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ was a serious flaw that could lead to their decline.

Christians today do well to be concerned about the decline and disbanding of churches. Apathy and stinginess can be destructive. The good news is that when God’s people are stirred to “excel in the grace of giving,” the community of believers can thrive.

Lord Jesus, you became poor for our sake so that we might become rich in your grace. Live in and through us so that we may give graciously, as you have taught us. Amen.

CURSED BEES

The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. —Romans 8:22

We might think that beekeeping should be easy: get some bees, put them in a hive, and let them do their thing, right? But a seasoned beekeeper will tell you that it's never easy. Hive beetles, varroa mites, wax moths, and foul brood disease are some of the more common threats to bees and their hives. Pesticides, pollution, habitat loss, and other threats add to the mix. Clearly the beauty and harmony of God's creation has been blighted. Honeybees are cursed along with the rest of creation. Bees need help and restoration.

In one of the most mysterious and tragic chapters of the Bible, a crafty and deceitful enemy slithers into God's good garden to subvert God's desires for his creation. Human beings—meant to reflect God's goodness—are seduced and infected. Sickness and death invade our homes and hearts.

The curse saps life from our bodies and souls, unless someone will come to save us.

We and the bees are still here, groaning but alive and kicking. This is proof of God's stubborn and strong love for us and for his whole creation. Christians are being brought from death to life by being united with Christ Jesus in his death and resurrection. And we, "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our . . . redemption. . . ."

The curse is being reversed. Thanks be to God!

Thank you, Jesus, for coming to reverse the curse of sin and death. May our hope in you energize us to wait patiently for our and all of creation's redemption. Amen.

PRAY FOR BEES

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.
—Ephesians 6:18

As a child, I was taught to pray a simple bedtime prayer. It was a “repeat-after-me” prayer, and it started like this: “Now I lay me down to sleep . . .” After memorizing it, I was encouraged to add other requests—mostly for sick family members or friends or about other concerns. Learning to pray with a parent was a good start for which I am grateful.

Over the years, my prayers have expanded and matured by fits and starts through the examples of others, prayer courses, and readings—and most profoundly by prayers in the Bible. Still, my prayers are often limited. I am still a child learning to pray. It has been a humbling path.

Near the close of his life, Paul urged Christ-followers to pray “on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” “Keep on praying for all the Lord’s people,” he said, and

“pray also for me.” These words came to mind while I was reading a book that included a prayer for the “Keeping of Bees.” Looking back, I realize that I’ve often overlooked this step in my caring for bees. No prayer is too small. Here is another lesson from the Spirit about praying on all occasions.

Are you praying in the Spirit? In what ways are your prayers maturing or being expanded? For what and whom are you being led to pray?

“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.” Continue the good and perfect teaching of your Word in our lives, Lord. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

OTHER BEES

"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." —John 10:16

As a keeper of honeybees, I've grown a bit narrowminded. I've become partial to honeybees even though I know there are lots of others—like bumblebees, sweat bees, and carpenter bees—to name a few. Recently I learned there are also mason bees, which use mud to make nests in small cavities. There are actually over 20,000 species of bees all around the world. Mind-boggling!

This could lead us to wonder about people groups too. Estimates for the number of people groups in the world range from about 11,000 to 24,000. Did you know that?

Jesus knew about other people groups—"other sheep" besides the people into which he was born. Jesus, the good shepherd, could not and would not be content in rescuing just one people group. He came to bring God's salvation to all the

people groups throughout the world.

In my thinking about honeybees, I need to remember that all of the bees in God's creation are treasured. And when it comes to people, we need to remember that each one is made in the image of God. Jesus came to rescue God's children from every people group in the whole human race.

In what ways can we show others that they are precious in God's sight?

Jesus, thank you for being the good shepherd. Thank you for rescuing us from the curse of sin and death. Guide us to pray for and work with others whom you have come to rescue as well. In your name, Amen.

BUSY BEES

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” —John 9:4-5

My favorite time at our beehives is around sunset. Gatherer bees are coming back to the hive. If I look closely, I can see the bulging pollen packs on their hind legs, holding the fruit of their labor. Amazing! These worker bees have been busy since sunrise—making the most of their opportunities to gather pollen and nectar. With darkness coming—and eventually the dark and cold of winter—the opportunity to work will end. Bees work and make honey “as long as it is day.”

