



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

*October 2020*



## Stories of Hope

In this aerial photo of the church roof (shot by Bob Kelley's drone, at 180 feet), the rooftop looks like a cross. You can view the rooftop photo without the border in Tom's email.





# EMMA'S LIVER STORY

BY  
BRITTANY  
SMITH

*On March 17, 4-year-old Emma Smith – the granddaughter of Debbie and Bruce Thomas of our congregation – received a liver transplant from Landis Erwin, 30, a donor unrelated to the family. Landis had offered to help after seeing a plea on Facebook.*

*With an incision from breast bone to belly button, doctors at UPMC Children's removed roughly a quarter of Landis' liver and transplanted it into Emma. Receiving a new liver allows Emma to better process protein and deal with a rare metabolic disorder that was destroying her kidneys.*

*Emma's mother, Brittany (Thomas) Smith, grew up in this church. Brittany kept a blog during her daughter's surgery and recovery, which continues to be a journey of HOPE.*



## March 11

Back in December, after much debate, we decided to proceed with a liver transplant to help treat (not cure) Emma's metabolic disorder. ...

As long as Emma stays healthy, she will receive her new liver on March 17. We are feeling a lot of emotions right now, but we've seen how God has worked in her life so far and we know He will continue to do so. We've had a lot of people ask what we need. Right now, we need prayer.

## March 16

We're all checked in and preparing for tomorrow. Soaking up every last cuddle!

## March 17

Things were a little delayed this morning, but they just took Emma back to begin prepping for surgery. This means that the donor's surgery has begun. Please pray for her and her family. Emma's surgery will be about eight hours, but with the time spent prepping before and recovering after, it will probably be about 12 hours until we see her again. Fortunately, they allowed both Pat and I back in the waiting room, but no other family is allowed.

## March 17

We are about three quarters of the way through the surgery and so far all updates have been good. The liver is in and connected. They said it fits in Emma perfectly! They're optimistic about closing, but not 100% yet. Please pray this can for sure happen. The donor is done and in recovery and it seems things went well on their end, too. Please keep the prayers coming! They are most definitely felt!

## March 17

Surgery is done and she is COMPLETELY closed!!!

Thank you for all of your prayers and support. Things today have gone very well. Three separate surgeons came out to tell us what a perfect fit the liver was in Emma's body. God is so good! It's hard not to look too far down the road, but we're trying to celebrate the victories today. We should be able to see Emma in about an hour.

## March 17 entry from Landis' parents

Today is possibly the proudest day of our lives as a family. When we asked our daughter, Landis Erwin, how we should celebrate her 30th birthday in a few weeks, she wanted to do something significant. ... Landis got her wish – marking her 30th in a pretty significant way.



As we plan to care for Landis in recovery, there still will never be a doubt that she made an amazing choice at this point in her life. Please continue to pray for the precious young recipient and her incredible family. They still have a very long road ahead of them.

## March 23

As I write this post tonight, it's hard not to think back to where we were a week ago. A week ago tonight we were getting settled into a room down the hall preparing for the surgery the next day. I spent the night soaking up every last cuddle with a very confused 4-year-old who couldn't understand why she was in the hospital when she wasn't even sick! ...

God has answered sooooo many prayers this past week! Emma has exceeded ours and her doctors' expectations! ... I'm so thankful for the way He has worked in Emma's life!

## March 26

As good as yesterday went, we seem to have taken a big jump backwards today. Emma started vomiting around 10 last night, and then continued vomiting throughout night and this morning. Her heart rate also began to climb and is currently pretty high for a resting heart rate. →





Brittany and Pat Smith with their children, Emma, Owen and Mia.

**March 30**

Today was a hard day. Not scary hard like last Thursday, but mentally hard. We’ve been here two weeks now and although we expected to be here at least this long, it’s still hard. We miss our family at home and we’re ready to be all together again.

**April 8**

Well, I am currently writing this post from my own couch! I think we’re all still in shock. When they mentioned it to us yesterday, we thought realistically it would be this weekend. But after MUCH, much discussion and debate today, everyone seemed to agree that Emma would recover better at home and she had reached a point where they felt comfortable with her doing so.

