

## One Thing by Tracy Commons

Consider this question... What is one thing you can do in 2024 to grow in maturity?

I am writing this article partly due to a decision God led me to make on New Year's Eve 2015. I was coming out of a wilderness season in 2014-2015 during which I felt dry, lost, lonely, hopeless, vulnerable, susceptible, like I was wandering and wasting away. Everything seemed hard. But as I emerged from that wilderness I became motivated to be more intentional about growing in maturity. I felt overwhelmed as I assessed all the areas in my life that needed growth. I remember reading something where the author encouraged his readers to simply focus on one thing that could potentially have the most significant impact.

As I prayed and discerned, I felt God leading me to make my "one thing" a decision to get up at 6am on normal work days. Not on weekends, or vacation, or holidays, or when I was sick. I wanted to keep it realistic. That one thing may not seem like a big deal to other people, but for me in that season of life it was, because it meant I would have margin and

time in the morning before the rest of the family got up, and I would have to decide how to use that time.

That one thing had ripple effects which made 2016 a significant year for me. I spent more time with God, read more, exercised more and got physically healthy, was a better husband, father, and friend, my calling was affirmed, which also led to a major transition for our family.

Philippians 3 as well as other passages of Scripture talk about this idea of "one thing"- *12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

I had to leave the wilderness behind, and that is hard because (as backwards as it seems) sometimes we are more comfortable in the wilderness. But not only that, I also had to strain

forward and press on. We do not grow in maturity by accident or while simply standing still. We must move forward, by the grace of God, in the Spirit of God, and hopefully with the support and encouragement of community around us. Don't compare yourself with people, but connect yourself with people to help you grow. People that you can look to as an example or mentor, and ones who can simply walk with you through this process.

So, what is your one thing?

## Finance Policy Update

As a result of the audit review we want to remind members to please be mindful about submitting separate receipts that list only church expenses and not combined with personal expenses on the same receipt.



## News From Everence

Everence College Scholarships - Everence offers college scholarship opportunities for you or your children. Eligible students can be chosen to receive scholarships of \$3,000, \$2,000 or \$1,000 for the coming academic year. Applications are accepted through Wednesday, February 28. Visit [everence.com/college-scholarships](http://everence.com/college-scholarships) to download the application.

Financial issues? Start to tackle debt or other money issues by getting counsel. Financial Choice, a free service thanks to our church's partnership with faith-based Everence, connects you with a counselor who walks with you in addressing financial difficulties. Learn more at [everence.com/Financial-Choice](http://everence.com/Financial-Choice) or call 877-809-0039.

FreedUp – Everence® is offering a new stewardship training program. The program is a way for everyone to get their finances in order and gain a deeper faith perspective on your money. Everence facilitators will lead the group sessions. There are several days of the week and times to choose from so you can find a time that fits your schedule. Mondays at 8 pm starting January 29, Tuesdays at 8 pm starting January 30, Wednesdays at 2 pm January 31, and Saturdays at 11 am starting February 3. Register at [everence.com/national](http://everence.com/national).



## Fighting Over Words by Pastor Nathan

I was helping Winslow get ready for bed when he asked, "When is summer?"

I was a bit thrown off. We're busy fielding the "When is Christmas?" question. Now he's thinking of summer!

I was also thrown off because Dana and I have an ongoing debate about the seasons.

For me, the year is broken up into planting, summer, harvest, and winter. I think of the seasons in terms of weather patterns, temperature, and the life cycle of plants and animals. Winter starts when the days feel shorter, the temperature is below freezing most nights, and harvest is fully over. Summer is when school is out, robin chicks begin leaving their nests, and the corn is tall enough to make the fields green.

Dana takes a more scientific approach. The seasons are based off of the movement of the sun and the length of the days. Summer begins on the longest day of the year – the summer solstice.

How do you explain all of this to a four year old?

I told him it technically wasn't winter yet. I explained how we put things in categories to better understand them. But there is also the reality of how we experience life. We can think about seasons in more than one way. Some people around the world identify anywhere from two to seven seasons, depending on their climate.