In John 9, Jesus talks about being “the light of the world,” and he warns his disciples about a kind of darkness that is coming. In this chapter we see Jesus bring light to a blind man’s eyes in the face of growing opposition and looming darkness. Jesus says, “As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me.”

And did you notice that Jesus includes his followers in the work he is doing?

The rest of the story in John 9 gets very dark. We can observe a similar darkness in the world around us as well. Yet Jesus, the light of the world, keeps working to bring sight to the blind.

In your coming and going, what are your opportunities to shine? How can you make the most of your opportunities to spread the light of Jesus?

Lord Jesus, live in us and through us to bring your light into the darkness of this world. May the fruit of your goodness and truth shine brightly as we make the most of the opportunities we have. In your name, Amen.

ONE HIVE

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

—1 Corinthians 12:12

People who count honeybees estimate that there are 20,000 to 60,000 bees in any given hive. Yet there is one hive. The hive has three basic kinds of bees: the queen, workers, and drones. Yet there is one hive. All of the bees work together by instinct to function as an interdependent community, like a living organism.

The Christ-followers at Corinth, estimated to be about 40 to 150 people, were not acting as “one.” This multiethnic group of recent converts included a mixture of educated and working-class people, rich and poor, and they struggled to care for and show God’s love to one another. The letter Paul wrote to them describes a divided, individualistic, selfish, and proud gaggle of believers. At best, they revealed that they were many parts struggling to become one body.

Similarly, our world today does little to encourage us to believe and act like we are an organic, interdependent community—one body. Individualism, privilege, possessions, and self-gratification are often the altars at which people worship. These behaviors make being one body most difficult.

Christ-followers can be one body only “in Christ.” This is not instinctual. It takes heart change and the hard and humble work of love. Will you pray and work humbly to love and serve with others who make up the body of Christ?

Lord Jesus, inspire us all to work toward the unity of your one body. Change our hearts and energize us to love and build up others as we serve with you. Amen.

BUILDER BEES

We are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field,
God's building.
—1 Corinthians 3:9

Honeybees are great builders. Inside their hive they make honeycombs consisting of hundreds of six-sided cells. These are the basic building blocks of beehives. The amazing geometry of these cells maximizes storage space while minimizing the wax needed for a stable structure. Beeswax is an ingenious blend of nectar, pollen, saliva, and other ingredients produced by worker bees to form the walls of the cells, which keep their shape in both heat and cold. While these cells are used mainly to store honey and some pollen and nectar, some of the cells are also used as nurseries for eggs and larvae.

Hive building is a tribute to the bees' ability to work well together. Each bee takes up its role in the building process.

A tragic contrast to this is our struggle as human beings to build caring communities. Jesus came to reverse our faulty con-

struction habits by reconnecting people to his Father and to one another. Yet we often fail to practice what he taught us. In place of humbly serving with each other in caring, harmonious, constructive ways, for example, the Christian community gets distracted by competing and comparing and by excluding and neglecting one another.

Are you a co-worker with God in building a community with others? In what ways is God calling you from self-service to serving him with others?

Thank you, God, for the firm foundation you have made for us in Christ. By your Spirit, direct us to care for each other as we serve to build up the body of Christ. Amen.

BEE SPACE

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

—Acts 2:42

Have you heard of “personal space”? It's described as the amount of space a person feels is needed in order to relate to and live well with others. Personal space can differ by culture, situation, relationship, and personal preference. For an average Westerner, personal space is about two feet on all sides. Does this seem right and healthy to you? In some other cultures, the distance can be a bit less.

Have you ever heard of “bee space”? Specifically, that is the space honeybees leave between combs in a hive. It's about 1/4 to 3/8 inch (6 - 9 mm)—a delicate balance of “enough room to move freely but not too much empty space,” according to sources on beekeeping. Bee space allows two bees to pass each other back-to-back and makes it possible for thousands of bees to live

and work closely together. Smaller spaces are filled with propolis (“bee glue”), and larger spaces are packed with unneeded “burr comb.”

Bees are at their best for life in the hive when they are in close quarters with each other. It's a matter of instinct, not choice.

People have more choices in defining personal space. In Acts 2:42 the Spirit of God draws us into a “good and pleasant” space for being and thriving together as followers of Christ. Choose and commit yourself to living in this good space with each other.

Holy Spirit, guide us to live in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we grow together faithfully in you so that others may come to know you also. Amen.

