

Inside Look at Amish Women's Stories Reveals Radical Grace of God

Note: This is Part 1 of a two-part series. Watch for Part 2 next week.

Ever wish you could visit with a group of Amish or Mennonite women over a cup of coffee? In the pages of *Homespun*, Amish and Plain Mennonite women swap stories and spin yarns while we listen in. Lorilee Craker, bestselling author of *Money Secrets of the Amish*, collects these personal writings about hospitality, home, grief, joy and walks with God.

The stories include one woman who struggles with feeling inferior to her sister, from another about her longing for a baby and from a third who accidentally bought stretchy material to sew her husband's pants. Each woman's story is a testament to the grace of God and the blessings of community.

Q: What was the inspiration behind your new book, *Homespun*? How did you collect the stories included in the book?

Herald Press approached me about being the general editor of a collection of writings from Amish and Mennonite women. I collected the stories from mainly two sources, *Daughters of Promise* magazine, a beautiful and beautifully written literary journal done by conservative Mennonite women, and *Ladies Journal*, a much more spare periodical by Amish women.

It was thrilling for me to discover new writers and incredible writing from mostly unknown writers. These women have a lot to say, and I was fascinated by their take on modern life. To hear from women specifically appealed to me, as a feminist. Sometimes in conservative subcultures, their voices are silenced or muted. This book gives them space and grace to

Speak.

Q: In what ways were you challenged to rethink your concept of welcome and hospitality?

In our HGTV era, we can begin to believe that hospitality equals a perfectly renovated and decorated space. I love all that stuff, and that's great, but these writers helped me get back to the true meaning of opening your home to others. I had just bought this table set for my patio, but all summer had hosted only one time. Why? Because of the weeds! Meanwhile, I could have blessed my guests all summer. These essays helped me get back to the idea of lengthening the table, not caring as much if things were "perfect."

Q: The advice in the "Abide" section varies from painting your home bright colors to reflect yourself to having plenty of white space. However, decorating tips really aren't the point. How does the section on abide differ from hospitality?

Hospitality is about opening your home to others, while the act of dwelling is different. How do we create a nest that nurtures and shelters us? Bethany Hege's piece called "White Space" is one of the loveliest pieces in the book and one of the most insightful things I have ever read on the topic of home décor and design. "Keep it simple but keep it significant," she writes. Her words really challenged me to do just that. For example, I framed an 8 x 10 print which reads, "Cheap Like Borscht," a saying known to Russian Mennonites and something my dad would always say. Every year, I make sure and buy gladioli because they were my Grandma's favorite flowers. I hung a large photo of a field with flax and canola—the two crops my Grandpa farmed—over my fireplace. To me, I am keeping things simple but significant.

Q: All of the stories in *Homespun* could actually fall under the category of testimony, but how do the stories in that section stand out among the others?

“The Lord is My Rock” profoundly moved me. Ervina Yoder tells about giving birth to her stillborn son. “I go to the grocery store and no one knows I’m a mommy,” she writes. Every time I read that, I get chills of sorrow. Yet her faith also gives me chills.

Q: Can you share one of the modern-day miracle stories included in the book?

Danielle Beiler’s “When You put Your Money in God’s Bank Account” is one of my favorite pieces in the book. It’s a very detailed journal, really, of God’s provision for her day to day. I love how she never ran out of gas, no matter how low her tank got. It reminds me of manna from heaven, except in this case manna was fuel!

Q: How is the preeminence of family different among the Mennonites and Amish versus those in other communities?

I think the biggest thing is our shared experiences. We are the “peculiar people,” an ethnic subculture with no homeland (so people don’t think we are an ethnicity) with a shared history of terrible suffering (especially the Russian Mennonites, the most recent wave of immigration from Ukraine who still have family members who remember living in Stalinist Russia). Those shared experiences set us apart and make our families close knit because we understand each other in a way no one else does.

Q: What does it mean to be one of God’s beloved? How do the stories reflect that belonging?

