



The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)

חסד על חסד (יוחנן א'טו)

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Y'shua vs. Spiritual Formulas

Life is not easy. Life with faith is not easy either. So often the community of faith, its leaders and its teachers, etc., emphasize a spiritual-life formula of sorts. You do some spiritual exercises – often relating to Y'shua and to scripture – and then things will go better or go well (and if you do not do the formula, you will not do so well). I call that “formula-based” Christianity – or formula-based faith. One frequent example of this is how people look at their devotional time. Somehow the “doing” of devotional time blesses them and powers them up. Without the devotional time they feel spiritually weak. There is something very special about time alone with Y'shua and with His word, but it is not – and never is – “the devotional time” that empowers us. It is Y'shua in us that truly empowers the believer. Devotional time might be a time that helps us remember that, but it could also be a time that we are trying to “safeguard” ourselves with the keeping of a “spiritual formula.”

I know that there have been times in my life where I had begun to trust in the “formula” of my keeping devotional time rather than trusting in the reality that

Y'shua was with me all the time. I had become more focused on keeping the process of devotional time than on Y'shua's *always* unseen presence. Following Y'shua is not a formula. It is the following of the Son of Man, the Son of God. He is a real being, not limited nor increased by our devotional activities. He is who He is.

Another problem with formula-based faith is that having “spiritual” success following spiritual formulas can actually boost our pride. We may take “honor and glory” (that belongs to God for His goodness to us) for doing the spiritual formula or exercise. Y'shua may not be looking to lift us up, He may actually be looking to bring us down – not for the sake of bringing us down so He can be over us – but because He Himself is the lowly one. In order for us to be more like Him, we must be brought down. It is a judgment of God to divide between our obedience, even to what we consider godly spiritual formulas, versus the absolute reality of His presence within us – because that is itself the reality of the gospel.

Salvation restores us to right relationship with God and enables the Holy Spirit –

God Himself – to dwell within us. It is a lowly Presence – not a formula – that has the potential to make us feel proud about accomplishing it. Y'shua is not looking for us to be spiritually successful so that we look, feel, or impress ourselves or others with our spiritual aptitude. He is looking for us to be like Him. Y'shua did not look or feel successful nor did He impress people as a great spiritual success when He went to the cross. He simply loved and loved completely.

Following this Y'shua in love and in loving others should be our goal. A great wonder of this Y'shua is that His heart, His character is just not like us. It is not selfish, self-congratulatory, or prideful in any way. The redemption that He brings to our lives is to reproduce that completely different image in us. That is so much different than what we are naturally. It can only happen through *Him* and His real and personal work of redemption in us; it does not come by *our* obedience to spiritual formulas.



Unique Happenings

This issue has been hard to write. Many of you probably noticed that there was no September issue. The trip to Israel exhausted me physically, emotionally, and financially. The Smiling Maven bank account would not have covered printing and mailing costs for a September issue. During this time I have considered taking a break from any “official” ministry role, including the writing of *The Smiling Maven*.

An opportunity has arisen for non-ministry employment that should be a help for our family finances. I am excited about “tent-making” and not feeling dependent upon the ministry for livelihood. On the other hand, Smiling Maven Ministries still has legal expenses from the tax exemption process, and we seem to barely make our other expenses from issue to issue. I must admit that a higher level of financial support from our readership would be a blessing and an encouragement.

Two years ago when I took my first trip

to Israel, I received some support through Smiling Maven that helped with the financial responsibilities of the trip. The trip this summer was far more expensive. The level of ministry support for this trip was about the same as two years ago. Along with some other unexpected family expenses before and after the trip, the impact on our family finances has been heavy. I have incurred some personal debt. I am not looking to grumble about the financial situation, but I have had a lot of trouble writing this issue. I believe the financial situation has been a factor. I am not supporting my family through *The Smiling Maven*, and the time that I spend working on the *Maven* is probably pulling me away from other employment.

Throughout my 20 years in ministry, I have had some chronic, non-life threatening, physical ailments. Over the last 10 years, I have been feeling better from season to season. Learning to truly live in

God's grace has been quite helpful. This autumn I have felt quite well. There have been times when I have been somewhat stunned by almost no pain or discomfort in my body. There is an excitement, surprise, and thankfulness for the current health, yet also some bewilderment and reflection over the contrast from the years of discomfort. I am not sure what to say, and I am not sure what to write. This is a positive but also unusual season for me. I seem to need some time so that I can absorb the healing and change that seems to be in progress.

My conclusion is this: Until our family finances improve, I need to focus on non-ministry employment and not spend the time or energy producing the *Maven*. I also need time to absorb, digest, and just enjoy this time in my life. I do not know how long that will take. It may be a few months. It could be a year, hopefully not longer than a year. I ask our readership to be gracious with us during this unique time.

Israel II

In the March issue I mentioned that I was planning a trip to Israel for the summer. I mentioned that planning this trip was quite challenging and either a step of faith or a crazy decision. The trip has come and gone, and I am still not sure if it was full of faith or crazy. As I said in March, maybe the truth lies between full of faith and crazy.