BEE GLUE

You yourselves are God's temple and . . . God's Spirit dwells in your midst. . . .
—1 Corinthians 3:16

A few years ago, a strong wind toppled one of the beehives behind our barn. The hive had been thriving, and it was five boxes tall. The hive had stuck together well. Amazingly, it didn't break open till it hit the ground. "Bee glue"—propolis—gets the credit for that. But, sadly, the hive was destroyed, and its bees quickly scattered.

In his letters to the Christ-followers in Corinth, Paul gets personal and pours out his heart to these new believers. They were going through some stormy and threatening times together, and that was surely predictable. Starting off as a new community in Christ can be hard, and as their pastor and mentor, Paul did all that he could to hold this body of Christ together. They especially needed to be reminded of their identity together—whose they were and who held them together.

Propolis is an amazing glue produced by worker bees. This sticky glue is used to fill small gaps to seal and protect the hive from bacteria and viruses. As propolis ages, it strengthens and holds the hive structure together.

As Christ-followers, our "glue" is the Holy Spirit, who "dwells in [our] midst," and together we are God's temple!

In what ways are you standing tall together in the Spirit with other Christ-followers in your community as you worship God and serve him?

Thank you, God, for your grace that enriches the followers of Jesus in every way. Hold us together by your Spirit as a unified temple in service to you, to each other, and to everyone around us. Amen.

QUEEN BEE

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. —Colossians 1:18

Honeybees and human beings have a fascination with royalty. Queens and kings rise and fall, and it's a mystery that we get so interested in them. With honeybees, there's a life-and-death fixation on the queen bee. A colony cannot survive without a queen. Beekeepers learn this quickly, and their hope for a yield of honey depends on having a healthy queen.

In each hive there is only one queen. She has been described as "the mother of all the bees," "the matriarch," and "the one in charge of the hive." The queen is the only fertile female, and a healthy queen will lay up to 2,000 eggs per day!

The queen is at the center of the hive's life—until she can no longer perform her duties. When the colony senses that its queen is ailing or preparing to leave, the workers begin a special process to raise a new

queen. They feed a young female "royal jelly" to activate her reproductive system. Soon she will be able to lay eggs to ensure the future growth and survival of the hive.

It may be tempting to view the rise and fall of royalty as an unbreakable pattern. But our Bible reading today makes clear that there is one glowing exception. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the *eternal* King over all things. He is our head, and we, his people, are his one body. No replacements. We can trust the Son of God to be the King of the universe and the Savior of our lives forever.

King Jesus, thank you for rescuing us from darkness and bringing us into your marvelous kingdom of light, love, and forgiveness. Amen.

WORKER BEES

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.
—1 Corinthians 12:14

When worker bees first hatch and emerge from their cells, their first task is to clean out their cell so that a new egg can be placed there.

As worker bees mature, they gain different responsibilities, becoming nurse bees for new bees, clutter cleaners, guards against hive robbers and threats (stinging if necessary), queen feeders (she cannot feed herself!), scouts and foragers for available nectar and pollen to make honey, and builders of new cells for storing honey, nectar, and eggs. All of this is done in about six weeks while the worker bee lives and prepares for the next generation to keep the hive thriving and growing.

It would be inconceivable for any of the bees in a hive to say to one another, "I don't need you!" It would be just as unimaginable for an ear to say to an eye (or any other part of the

human body), "I don't need you!" That would be absurd.

For the body of Christ to mature and thrive, each of Jesus' followers needs to humbly recognize and do their part. There are many, many ways in which Christ needs us to do our part with him and with the other parts of his body. When we each willingly discern and serve as we are gifted to do, we will mature together and thrive with the whole body.

Lord Jesus, help us to believe and serve as the part of your body where you need us and call us to be. Guide us to serve as you have gifted us, working with the other parts of your body for the benefit of all and for your glory. Amen.

DRONE BEES

God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that . . . its parts should have equal concern for each other. —1 Corinthians 12:24-25

During high school I was invited to a party. This had never happened to me before, so it made me feel kind of special. At the party, however, the host privately explained that “they” thought there should be a party for people who were not usually invited. Feeling pitied, I soon left. Being “special” in that way made me feel that I was not genuinely valued.

In our reading for today, some parts of the human body are described as “weaker,” “less honorable,” or “unpresentable.” But in the body of believers in Christ, we need to take care not to view or treat anyone in a way like that.