This made me think about the other age old debate: whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable.

My answer is, "It depends what you mean". According to the botanical definition, tomatoes are a fruit. Peas, corn, cucumbers, and walnuts are too. According to how we use them in the kitchen, tomatoes, peas, and corn are vegetables.

It depends on who is grouping them and why.

This does not make one definition right or wrong. We are using the same word to describe similar but different things.

We find the same thing when we come to theology.

I visited Plumstead Christian School to discuss a coaching service I offer to high school students unsure of what they want to do when they graduate. In the teachers' lounge, it came up that I am also a Mennonite pastor. One of the teachers began to grill me on predestination versus free will.

At a point in Christian history, theologians thought this was an important category. They studied Scripture from every angle to decide whether God predetermines who goes to heaven and hell or whether people have a free choice in the matter. Questions like this are part of systematic theology.

When she pressed me on whether God chooses or people choose, my answer was, "Yes". I know the questions and "answers" of systematic theology, but on this topic I choose to group things differently using biblical theological categories. Biblical theology takes the story of the Bible as a whole, and rather than forcing categories onto the Bible, it

asks what the categories are that the Bible itself uses.

In the story of Scripture, we find both themes. Yes, God has a plan, knows the future, and is actively working his will out in the world. And yes, people have free will, make decisions and face their consequences, and need to repent to be saved.

Systematic theology is more of a scientific approach to Scripture while biblical theology engages the Bible as it is written. Neither is right or wrong, but they are different.

When we disagree with someone, it is important that we understand how and why they are using the terms that they are using.

We are living in a time where the definition of gender is being questioned and redefined. Some people want to look at gender from a scientific perspective. Others are using the same words to express their experience of life. They are using the same words but talking about different things.

At its worst, people refuse to listen and start to see the other person in a debate as an object to be manipulated rather than as a person to be loved and understood.

(continued on page 3)

Swamp Mennonite Church  
2125 Rosedale Road  
Quakertown, PA  
18951-4013  
Email: [info@justswamp.com](mailto:info@justswamp.com)  
[www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
Phone: (215) 536-7928

## Church Board Highlights

Church Board Chair Quincy Longacre brought the meeting to order. Nan Myland then offered the devotional on gratitude, thanks, and being grateful, including excerpts from Psalm 145.

The minutes from the Church Board meeting of September 21 were reviewed and approved. It was noted that an additional bylaw change recommendation regarding the number of Church Board members and how that impacts a quorum were presented and approved by Church Board Members via email communication.

There were various items related to staff oversight. The 2024 Memos of Understanding for Pastor Nathan and Pastor Tracy were reviewed. It was recommended to follow Everence Guidelines for four weeks of vacation time after twelve years of pastoral service. The housing allowance for both the Lead Pastor and Associate Pastor was reviewed and approved.

Barry Gehman presented the proposed 2024 budget to Church Board which noted a 2.48% increase over 2023. Barry Gehman agreed to continue serving as Finance Chair next year. The Audit Report was reviewed and it was noted to remind members about submitting separate receipts that list only church expenses and not with combined personal ones on same receipt. It was also recommended to perform an audit every other year.

Pastor Nathan reviewed the revised Our Covenant document, based upon feedback from Leadership Retreat. Some additional revisions were recommended by the Board. There was discussion about how to best present the revised covenant to the congregation, since the document is Board policy and does not require a congregational vote. Pastor Nathan will include some of the updated language for the covenant in his Member Meeting

report. The board will also host a forum time during a Sunday School hour. It was decided to wait until after this feedback time from the congregation to take any action on updating the board policy containing the church covenant.

The agenda for the annual member meeting was reviewed. Laura reported on the Mosaic Conference Delegate Assembly. She highlighted that they recognized congregations that left the conference, which was very emotional. There was lack of clarity about how the Conference will address differences that can pull people and groups apart. Currently, it feels like the Conference is ignoring these differences rather than addressing them.

