



# Caspari Center NEWS

March 2017



## From the CEO

Elisabeth E. Levy

## Dear Partners and Supporters of the Caspari Center

Jewish writer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel once said: "God made man because he loves stories". Did you know that 75% of the Bible is in story format? And much of Yeshua's teaching ministry came in the form of stories.

In the middle of February, Caspari Center hosted a week-long seminar called *Simply the Story*, an oral interactive Bible study course focused on the story of Scripture. More than thirty people joined us for this course. This newsletter contains details about the story that unfolded during the *Simply the Story* seminar.

After a cold winter here in Jerusalem, spring is on the way! The sun is getting stronger and warmer each day. We are looking forward to all that the new season has in store. We will be hosting a group of theology students from Norway who will be coming to Israel for a month of study. Their time in Israel is a part of their Master's program, but we know the experience will shape the way in which they read their Bibles, teach, and minister for the rest of their lives.

As always, we covet your prayers and value your ongoing financial support of this ministry.

## The Power of the Story

Marja-Liisa Söderqvist  
/ CC staff member



Fresh winds blew through the Caspari Center this February, while over 30 people from various cities in Israel gathered to participate in a *Simply the Story* (STS) seminar, an oral interactive course focused on the story of Scripture. The five-day workshop was taught by a team of four skilled storyteller trainers from the United States. The team was headed up by Dr. Bill Bjoraker, a pastor, teacher, theologian, and creator of the STS method, which he initially developed to reach the Jewish people.

The trainers gave participants guidelines for digging deeply into the story, in search of spiritual truths, and then divided the participants into small groups to practice. Each small group had a leader. The leaders were instructed to begin with prayer. Then, having prepared the story, the storyteller shared it with the others as accurately as possible. One participant in the group repeated the story to the best of their recollection. After that, there was a third round: the lead storyteller told the story again, with deliberate gaps for the others to fill in.

Participants also learned to seek context for the story, and to search the text for conflicts and tension. Trainers encouraged seminar attendees to look for ways to make an emotional connection with the story's characters. They were encouraged to ask questions such as, "What can I learn about the characters? About God? What choices were made, or could have been made, and what do these things tell us about the decision-maker? What was the result and who was affected by it? How did God work in the situation and what does it say about his character?" Participants were encouraged to apply these same questions to the story of their own lives in order to gain new insight about God and his work in their lives.

Storying invites the whole person to participate, and the Holy Spirit applies the truths most relevant to the life of every hearer. This approach to sharing the good news is a contrast to apologetics and argumentation, as it focuses on story and not on winning a debate. It is also how Jesus engaged his audience.

At the end of the seminar, participants went out into the streets to share short, five-minute stories with strangers. Some noted that they had previously been afraid to share the gospel, but now found joy in it. Participants overwhelmingly reported that they found the seminar inspiring, strengthening both their faith and communication skills. In addition, a number of participants discovered that they learned more of God's character through making spiritual observations and applying them to their own lives.

The goal of the *Simply the Story* seminar was to equip the participants to prepare and present fascinating, accurate Bible stories and to lead dynamic discussions on Scripture, applying it to life. It was exciting to see people leave the seminar engaged and committed to sharing the greatest story of all.



— Bill Bjoraker —

# The Time of God's Favor

Rita Kontorovich / Project Coordinator



What does it mean when we say “the time of God’s favor”? It is a phrase (et ratzon) found in the Hebrew Bible which has made its way into Modern Hebrew, though today it is used to signify “the right time.” In ministry, I have witnessed specific times and events when God is at work in a powerful way that extends beyond what our own human effort could ever generate.

How is this “right time” to be recognized? Sometimes there is a wonderful flow when all the pieces fall into place surrounding a particular ministry initiative. At other times, God’s favor can be seen as a red stoplight, bringing careful plans to a supernatural halt. In every case, grounding in Scripture combined with spiritual sensitivity helps clarify how the Spirit is working.