Drone bees, aside from the fact that some of them mate with the queen bee (and then die), have not been observed doing any work in the hive. They have been described as just hanging around and eating

honey (made and stored by the worker bees). Drones also look different and have no stinger. In autumn they suffer the final indignity of being kicked out of the hive so that the honey for the queen and the worker bees will last during the winter.

In the body of Christ, however, no one is a drone. All parts are needed and indispensable, worthy of special concern and honor, not condescension. We are all partners in Christ, and we strive to develop each other’s gifts as the Lord has given them. How are you serving together with all the other parts of Christ body?

Lord Jesus, thank you for making me a part of your body. May we all honor and care equally for all the parts of your body as we serve you. Amen.

DANCING BEES

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
—Galatians 5:25

Did you know that honeybees communicate by dancing? Beekeepers have identified three dances used by these bees.

Scout bees use the “waggle dance” to describe the distance, direction, and quality of a food source to be gathered. The number of waggles and the length of the dance indicate how rich and how far away the food supply is.

In contrast, the “round dance” communicates that a food source is nearby. Moving in small circles on the honeycomb, scouts recruit foragers to go and get this local food.

In the “sickle dance,” the bees use a crescent-shaped pattern and make special sounds and vibrations when the colony needs to be defended from a threat. I’m sure this dance was used when I’ve been stung and chased away.

Honeybees learn their dance

moves by instinct and imitation. But this is not the case for Christ-followers. Our missteps in communication are often damaging and in need of correction. Going with the flow of the sinful nature brings pain and damage to the body of Christ.

The dance that Christ-followers need to learn is to “keep in step with the Spirit.” It is essential that we learn to show “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” in all our interactions with one another. Which steps in this dance have you been learning and practicing lately?

Spirit of God, fill us with your love and wisdom, that we may keep in step with you in all of our interactions. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

BEE SCENTS

We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.
—2 Corinthians 2:15

People who have studied bee communication have observed a complex system in which bees use pheromones (scents). These “chemical messengers” that bees produce and receive are needed for a hive to thrive. For example, scents are central to the mating process. And if the hive is threatened, worker bees give off an alarm scent that rallies other bees to go out and sting potential intruders. Also, each hive is marked with its own queen’s scent so that the gatherer bees from that hive will find their way safely back to it.

In communication among living things, so much is shared in subtle ways. For instance, we can communicate nonverbally through gestures, looks, posture, tone of voice, and so on. People who have studied human interactions assert that 80-90 percent of our commu-

nication is nonverbal, and this can either support or contrast with our words.

As Christ-followers, we are encouraged to infuse our communication with the “pleasing aroma of Christ.” There is no way to fake this scent. It can come only through our union with Christ. Ephesians 5:2 recommends, for example, that we “walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Doing that, we can spread the pleasing scent of Christ to the people around us.

Lord Jesus, may our actions and words be infused with your scent so that others may sense your presence in us and be drawn to you. Amen.

STUNG!

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 15:56-57

In our garden one summer day, I was suddenly assaulted by a bee buzzing furiously around my head. Panicking (never a good idea), I flailed furiously with my hat, trying to swat it away. The bee zeroed in and sunk its stinger into my nose. When it circled and then flew in to sting me again, I knew it could not be one of my honeybees. They lose their stingers and die after one sting. Thankfully, I was able to escape with only one sting.

Are you afraid of bees? Many people are. Bee stings are painful. And if you are allergic, bee stings can be dangerous and even deadly. Getting too many bee stings at once could overwhelm and cause death for anyone.

Are you afraid of death? Paul's words to Christ-followers in 1 Corinthians 15 are aimed at calming our fears of being

stung to death. Paul explains that sin delivers the sting that leads to death. When people go their own way, their sin is like a deadly stinger that shoots venom into them, resulting in death. The only antidote to the poisonous venom of sin and death is in Jesus—his death for our sins and his resurrection victory over death.

We can trust in Jesus and walk in his resurrection power each day, sharing with others the good news of salvation and new life in him.

Dear Jesus, you came to die for our sin, taking on the sting of death for all who trust in you. Assure us that in your resurrection power we can be free of sin and death and rise to new life with you. In your name, Amen.

POLLINATING BEES

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . .”
—Matthew 28:19

Late August is the best time for us to pick our raspberries. That’s when the berries are turning ripe, red, and sweet. At the same time, honeybees, bumblebees, and other bees are buzzing all around and pollinating, doing their everyday work and living. The honeybees collect pollen and nectar to build their hive and produce food—honey to eat now and throughout the winter. As they go about their work, bees pollinate anything that has flowers. And for us their work produces fruit, vegetables, and foliage in abundance.