**April 10**

After we returned home, we got a call that her potassium had come back fairly high. They wanted to check it again to make sure it was not a mistake. ...

Emma’s arms, hands, and feet are very, very bruised. Because of all the IVs she’s had lately, they are having a very hard time finding a vein to get blood from or place a new IV in. This is also traumatic for her. I know this is all part of the journey, but it is REALLY hard to watch your child go through. Praying her level has dropped so we can all go home tonight.

**April 11**

Quick update: We ended up getting admitted. Her potassium did not drop as much as they

would like so they’re doing a second round of treatment. Hopefully this time it works and we can go home tomorrow.

**April 12**

The Easter bunny even visited Children’s Hospital last night! We are very thankful to be on our way home to celebrate Easter with the rest of our family today! God is good!

**April 18**

As I sit here tonight one month post-transplant, I’d like to reflect on the ways we’ve seen God’s hand throughout this entire journey. This is by far one of the hardest times we’ve had to walk through (right up there with her initial diagnosis), but when we reflect on the last month, we’ve been blessed in so many ways. ...

Philippians 4. 6-7: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We have certainly felt that peace amid all the worry this past month and we know that comes from fully trusting God to lead us through this journey! They say the first three months are the hardest – one month down!

**April 28**

Emma’s biggest accomplishment over the last couple of days is that she has started eating again! It started Saturday when she ate some goldfish and continued Sunday when

she ate a whole cheese stick and today when she tried some chocolate pudding!

**May 18**

Today marks two months since Emma’s liver transplant. To say this last month has been significantly easier than the first month is an understatement!

**June 18**

Today marks three months since Emma’s transplant! ... If you watched her run around our yard the last few weeks, you’d never know she’s been through major surgery! She runs and jumps and rides her bike and plays as if nothing’s ever happened!

**Sept. 18**

Six months ago was the hardest day of my life as I handed my screaming, scared to death baby over for an operation that would take around 12 hours. As the world seemed to be falling apart around us, it was all we could do to trust God as we began this journey. From providing another couple to talk to in the surgical waiting room to providing various forms of comfort throughout the recovery process to providing us with such an amazing support system that took care of the physical and financial needs, God constantly reminded us He was in control and always watching over us through it all. ...

It’s amazing to look back and see how far we’ve come in six months!

# LAST HOPE

A POEM  
BY ART  
FLICKINGER

Is there hope, surely life is not a bad joke,  
when you’re at the end of the rope, who’s there to save you?  
Or do you fall into the abyss, that’s it, the end?  
Is there something more, why do I exist?

I cry out, “Why me?”  
The echo replies, “Why not?”  
Falling, falling, falling will I ever stop?”  
I am an accident, thrown together by chance,  
a tiny dot, cosmic dust, compost for the universe,  
nothing, nothing in nothingness,  
I fall, fall, fall into the black abyss ...

A small voice within me, the one I oft ignored,  
I hear it now! I hear it now!  
“You were made in My image, you have purpose, you have value.”  
It echoes through my head a thunderous roar,  
shaking me to the marrow.

“Awake! Awake, O hardened soul!  
Fear not! I am with you, I am the hope for all!  
I will not leave or forsake you, in your time of need just call  
You must believe, confess, I am your Lord, repent, I will make you new  
My Spirit will indwell in you, I will not let you go!”

The hounds of heaven caught me, on my knees I did implore,  
“Oh God save this blind  
sinner, forgiveness undeserved,  
I cling to the Cross of Jesus, he died for all my sins,  
by his shed blood he covers me,  
to God I’m born anew!”

Shielded from his wrath, I stand before the throne,  
broken but forgiven, I am not my own.  
Paid for with a price, no one ever could repay,  
washed in the blood of Jesus, I will never be the same,  
Praise the Lord of Heaven, for Holy, Holy, Holy, is His name!

Now you know my story and all I wrote is true.  
Believe in Christ our Savior and he will do the same for you!