These women have a deep, radical faith that spreads so much light. This was the hardest section from which to choose because there were so many moving pieces. “Rebuilding from the Shambles of Shame,” for example, is profound. She compares the process of rising up out of shame to restoring a crumbling old house. Often while reading these pieces I felt stirred and uplifted.

Q: What do you ultimately hope readers will gain from reading *Homespun*?

I hope they will find a pocket of peace and gentle witness in their hectic, modern lives. These women have a countercultural, singular mindset that is refreshingly different. I hope our readers will see their own stories in a new, Homespun light! {eoa}

Learn more about Lorilee Craker online at [. You can also find her on Facebook \(@LorileeCraker\), Twitter \(@lorileecraker\) and Instagram \(@thebooksellersdaughter\).](#)

How Simeon Teaches Us to Finish Our Race Well

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's by the Spirit, he came into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he received Him in his arms and blessed God and said:

"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation (Luke 2:25-30).

The name "Simeon" refers to hearing. Over two decades ago, the Holy Spirit highlighted Simeon to me, a man who ran his race with determination and in faith until the very end. I

recognized that, although most everyone else in Jerusalem was clueless that the Messiah and sovereign King of the universe had been born, Simeon was in tune and heard the Lord.

Three years before this, back in 1993, Holy Spirit showed my husband, Randy, that we were going to have another son, and that we were to name him Simeon. Just as God promised Simeon that he would not die until he saw the birth of the Messiah, our son Simeon and his generation would live to see the second coming of Christ. The Lord told my husband not to tell me the name—that He would reveal it to me in His perfect timing, which happened to be approximately three years later. Our son Simeon John was born in 1996; he is now almost 22 years old.

Based on this personal revelation, I believe that we, or at least our children and grandchildren, are living in the generation that will witness the return of Christ. Therefore, it is imperative that we are tuned in and sensitive to the Holy Spirit and stay active in faith all the way to the end of our lives, pouring into the next generation, like Simeon in Luke 2.

Finishing the race well will look different for everyone—for one, it is serving as a watchman on the wall in the global prayer movement; to another, it might entail discipling the younger generation; and to others, it might be more of an evangelistic focus.

The way we end our race is more important than how it began. Like Simeon, we want to be in sync with God's perfect will, at the right place at the right time, pleasing God. Otherwise, we'll have a misdirected focus, and we will miss out on the fullness of God's intended destiny for our lives.

It's sad to see older saints slip into patterns of fear, self-pity, depression and bitterness. But the common theme in the Bible is running the race of faith to win, and fixing our eyes on Jesus—He is the prize! The longer I live, the more I

realize just how sovereign God is and how intimately involved He wants to be in our lives (see Ps. 46:1–5, 97:9, 145:18; Dan. 4:17).

I recently heard the Holy Spirit say, “Let love set the pace of your day.” Love never fails. Whenever we are yielded to the Spirit and motivated by His ways of love, we will enter His rest and glorify God (see Heb. 4:9–10). Those who are challenging to be around are gifts from God to teach us to love and are usually the ones who need to be loved the most. End your race loving others well (Matt. 5:43–48; 1 John 2:3–11).

In Acts 20:24b, Paul states, “that I may joyfully finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus.” For Paul, there was a high cost to following Jesus faithfully to the end. The same is true for many other heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 and referred to as the “great cloud of witnesses” in Hebrews 12:1–2.

Joshua is an excellent example of someone who faithfully completed his journey. Here are some insights on his life from a devotional by T. Covey entitled “Joshua—A Man Full of Commitment”:

There are many great things said of the man named Joshua in the Old Testament. Joshua was a man full of humility, full of faith, full of the Spirit, and full of courage.

Joshua’s life was also full of adventure. He witnessed the plagues, the giving of the Law, and the people always complaining. He saw a river parting, not once, but twice. He watched the mighty walls of Jericho crash as the people shouted. He saw Achan and his family die from their stoning. Most of all, he had a personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. Few human beings have ever experienced more than Joshua.

If Joshua had lived in modern times, he could have written a best-seller. Just think of the possible titles!