Finally, Pastor Nathan noted that Pastor Tracy and himself would be meeting once a month as Ministry Team with Carl taking minutes to be submitted to Church Board.

## This 'n' That by Arlene Yothers

Thank you to all who baked goodies for the bake sale at the Souderton Home Holiday Bazaar. The event was a huge success with funds raised going to the Benevolent Fund. The Corner Store at the Souderton Home will be having special sales on Thursday, February 29 which is leap year day! The proceeds raised at the Corner Store will all go to the Benevolent Fund, come shop any day. The next fundraiser will be the Rockerthon on Friday, March 22. The auxiliary will be joining with others on rocking chairs in the auditorium. We will be entertained and fed while rocking, usually an hour at a time. It is a time of fellowship and fun.

Those who want to rock can let me know for more details, it is a daytime event.

Thanks to all who helped at the Apple Butter Frolic at the Heritage Center. It was a great big help to me personally! Up next, there will be a Winter Hymn Sing on Thursday, January 25 from 7:00 pm-8:30 pm. Come and rejoice, weather permitting. Then the Harleysville Hank Extravaganza will be held on Groundhog Day, Friday, February 2 from 6:45 am-7:30 am. Come and have coffee or hot chocolate and hear the prediction for the weather for the weeks to follow.

Thanks to all who came out for the event to raise funds for the

Worm Project in October. Thanks to all who give money to that organization. Many children around the world are helped! The pills are delivered to the children by other organizations, please keep them all in your prayers.

The Care & Share Shoppes in Souderton now has an app! You can buy items through the auction on the app. No need to come to the store. Volunteers are needed in many areas at that location, come to the Welcome Center and learn where you can fit in and help the Mennonite Central Committee. The profits from those stores go to help missionaries around the world, near and far.

## Mission Outreach: What is Ripple? by Bill Longacre

Ripple is a sister Anabaptist congregation in the heart of Allentown, a member of Mosaic Mennonite Conference with us. Since they began in 2010, Ripple has had a heart for those who are lost, living on the margins, and in need of Hope. No matter one's status, income, lifestyle, or background, each one is invited to come and see what God is doing in their community.

They show the love of Jesus by feeding the masses in tangible ways - both spiritually and physically. By providing blankets, coats, hats, and hand warmers, they help with survival in winter months.

In addition, they also provide socks, backpacks, soup, oatmeal packets, and canned/vacuum packed meats.

Currently they are developing a resource center for community members to have computer access for job listings, resumes, and to access community resources.

An outgrowth of the congregation is Ripple Community, Inc., which has a community center that serves the most vulnerable population by developing relationships with each other and volunteers.

They also operate RCI Village, consisting of 13 community-supported affordable housing apartments that provide neighbors with safe, long-term housing, often for the first time in their lives.

For several years, Swamp's mission outreach fund has supported Ripple by providing funds to assist with one of the 13 apartments.

Swamp recently used our Thanksgiving offering to assist

Ripple with their programs. And some have volunteered by bringing and serving a meal at the church, which they have each Sunday after their 4:00 PM service. The Swamp Youth have volunteered at Ripple, and we have invited Ripple kids to our VBS.

Ripple has invited us to dream with them about what God's kingdom on earth looks like for us together - our passions and vision for future outreach.



## Fighting Over Words by Pastor Nathan

*(continued from page 1)*

My purpose here is not to define gender, or predestination, or tomato. My point is that when we disagree, the first thing we need to do is listen. In conflict and disagreement it is easy to assume that we know what the other person means. But many times, we are using the same words and talking about completely different things.

We can learn a lot from Jesus. He lived in polarized times and

was regularly questioned on "the issues". Rarely did he "take a stand". More often, he asked a question in return. He tried to better understand the person asking the question. He told stories to help them to think more clearly. He cared about them, even if he disagreed with them. And when it was clear they came with good Intentions, he plainly spoke the truth in love.

In this world that we live in, may we all be more like Jesus.