Bees do not need to be told to go out, gather, and pollinate. It’s programed into their nature. It’s all about doing what God made them to do so that plants and trees will thrive and provide food for all creatures, especially us humans. What’s more, doing what they do

helps their hive to survive and thrive.

As followers of Jesus, we all are instructed to go and make disciples, inviting people to become followers of Jesus. Wherever we go about doing our work and living in God’s wide world, we can touch people with the message of Jesus’ love. This is the desire of Jesus’ heart. Like pollinating bees, we can touch the lives of lost people and pray that the love of Christ will produce the fruit of faith in them.

Have you embraced this mission? In what ways are you engaged in it?

Lord, keep sending your followers to bring your message of love and mercy everywhere. Use our deeds and words to draw people to you. Amen.

SWARMING BEES

They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
—Psalm 118:12

How does the image of swarming bees affect you? Disaster and horror movies that picture bees stinging people to death will make some viewers overly fearful of bees.

Bees will sometimes try to nest in odd places. For example, I heard of a swarm of honeybees clustering on the fender of a yellow Corvette Stingray. Were they drawn to the car's bright color?

I encountered my first swarm of bees while trimming a hedge. At first, I heard some buzzing that grew louder and stronger. Looking around, I saw a swarm of bees on a nearby tree branch. I knew that honeybee swarms are harmless as long as they are not disturbed. They likely had left an overcrowded hive with their queen, and their scout bees were looking for a choice location to start a new hive.

The writer of Psalm 118 seems to have been familiar with swarming bees. He said that being surrounded by enemies was like having a swarm of bees around him. Maybe you know what that's like. Being in a seemingly impossible situation with frustrated or threatening people swirling around can arouse fear and anxiety.

Psalm 118 indicates that the way into secure daily living and a bright future is to look to the Lord for relief and rescue. Our guarantee is that "his love endures forever." When we are feeling overwhelmed, let's look to the Lord!

Lord, inspire us to trust in you and to cry out to you when we are feeling overwhelmed. Thank you for your steadfast love and abundant goodness. Amen.

A WORK OF LOVE

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
—1 Corinthians 13:4

Over the years, so much has been written about beekeeping that it can be easy to be distracted by details and lose sight of the “big picture.” With bees, it’s primarily about maintaining the hive, a living superorganism. Rev. L. L. Langstroth, who invented the movable frame hive (1852), recommended listening to the “hum” of the hive for inspiration. A quick internet search shows that lots of beekeepers compare the hum of the hive to a symphony.

What makes the hive a harmonious home for bees? We might like to think that bees survive and thrive by way of virtues, but they just follow the wonderful instincts God provided when he created them.

In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we can see that the community life of Christ-followers is, sadly, not always loving and harmonious. In fact, sometimes the church is far from

that ideal. A whole other dynamic is necessary for a community to become wholesome. Living by the virtues we find in 1 Corinthians 13 requires that we selflessly love one another.

The inspired text of 1 Corinthians 13 reflects the self-giving love of God, in whose image Christ-followers are being recreated. In Christ, we can be part of a body in which all “have equal concern for each other” (12:25). The one body of Christ is the community in which each member lovingly works to build up and care for one another in the Lord, the one and only Savior.

Lord, thank you for being the way to faith, hope, and love. Grow us to become mature in you as each part of your body does its work. Amen.

SWEET HONEY

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Psalm 119:103

Reading books to my children and grandchildren is one of my sweetest memories. And stories about Winnie the Pooh always make me chuckle:

Isn't it funny,
How a bear likes honey?
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

Before we became beekeepers, my son and I took a class. At the outset, the instructor noted that most people get into beekeeping for the honey. This was a major goal for us as well. Honey's reputation for sweetness is richly deserved. The flavor varies with the nectar and pollen gathered by the bees. People often say that eating local honey helps to combat allergies as well.

Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, savors God's Word in its many forms. The Word blossoms as God's law, providing us with direction. It blooms in the shape of God's

judgments, which help us to learn right from wrong. God's Word also flowers in his testimonies to inspire us to be faithful and true, like God.

The most beautiful form of God's Word was revealed when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). This Word, Jesus Christ himself, is the whole package—all of God's promises are fulfilled in him.