On May 13th I left for Jerusalem. The next day Ruthe had her wisdom teeth removed. Grandparents Frank and Elfriede



Caleb and Ruthe in Jerusalem

Scherer came to Zion, IL, to care for Ruthe as she recovered and to hold down the Weiner “fort” for three weeks. Sister-in-law Evelyn watched them for one week before they left for Jerusalem to join me in Israel. A few days before Ruthe and Caleb left for Israel, Ruthe was involved in a car accident on her way to work. She suffered minor cuts and bruises. Our “beloved” Corolla was totaled. As I look at this paragraph – leaving before my daughter had surgery (which I knew about) and the timing of a car accident before they left (which I did not know about beforehand) – I think, “Maybe I was crazy to plan this trip.”

Meanwhile I was in Israel immersing myself in Hebrew. I was in an intensive Hebrew Ulpan (language study class) every morning for three hours. In the afternoons I was studying and engaging myself in Hebrew conversations with people on the street and in the mall. I made a lot of progress in Hebrew. I shared my faith speaking in Hebrew for the first time. I also visited many Hebrew-speaking congregations, was able to understand a reasonable amount of the messages, and was blessed by the opportunity to worship in Hebrew with many other Jewish believers in Y’shua. Often while “walking the streets,” I sensed some revival in my soul and spirit; and as I walked the land, I was reminded that God is fulfilling his promises concerning Israel. I established some friendships that were “Hebrew-based”: These friends did not speak English, and we communicated only in Hebrew. I met an older Israeli man, Niziim, at the mall. He came to the mall everyday; he agreed to meet with me every afternoon and helped me with my Hebrew. He was a patient and sometimes demanding

tutor (he spoke no English). His help was a blessing and an encouragement. One of the Ulpan teachers later told me that the name Niziim means “miracle.” When I see this paragraph, the progress that I made, the new friends, and the reminder of God’s faithfulness to Israel, I think, Maybe I was in faith about this trip.”

Ruthe and Caleb safely arrived in Israel on June 12th. We toured the country for the next three and one-half weeks, covering a lot of terrain. We were in the Golan Heights and Matula to the north. We visited the cities of Netanya, Tel Aviv, Ashdod, and Ashkelon – all on the Mediterranean – always going to the beaches, which made my daughter very happy. We drove to the border of Gaza (Caleb’s request; he wanted to tell his friends that he was close to a “war zone”). Caleb was often intrigued by the military – or maybe I should say miraculous military history – of modern Israel. We drove to Israel’s southernmost city: beautiful and scenic Eilat. We spent four days snorkeling and viewing beautiful coral reefs abounding with beautiful fish. We tried wind surfing and just enjoyed the refreshing Red Sea beach area. On the eastern border of Israel, we swam in the Dead Sea and visited and climbed up Masada. In the Galilee, we visited modern



Dad and Caleb (Knesset behind us)

Tiberias, the ruins of Capernaum, and (of course) went to the beach and swam in the Sea of Galilee. We also took in many sights in and around Jerusalem. When I reflect on doing this touring with two teenagers – and doing it with a minimum of frustration – I think, “Maybe I was crazy, but I also had some faith.”

There were other ups and downs in and among the trip to Israel: During the first few weeks in Israel, our attorney called and informed us that Smiling Maven Ministries had received its tax exempt status from the U.S. government. This was a long process, and we were quite happy and thankful to receive this good news. Later during the trip, Art’s laptop had its motherboard burn out; it was not until recently that the laptop was finally replaced. A few days before leaving Israel, Caleb (6’3” and 14-years-old) tripped with his ever increasingly long legs. He smashed his knees badly, bad enough that we took a trip to a clinic and

had one of them x-rayed. Fortunately, nothing was broken. I knew the trip was going to be costly and stretch our finances, but it turned out to be even more expensive than expected: The exchange rate was weak for the dollar; we had a glitch regarding accommodations for a week; Caleb’s medical expenses regarding his knee, car replacement issues, and some other unexpected family expenses just before and after the trip severely stretched our family finances. I cannot come to a definite conclusion about whether planning this trip was crazy or full of faith. Sometimes there is purpose beyond our understanding and beyond our comprehension of what seems to make sense – even spiritual sense. That purpose ultimately relates to our eternal need to know Y’shua better and to be transformed more into His image. “He (God) has planted eternity in men’s hearts (a divinely inspired sense of a purpose which nothing under the sun, but God alone can satisfy).” Ecclesiastes 3:11 [The Amplified Bible](#).

The Smiling Maven is a bi-monthly Jewish - flavored newsletter sharing God’s incredible grace. There is coming a spiritual atomic bomb of that incredible grace. It is an imminent spiritual explosion soon to happen in Israel that will have an awesome effect in Israel and all the world.

Life is often hard. Suffering is a real part of life. Sometimes suffering enables us to see more clearly the reality that God loves us. He loves us unconditionally; it is not based on how we are doing. We may begin to understand the wonder of God’s salvation through Messiah Y’shua. Grace might actually be breaking through into our lives. It is the experience of grace that can generate the most genuine smiles. “Maven” is a Yiddish word that means “a person with special knowledge or experience.” Evidence of God’s grace should be characterized by an ability to smile. *The Smiling Maven* newsletter is an encouragement for all of us to be smiling mavens, smiling people with special knowledge of God’s amazing grace.

- EditorArthur Weiner
Someone needing to Smile More
- Copy Editor.....Peter Toeg
Making sure that our articles can produce smiles.
- Text Editor.....Valarie Dillenbeck
No frowns because of grammar or punctuation
- Production Assistant.....Ruthe Weiner
Often producing more smiles than her dad.
- Quality Control.....Caleb Weiner
Smiling, especially while playing on the computer.

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