# THE BATHROOM

BY  
LAURITA  
KUZKO

On May 2, my husband John was taken by ambulance to the ER for a massive ulcer. It led to a surgery, procedures, over 25 transfusions, two weeks in the ICU and a diagnosis of a rare lymphoma.

When the ambulance took him away, I wasn't allowed to go with him or see him in the ICU. I didn't know if I would see him again this side of heaven. It was one of those night seasons when the darkness seems endless, and the morning didn't seem to come.

God spared John's life, Praise the Lord! He had lost almost all of his muscle mass and had to rebuild strength to stand and relearn to walk. We were told they wouldn't release him home unless we put handrails in the bathroom, and he would come home sooner if we could get the walk-in shower working. It leaked and was on our long "to do" list.

We prayed and made a plan. We would do it ourselves. Kate and I watched lots of YouTube videos. We said: "We can do this." I think Kate believed it.

During a choir Zoom meeting, Kate asked for prayer. Specifically, she asked for wisdom on how to solve the bathroom problem. Both Tom O'Boyle and Jack Doyle prayed at that choir Zoom meeting. Then they had a meeting of their own.

They asked if we were willing to let them help. We said yes. Both Kate and I thought that they would lend an extra set of hands, some tools and advice and experience while they taught her how to fix it herself.

We were wrong. But only in the best way.

It seemed they had a better plan. Church Deacon Roland Hasani agreed to come and tile the shower.

Before he could start, he needed to get down to the structure. He demolished the space and it was like Pandora's box had opened.

"I am so sorry to tell you this, but, when the shower was put in, they didn't install the waterproofing properly and the water damage has destroyed the joist. That joist is holding up your center roof support. It is sitting on nothing! If we don't fix this your roof will collapse. I am so sorry I cannot fix your shower until the joist is fixed first."

I covered my mouth and tears flowed. I couldn't stop them. Poor Roland! He saw my tears, and thought I was upset there were more problems. I explained, "No. There are always more problems! Thank you for being honest, most people who have worked on our house haven't been. I understand, thank you anyway." It's too much, I thought. It's a closed door.

Roland smiled and said, "No, I am going to do your shower. I do this unto God. This is what the church does! When a brother is in need, we help each other, we do what we can. Sometimes, you have helped others, sometimes they help you, right?"

Later Tom explained that our church had decided to help us. We were letting them use their gifts and talents unto God. That we were not to worry about this. We were giving them an opportunity to serve the brethren. "This is what the family of God does," we were told.

Enter Bob Egeland, the structural engineer (at the recommendation of Rick Wolling). Bob is this church's version of Bob Vila, host of the iconic PBS show, "This Old House." Our Bob loves old homes and the unusual problems they often present.

He came, hoisted up the joist from underneath and sistered it. To get to it though, Bob and Tom had to tear out the wall in the garage. Mr. Egeland told Kate she needed to use drywall to replace the pegboard to be up to code. That was the start of the remarkable metamorphosis that has transformed our garage into Kate's new workshop. I love Providential Reversals.