May we all trust and love Jesus! Each day we can take in God's Word like the sweetest honey.

"Beautiful Savior! King of creation," in all the pages of the precious Word of God, help us to see you, Jesus, as the one who leads us into everlasting life. In your name, Amen.

FINDING HONEY

If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and you will vomit.
—Proverbs 25:16

Late summer to early fall is usually the time when beekeepers “find” honey. At that time of year for bees, the days of gathering pollen and nectar are winding down. Wise beekeepers provide extra room in the hive, taking advantage of the bees’ hoarding instinct and “tricking” them into making more honey than they need. A healthy hive will often have two to three times as much honey as the bees will need for winter. The beekeepers then take the extra honey, making sure to leave enough for the bees to survive on.

Finding honey is not so difficult with the hive boxes and removable frames we have today. In the wild, though, it can be a lot more challenging to find and gather this treasure. Through the centuries people have learned to search for honey in hollow trees, small caves, remote cliffs, and other

protected spots that are near abundant varieties of flowering plants.

While honey is sweet, our proverb for today tells us to “eat just enough” and not too much. It makes good sense not to overdose on honey—or on any of the sweet things in life. Wisdom calls us to a healthy balancing act.

Sadly, the siren song of our world today is that “more is always better.” But finding honey reveals the wisdom of enjoying sweet things in life within wholesome limits.

In what ways is the Spirit of God directing you to set wise limits in your life?

Thank you, Lord, for the sweet things in life. Guide us to follow you and to gain a heart of wisdom. In Jesus, Amen.

EATING HONEY

He said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. —Ezekiel 3:3

My morning ritual includes a cup of tea mixed with apple cider vinegar and a tablespoon of honey. I believe this bitter-sweet drink is good for digestion and fighting allergies. It seems also that a spoonful of honey may be good medicine that keeps my head clear.

In Ezekiel's time as a prophet, he received messages from God to warn his people of the coming destruction from Babylon. The messages were bittersweet and meant to prepare God's people for a great disaster, the loss of their homeland and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's words of prophecy were intended as medicine to purify and preserve God's people.

For too long these people had been mixing with other religions and eating at the tables of false gods. So they could not stomach the messages of this

edible scroll, and they would not listen. Ezekiel was able to bring the messages because he had ingested, digested, and internalized the “sweet as honey” Word of God in his heart and mind. The Word of God sustained and energized him to speak the Lord's message.

God's Spirit-breathed Word in the Bible, given and gathered over thousands of years, is true and bittersweet. What are you doing to ingest, digest, and internalize this Word? Is God's Word purifying and energizing you so that his message can go out to others?

Lord, protect us from the sickening messages of the toxic world around us. Plant your Word in our hearts. Rescue, purify, and use us to speak your words of life. Amen.

A NEW THING

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?”
—Isaiah 43:19

When my son and I started beekeeping, we were especially keen on harvesting honey from our beehives. Minimizing our investment in equipment was also a goal. The solution was to use a primitive method of harvesting by scraping the honey-filled combs from our frames and draining the honey from the wax. Happy with the yield of honey, we wondered what to do with the pile of beeswax that resulted from this process.

Beeswax itself is a treasure. Beekeepers and YouTubers supply loads of information about processing and using beeswax. The virtues of beeswax candles for home and worship are well known, for example. These all-natural candles are eco-friendly, smell like the fragrant outdoors, and are safe for air quality. Many fans also tout the benefits of beeswax as lip balm and for treat-

ing rashes and acne. Some people even claim that beeswax can help relieve pain, reduce inflammation, and lower cholesterol levels.

Some of these benefits might be debatable, but in God’s creation we often learn that nothing need be wasted or thrown away. Similarly, with God, anyone can be rescued, refined, and repurposed. People facing judgment amid catastrophe needed to hear this in Isaiah’s day, and we also need to hear this wisdom today. God loves us and is with us always. He will deliver us and do new things in, with, and through us.

Lord, thank you for telling us that we are chosen and loved by you. Guide us to face change and to embrace the new life you make possible for us through Jesus. Amen.

BEES IN WINTER

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

By the time snow began to fall in November last year, our honeybees had been preparing for months for the transition to winter weather. With fading daylight hours and falling temperatures where we live in Michigan, the bees had begun storing up honey and pollen in late summer and "bee bread" (a mix of nectar, honey, and enzymes) in early autumn. When the temperature outdoors dropped to about 55°F (12-13°C), hardier bees in the hive started taking over feeding and warming the queen to keep her alive during the cold, dark days of winter.