“Don’t Go Camping With a Bunch of Bellyachers”

“The Day the Sun Stood Still”

“Harlots Who Escape by a Thread”

Joshua’s book would not have been complete if he had not been able to write the final chapter. Someone has said, “It matters little how you begin the race. It’s how you finish that counts!” Joshua was a man full of commitment, and he finished well.

At the end of the book of Joshua, Joshua knows that his earthly life is almost over. He gathers all the leaders of Israel together and reminds them of what God has done for them since the time of Abraham. He recounts explicitly all that happened after they crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land. He tells how they conquered their foes with God’s help. He also points out how God let them be defeated when sin had entered their midst. Joshua finishes by urging the people to fear the Lord and serve Him faithfully.

Near the end of his life, Joshua stood before the people and said:

“Therefore, fear the Lord and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the Lord. But if it doesn’t please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord” (Josh. 24:14–15, CSB).

For 110 years, Joshua had faithfully served the Lord. He had fought battles, crossed raging rivers, defeated enemies and stood firm when others didn’t. Therefore, at the end of his life, he could boldly say, “As for me and my family, we will

worship the Lord.”

What a testimony! What a life! What a man of God!

God is calling you to walk by faith just like Joshua did. The first key is to hear from God. Next, you must believe God. Lastly, you must act on what God is telling you to do. It is time for you to take your stand for the Lord just like Joshua, Simeon and all the faithful men and women of God have done over the many centuries of human history.

Beloved, don't settle for mediocrity in the remaining years of your life. This quote is very fitting: "Don't give in to short-term thinking! Stay focused on the end game. You don't get the trophy until the race is over, so be determined to finish strong!"

Here are some other essential keys to finishing one's race in victory:

Self-condemnation is a snare of the enemy because it keeps our focus on ourselves—don't go there (Rom. 8:1).

Don't allow your flesh with its passions and desires to rule your life—yield to the fruits of the Holy Spirit instead (Gal.5:22–25).

Shake off regret and focus on the positive—regret only chains you to the past. It's not about doing everything perfectly; it's about moving forward. God's not limited to our mistakes or dependent on our successes. Our identity is secure in Christ and not based on performance (Phil. 3:3–14).

Believe that God is good and incapable of anything less than goodness (Rom. 8:28).

Doubt and unbelief are walls of self-preservation we hold up around our hearts, which tie up God's hands from moving on our behalf. Steps of faith in God remove the barriers and release His divine intervention (Matt. 13:58, Heb. 11:30).

When negative thoughts come knocking on the door of your heart, don't invite them in and entertain them—they are not your friends. Send them away in the name of Jesus (2 Cor. 10:3–5).

The goal of our race is to set our minds on things above, and to please the Lord—not people (Col. 3:1–2, 23–24).

Only God is qualified to sit in the judgment seat. Whenever we attempt to sit there, we end up in the accuser's place with Satan, instead of sitting with Jesus as an advocate on behalf of others (Heb. 4:12–13, James 4:11–12, 1 John 2:1, Rev. 12:10).

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how Jesus is interceding for people who hurt or oppose you, and for those who are in difficult circumstances (Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25).

God is sovereign—we are not. Surrender control, because you never had it anyway. You suffer even when you get what you want in the here and now because you eventually have to give it up. Nothing ever stays the same, because change is inevitable. Whatever we do with a motive of love for God will last for eternity (Eccl. 2:3–11; Luke 9:23–25, 17:33).

Before losing his life for Christ on the mission field, evangelist Jim Elliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Let's run our race, like Mr. Elliot, faithful to the end!

What can you do *today* to finish your race well? {eoa}

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Juliet is also a licensed minister and a certified Christian counselor.

This article originally appeared at .

Anne Graham Lotz: 'You Want to Be Prepared Before the Hurricane'

Anne Graham Lotz and others in the Carolinas are already experiencing the punishing outer bands of Hurricane Florence. But the popular evangelist also faces what she calls her own "personal hurricane": a recent diagnosis of breast cancer. In this interview with WRAL (Raleigh, North Carolina) she shares words of prophetic encouragement for all those in the path of personal storms.