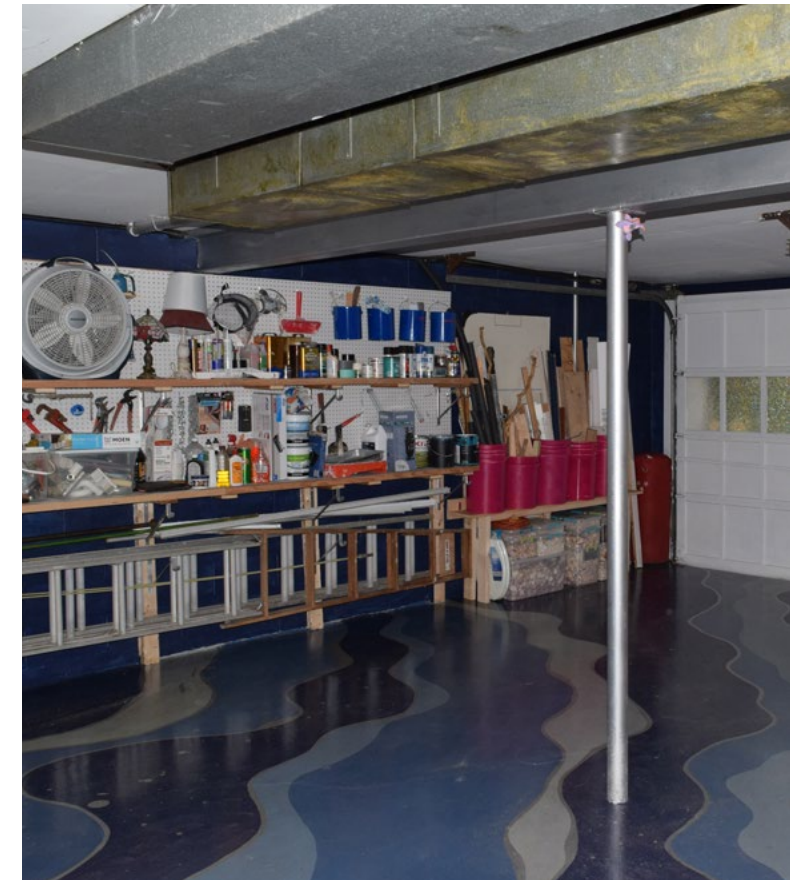
By Memorial Day, the joists and floor boards had been restored and the exterior wall and window had been replaced. Roland was able to finish his tile work. It's beautiful. And he taught Kate how to finish the floor.

There have been times in my life when I couldn't pick myself up. I would cry out to God, but I felt too proud, or too ashamed, to put out my hand and let anyone help me up. Years I have wasted in the slough of despond.

Here was kindness, and dignity, and integrity unto God. These were my brothers and sisters in Christ coming to use their gifts to help and to fix things we could not do ourselves. Here was a glimmer of hope. This is what Jesus meant by bearing each other's burdens. This is what Jesus meant when He told us to love each other as He has loved us.

Hope is sweetest in the night seasons when you need it the most. This bathroom is so sweet. I can remember all of your faces, and I feel the love, time and talent that went into it. Because of this, it's the loveliest room in our home. Thank you, church family, for helping us when we needed you most.

John is home. The bathroom is marvelous and fully functional. It is a monument to hope.



## JEREMIAH 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.





# LAYLA

## & THE TRIUMPH OF HOPE

BY KAREN  
LINDENFELSER

I still remember the day I received the phone call from my pregnant daughter Laura, after her first ultrasound.

Most of the details of that call are forgotten. Partly because she was crying so hard it was difficult to hear and partly because full information wasn't yet known. I do remember the heartache I felt when all Laura could envision was her first baby having atypical arms.

When we were told a more detailed scan was required, we needed Hope. When the doctor said Pete and Laura's baby "didn't have bones in the lower arms," we needed Hope. Hope we knew we'd be assured of via prayer and the comfort it brings.

I remember crying very hard and repeatedly at my desk at work after that first call. Some of the tears reflected the confusion and shock of the moment and knowing how sad Laura was. At first, it seemed so unfair that my sweet godly daughter was dealing with such disappointment and worry. She "deserved" so much better, I thought. Hope was present but overshadowed by the initial grief and worry.

When Laura learned more about the pre-diagnosis of absent arm bones, she googled it. There were more questions than answers. Pete and Laura had firmly decided they didn't want to know the baby's gender but had an envelope with the gender inside, just in case there was a life-threatening diagnosis, so they could pray for the baby with the proper pronouns.

Pete did his best to calm Laura's heart, stay the course and offer Hope. He was a pillar of strength for Laura and me then and is to this day.

Pete also has his own personal "story of Hope" that came full circle with the birth of sweet Layla. Knowing he had to be strong for Laura and for all that Layla would need was a galvanizing moment in his own spiritual journey. He suddenly had a very real and needed purpose.

Layla has brought about all kinds of proof that Hope was depended upon and is REAL. She has beaten the odds of so many of the concerns we all had before and after she was born.