The prophetic poetry of Lamentations is cold and darkening. God's people at that time had been steadily approaching the brutal chill of being conquered and exiled. The armies of the cruel, cold-blooded Babylonian Empire were coming.

For God's people whose hearts had grown cold, no reprieve was predicted. The chilling consequences of disobedience and wickedness were approaching as certainly as a bitterly cold, dark winter.

Today's verses appear right in the midst of Jeremiah's laments on the destruction, devastation, and mass deportation of God's people during the invasion by Babylon. Like a ray of warm sunshine, these verses assure us that "the LORD's great love," compassions, and faithfulness are available to us each day. Let's remember this in whatever cold and dark times we find ourselves in.

"Great is your faithfulness, O God [our] Father." In all the seasons of life you have been here with and for us. Help us to trust in you. Amen.

SURVIVING COLD, DARK TIMES

I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.
—Psalm 13:5

A question many people ask about honeybees is "How do they survive the cold months of winter?" The answer is that worker bees form a tight cluster around the queen, with their heads pointed toward her in the center. Then they vibrate (shiver) their muscles to generate heat for the queen and themselves. They also shift positions constantly from the warm, inner core to the outer layers of the cluster so that the bees on the outside don't get too cold. And their stored food gives them the energy to keep going.

The main question of Psalm 13 is "How long, LORD?" This question expresses deep dismay over having to endure the attacks and successes of an enemy. The psalmist seems to have wrestled with this enemy's threats and advances for a long, dark time without relief.

Sometimes our struggles and setbacks in life can make us feel that way too. I have also engaged in this kind of wondering if I am lost in troubles of my own making and/or in struggles with the relentless wickedness in our world. A common question is "How are we going to get through this?"

A helpful response is in the psalmist's closing lines. The writer recalls the Lord's unfailing love and goodness and looks ahead with hope, expressing joy in the Lord's salvation. May we recognize that the Lord faithfully sustains and preserves our lives each day!

Lord, look on us and give light to our eyes amid the cold, dark days of our struggles. Guide us to trust in you and praise you faithfully. Amen.

OUR STRUGGLE

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the . . . powers of this dark world and . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. —Ephesians 6:12

When we moved to our latest home near a cherry orchard, I imagined that the beautiful cherry blossoms would be a great source of pollen and nectar for our bees. So I was horrified one day to see a tractor rolling through the orchard and spraying insecticide on the cherry trees. I knew the unseen poison would likely harm the bees. The orchard owner offered to spray in the evening when the bees would be in their hives. Yet I knew the bees would be hurt.

Honeybees struggle with a host of seen and unseen enemies, including insecticides, from which they need to be defended. First and following generations of bees may be harmed beyond repair, bringing about the demise and death of many bees and even entire hives.

Toward the end of his letter to

Christ-followers in Ephesus, Paul reminds his listeners that our main struggle is against invisible forces and powerful enemies directed by the devil. Legions of threatening forces can be seen all around and within, yet we must also be aware of the invisible and unseen foes. Throughout life we need to “be strong in the Lord.” And we must make use of every weapon God provides to defend and sustain us “in his mighty power.” May we serve God faithfully against the devil and his schemes.

Lord, empower us to use all the weapons you provide for our defense against spiritual enemies. Together with all Christ-followers, may we stand firm as we depend on you, in Jesus. Amen.

COLONY COLLAPSE

“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”
—Matthew 24:6

About 20 years ago, a massive threat to honeybees everywhere on our planet was fearfully announced. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) was named and blamed for about 10 percent of hives' dying off in 2006-2007. “Would this be the beginning of the end for honeybees?” we wondered. The effects of CCD on crops were also forecast to be catastrophic for humans and for other life on the planet. While the threat of CCD has decreased a bit recently, the menace and mystery remain.

Back in the days of Jesus' teaching ministry, his followers worried about “the end of the age.” And Jesus' response to their concerns about end-time catastrophes and his coming again is somewhat puzzling and mysterious. Wars, disasters, persecutions, and false teachers/messiahs are ongoing

terrors that he calls “the beginning of birth pains.” Since those days and long before them, disasters and disorders have come and gone. CCD and the COVID-19 pandemic are just a couple of new arrivals in our era today.

Jesus said, “Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” So we need to listen to his words: “Watch out that no one deceives you.” And we need to remain faithful in following him—showing mercy and bringing the good news of God's coming kingdom.