I recently experienced this sense of a “time of God’s favor” at our sixth annual seminar for Russian-speaking Shabbat school teachers in Haifa. This year’s gathering garnered more interest from across Israel than ever before. Initially organized for Russian-speaking teachers in the North of the country, the seminar has begun to attract participants from the center and even from the South of Israel. The number of participating congregations is also growing. We are drawing teachers from Hebrew-speaking congregations, too, as almost every Israeli congregation, regardless of their official service language, has Russian-speaking teachers. In addition to this, participants have shown initiative by actively engaging with us prior to the seminar, sending us suggestions for discussion topics and other agenda-related issues.

In Israel, the community of Yeshua-followers is small. Estimates place the number between ten and fifteen thousand people. It has been an on-going challenge to find qualified, professional speakers for our seminars, but recently we have begun to see growth and commitment in the believing community and we now have access to a number of seasoned children’s ministry leaders. I am happy to say that there are many Russian speakers among them.



Our latest speaker was truly remarkable. This particular lecturer teaches Tanakh (Old Testament) in an ordinary Israeli high school, and loves her profession. (Unfortunately, not all Tanakh teachers believe in the God of the Tanakh.) She brought to our seminar a knowledge and love of Scripture and a teaching proficiency that really enhances the learning experience of both the students in her secular high school, and the children in her congregation. With her help, those attending the seminar learned how to dig deeper into Biblical Hebrew. They learned how to help their children understand this language, which is so different from modern-day Hebrew. They learned how to impart a love of the Book of books. They learned how to turn each lesson into a memorable experience.

This seminar was unforgettable for all participants and our feedback forms reflected this unequivocally. Blessed be the Lord who sends us good speakers at the right time! At the end of the seminar we asked the participants if they would like to gather more often than once a year. Every single hand went up in the air!

As we move ahead to meet this desire, we sense that this is a time of God’s favor to further develop this important discipleship ministry. May we have the wisdom to follow him well where he is already at work among his people!

## Prayer Requests Please pray for...

- The month-long course we are organizing for students of the Norwegian School of Theology, in March-April.
- The national Shabbat School Seminar, which will take place in late spring, in Netanya.
- Our Board and Partners' meetings, in June. May the Lord continue to lead us through wise counsel. (Proverbs 15:22)



# A Time to Study

David Serner

/ Director of International Studies

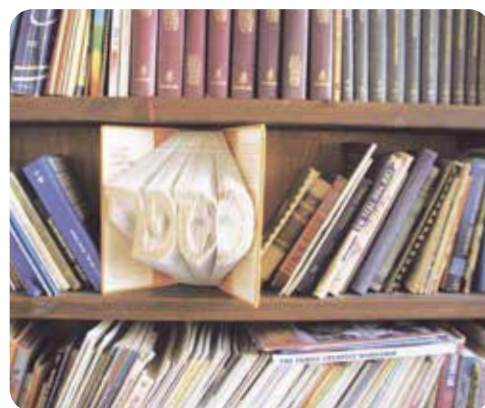


At the Caspari Center, we encourage people to come and study in the land of the Bible. We love to help facilitate such endeavors through our library, contacts, and proficient instruction.

This fall, Pastor Jan Bygstad, from cold and rainy Bergen on the west coast of Norway, did just that. He took a pastoral study leave when the possibility arose to dive into a subject that had been on his mind for decades: Jewish believers in Jesus and their theology. Jan's interest in the Jewish people was sparked when, as a youth, he read Andre Schwarz Bart's novel *The Last of the Just*, which deals with the Holocaust and who the Jewish Messiah is, or should be. This grew into a natural interest in and care for Jewish believers in Jesus. The focus of Jan's study time was to gain a deeper understanding of the place of the Torah in the Messianic movement(s). Jan recalls that the opportunity to be away from his demanding congregational service was a great benefit that enabled him to read without distraction, especially in the Caspari library.

Some of the things that surprised Jan most in the Messianic movement were the lack of understanding of the distinction between law and gospel; the strong influence of various types of Reformed theology that he encountered during his interactions with different Messianic leaders or through their books; and a willingness to accept rabbinic tradition to a certain extent. This deeper understanding of the problems and theological challenges confronting the movement enhances and advances the capability to discern and ponder a biblical approach to what we are facing today as believers.