There was what I perceive to be a miracle when a doctor just happened to enter a week before her birth, likely saving her from harm.

During a final meeting with Laura's OB team at West Penn Hospital, the doctor was sure Layla had a rare condition known as TAR syndrome. Because of this, a c-section was the only safe delivery option. Anything else could have been fatal to Layla. Hope was sent from God in the form of this medical professional who hadn't been part of Laura's normal medical team.

Hope was felt again when the weekly transfusions could be stopped at three months instead of the predicted one to two years typical of this syndrome. Potential heart ailments were covered in Hope when Layla was declared free from cardiac concerns just before 4 years old.

Layla, who will celebrate her fifth birthday Oct. 29, also defied the odds when she had illnesses that should have sent her platelet numbers plummeting but mostly didn't. She "graduated" from some early intervention therapies received as an infant and toddler

with flying colors. She continues to amaze therapists with her progress. All additional parts of her story of Hope.

She is one determined little girl and always tries again and again before asking for help. So many successes for this young lady! Hope.

Pete and Laura's faith and Hope were also evident in the birth of Layla's two new sisters: Nora in April of 2018 and Olivia in July of 2020. Thanks to Hope, Pete and Laura were well prepared for whatever they heard from the first pre-natal scan for each daughter and in all the days that followed.

Bumps in the road are just that for them, simply bumps. Because they have greater confidence in Who holds their lives in the palm of His hand. They know many have prayed for our family and continue to do so.

God is good all the time. We praise Him for the gifts He has given to Layla to help her navigate the challenges she faces and fully trust He will continue to do so.

While we will never understand the "whys," we know His plan is perfect so the why doesn't need an answer. He has big plans for Layla and her family.

I am convinced those plans will include showing how beautifully differently-abled can look. How one can advocate for "rare" awareness in amazing ways. How the family of "rares" can show the world how to treat these perfect creations of God.

I cannot wait to watch their stories of Hope continue to unfold.



### ECCLESIASTES 11:5

As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

### 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.



# THE GOD WHO NEVER STOPS DOING GOOD

BY  
BRENT  
MOCK

The passage below from Jeremiah (32. 39-41) is a life defining verse in my life and Carol's. It says:

*I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them.*

*I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.*

*I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.*

Our covenant-keeping God never stops doing good. He spoke this promise to a people in exile, for whom life had fallen apart. No matter how adverse the circumstance, God never stops doing good.

It was true in Jeremiah's day. And it has most certainly been true in mine. Even when adversity strikes, as it did in the fall of 2019, when I received my cancer diagnosis.

What I thought was just fatty tissue turned out to be a dangerous and extensive melanoma. My first thought and prayer was simply, "Lord, you have taken care of me all these years. That hasn't changed."

This experience set us on a journey of staying close to Jesus and seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit every step of the way. It became a journey saturated in prayer, ours and yours.

Months before the diagnosis, Carol sensed from the Lord that it was cancer. She prayed specifically that the cancer would stay contained to the tumor.

Given how long the tumor grew and how big it was, it should have spread. It didn't. For this I owe Carol and the Lord Jesus my life.

We prayerfully asked God to lead us to the right dermatologist. Nick and Jan Profio recommended one.

When I called, I did not get an appointment with the doctor Nick suggested, but with the head of the practice, who sees only a few patients. He turned out to be just the dermatologist I needed.

He referred me to one of the best oncology surgeons in Pittsburgh. We chose from several oncologists at the Hillman Cancer Center. We considered one and were going to choose him when Carol was drawn to another, Dr. Yana Najjar.

She has proven not only to be a leading melanoma researcher but a wonderful doctor and an answer to prayer. I could not have received better care.

A simple recommendation from a brother and sister at Beverly Heights set all of this in motion. It was a good God who made this happen.

We prayed about whether or not to undertake immunotherapy and trusted God's leading. I needed to clarify what my insurance would cover as immunotherapy is costly. I was told my insurance would cover all costs. On this basis we agreed to start immunotherapy.