Jesus, thank you for rescuing us from the devil's deceptions and our wayward anxieties. Make us watchful and confident in proclaiming that you have the whole world in your hands. Amen.

“SAVE THE BEES!”

You have made [human beings] a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

—Psalm 8:5

Thankfully, many organizations are tracking the health of honeybees today. Since the alarming announcement of CCD (see July 28), some corrective actions have been taken by beekeepers and governments. As a result, honeybee populations have mainly stabilized. However, a hidden disaster for pollinators is looming ever larger. Wild bee populations are dying off too. These other bees pollinate 80 percent of flowering plants and trees worldwide. The catastrophic cost of losing bees would be inestimable for farming, economies, wildlife, and the environment.

Human greed and carelessness play an outsize role in the use of pesticides and the ongoing habitat loss that threaten bees. As a result, “Save the bees!” movements have sprouted up around the globe. These cam-

paigns are similar to calls to “Save the planet” and other efforts in past years.

In light of Psalm 8, humanity’s threat to bees and to our own environment is ironic. Human beings, made in God’s image, have the honor to care wisely for God’s creation and his creatures. But when we mismanage God’s good creation, we harm ourselves and all creation as well.

The good news is that the perfect human has come in Jesus Christ to restore us to our role of truly caring for God’s creation. Let’s learn and do what we can to care for the world we live in.

Lord, the earth and everything in it is yours. Empower us to restore your creation for your purposes and glory. Amen.

SPRINGTIME

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!”
—Luke 24:5-6

When winter has passed and I check on our bees in the early spring, I think of the question the angels asked the women at Jesus’ tomb: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Many beehives become “dead-outs” after a long winter. The best hope for a beekeeper is that the hive will be able to be revived by the surviving queen and worker bees.

The lives of people, animals, insects, plants, and all creation are cyclical. The cycle—birth, life, and death—can be both delightful and vicious, and both bright and dreary. Then the next generation takes its turn. The revival of a honeybee hive can be hopeful, and yet there’s an end in sight. Many people settle for that, but we may also ask, “Is that all there is?”

The men and women who had followed Jesus went to his tomb expecting to find the dead among the dead. So it

was shocking to be confronted with the surprise that Jesus had risen from the dead! As Jesus’ followers have come to know, he is alive today, tomorrow, and forever.

Jesus’ followers celebrate an everlasting spring. After his resurrection, Bible passages call him “the firstfruits” of those who have died. As his followers, we share in his victory over death. We follow Jesus from death into life, certain that in him we have resurrection life. We can trust the risen and living Savior forever!

Creator God, thank you for giving us “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Live in and through us, we pray, by your Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE BLESSING OF BEES

Now may the God of peace, who . . . brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus . . . work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ. . . . —Hebrews 13:20-21

It has been a blessing to be a beekeeper. My hope is that—in the process—plants, creatures, and other parts of God’s creation have benefited. In any healthy relationship, blessings flow both ways. Being a beekeeper, I know that I have received more than I have given. I have learned about and been inspired by the bees’ life in community, recognizing and honoring all members, working and serving together, communicating well, and much more. In addition, I’ve been able to enjoy and share the sweet honey made by bees, and to give thanks for the health benefits it brings.

The blessing from Hebrews 13:20-21 reflects well the flow of God’s blessings to us and through us. “Peace” refers to the biblical teaching of shalom—physical and spiritual well-being in a flourishing, nur-

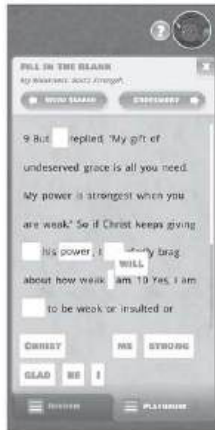
tering environment with God and his people. Shattered by our waywardness, we desperately need to be shepherded into shalom. Our great shepherd’s rescue, nurture, protection, and guidance are all necessary for our restored thriving and well-being.

While honeybees may do reasonably well without a beekeeper, human beings do not do well without a shepherd. People wreck and ruin God’s creation and one another. Only Jesus fills the role of “great shepherd,” coming to rescue us and to “work in us what is pleasing to him.” What a beautiful blessing! Are you experiencing and sharing it?

Lord of shalom, equip us and work in us through Jesus to bring blessing into your world and bring glory to you. Amen.



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