One of the things that has been important to Jan in his work as a minister is that the First Testament is not to be considered merely a preface to the New Testament, but is itself Holy Scripture that Jesus and the NT writers reveal. Luther was quite clear that the Tanakh is Holy Scripture proper, while the gospel/NT is an oral and preached word. To a large degree this idea was lost during the Enlightenment. This is also one of the biggest challenges for the historical churches: to take the Tanakh seriously as a sacred text on its own merits, as Jesus teaches us. A great challenge of the Messianic movement seems to lie in anthropology—that is, to realize the depth of the Fall, and with this the pedagogical task of God's law. Without this, the preaching of the law becomes moralistic.



Encountering Messianic theology—and Messianic believers—enhances the understanding of the background of the NT. As Jews, the Jewish believers often have the ability to reveal connections and insights that we as non-Jews easily overlook. This also is part of Jan's interest in the movement: It can give the church important insights into the biblical text. It is also important to be aware of the fact that the apostle Paul gives Jesus the status that the Torah has in rabbinic Judaism: Jesus—not Torah—is "the way, the truth and the life." He also is the pre-existing intermediary between creation and the Creator.

When asked if he would call the NT "Halakhah for Christians," Jan said, "You certainly find a kind of Halakhah in the NT, but this is a Halakhah that is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus, as Paul teaches in Romans 6."

Jan is excited to follow the Messianic movement(s) in Israel as they mature, and hopes that the Gentile churches will learn from their insights. He also hopes that the movement will learn from the heritage of 2,000 years of theological struggle in the churches.

In closing, Jan said, "The meetings with Messianic leaders were so intriguing that I would have loved to continue my conversations with those whom I met during my time in Jerusalem. And I absolutely recommend that anyone who has an interest in the movement and their theology come and spend some time at the Caspari Center."



## Devotional thoughts



# A Full Day's Pay

Michelle Van Loon  
/ US Administrator



Matthew 20:1-16 recounts the parable of a vineyard owner who hired workers throughout the day to help with the harvest. Some workers had worked the whole day for the man, others worked just an hour at the end of the day. When it was time to pay the workers, the vineyard owner paid each worker precisely what he'd promised them when he hired them. No matter how long each worker had toiled, each received precisely the same amount of pay from the vineyard owner.

It seemed terribly unfair. The grumbling began immediately from those who'd been working the entire day: Why should a man who worked only an hour in the lengthening shadows of the afternoon receive the exact same pay as a man who'd worked hard from morning to nightfall?

The vineyard owner reminded the complainers that they agreed to the pay he'd offered them before hiring them. Then he named the core issue lying underneath their grumbling: "Are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:15)

This question exposes what we believe about God's character. It isn't always easy to believe that God is fair when the world around us is filled with so much injustice. Or we measure our lives by what we believe we lack in terms of relationships, work, health, or finances, then erroneously conclude God must love just a little bit more than he does us the person who seems to possess whatever we feel we're lacking.

### Consider a few of the things the Bible says about jealousy:

#### • Jealousy consumes us:

"Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame." (Song of Solomon 8:6)

#### • Jealousy drives our competition with others:

"And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor." (Ecclesiastes 4:4)

#### • Jealousy causes unholy divisions between people:

"You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task." (1 Corinthians 3:3-5)



When we use a calculator to try to count God's immeasurable love for us, we become stingy hoarders. The antidote for this stinginess is to confess the truth of his mercy toward us. He has given us so much more in Yeshua than a full day's pay, and we haven't earned a single cent of it.

Father, please help us recognize and confess those areas of jealousy that hamper us from freedom, gratitude, and generosity. Through Yeshua, you have paid every debt we owe and by Your Spirit, we are empowered to live in freedom and love. Thank you, Lord!

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*"Equipping His people for works of service, so that the body of Messiah may be built up" Ephesians 4:12*

If you would like to know more about the Caspari Center and its activities, write to [caspari@caspari.com](mailto:caspari@caspari.com) or visit our website, [www.caspari.com](http://www.caspari.com). You can support our work by prayer, volunteering, or financial gifts to help with individual projects or the general work of the center.