Later we discovered that under my insurance plan I was liable for 20% of the cost. Had the agent I talked to not given me faulty information we probably would not have done immunotherapy. God used a mistake to lead us down the right path.

We prayed about whether or not to continue my immunotherapy as first planned which meant 12 infusions over one year. As I experienced significant fatigue and muscle pain which greatly affected my quality of life, Dr. Najjar asked us to consider stopping sooner.

We made this a matter of seeking the Lord's guidance, trusting that if we stopped the fewer infusions would be as effective as all 12.

We stopped at eight with my last treatment on Sept. 17. As the immunotherapy drug stays in my system, the fatigue and pain lessen gradually. Some days are better than others.



Brent with his oncologist at the Hillman Cancer Center, Dr. Yana Najjar.

The good news is that side effects that could have injured my organs never happened.

Our Lord's clear leading throughout all of this declares that I am cancer free and should stay free. His goodness is so evident to us.

Psalm 91. 14-16 sums up the goodness of our God:

*"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will*

*deliver him;  
I will protect him, because he knows my name.  
When he calls to me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and honor him.  
With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."*

Carol and I are blessed to be in a vital fellowship of believers at Beverly Heights.

The concern expressed for us, all the prayers prayed for us, the cards and the prayer shawl you sent blesses us more than we could ever express. Jesus never stops doing good and so do all of you at Beverly Heights.

We know that your continual, fervent prayers for us make a huge difference and through you we have greatly experienced God's goodness.





# BETWEEN | SUNDAYS

BY RICK WOLLING

## A HOPE THAT DOES NOT DISAPPOINT

Five years into my pastorate in central Oklahoma a tragedy hit our little oilfield town.

Its well-known and beloved “son of the community” was tragically killed in an automobile crash at 30 years of age.

Jeff’s family was crushed by unimaginable grief. Janet, his wife with two young children, went into a state of shock. His mother and father could barely put one foot in front of the other, overwhelmed by the pain of losing their only child.

Overwhelmed, too, was the small group of young couples whom the Lord had brought to the church and who bonded together in passionate desire and grateful thanksgiving as we witnessed our formerly dead church come alive in vibrant worship, purposeful mission and rich, sustaining fellowship.

The only thing we knew to do in response to the grim reality of our friend’s death was to continue to come together. We held each other, cried together and walked with each other in a minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day attempt to continue on.

Our group was comprised of an airplane pilot, a newspaper advertisement manager, a preschool director, a manufacturer of blue jeans and a “green bean salesman” along with spouses and a whole gaggle of little kids. And a devastated wife with two little ones who couldn’t begin to comprehend what had happened to their daddy.

And that group included me, their pastor.



What can one say in such a situation? What can one offer when the sheep are weary and the shepherd has been wounded as well? Why did this happen? Where is God in all of this? What good could possibly come of this?

All the questions and all the grief-stricken, tear-drenched faces turned to their pastor.

Where could I turn? Where could I take them?

Mary recently reminded me of one of our group’s early gatherings when we joined together, and cared for and prayed for one another.

We opened God’s Word and we meditated upon Romans 5. 3-5: “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”

What is this hope that does not disappoint us? James I. Packer, who just this summer had his hope realized at his entrance into heaven, contrasted the world’s misunderstanding of hope with true Christian hope when he said:

*Optimism hopes for the best without any guarantee of its arriving and is often no more than whistling in the dark. Christian hope, by contrast, is faith looking ahead to the fulfillment of the promises of God. ... Optimism is a wish without warrant; Christian*

*hope is a certainty, guaranteed by God himself. Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come. Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life, and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth, on the basis of God’s own commitment, that the best is yet to come.*

The foundation of that “sure and certain hope” is Jesus Christ and His finished work of redemption for us on the cross, the forgiveness of all our sins, our restoration to fellowship with God for eternity and our growth in Christlikeness until then.

It was this very hope that sustained that little group of mourners in Oklahoma years ago. And the same hope that today sustains all who trust in Christ until He comes again.

*Rick Wolling is pastor emeritus of Beverly Heights Church.*