



Will & LeeAnn Groben

Update for February 2014. The good news is that LeeAnn and I bought a house out in the countryside. It is less than ten minutes from the church [at least when the roads are passable; lately often coated with half an inch of ice], and has views of corn fields out the front and back. Of course, it comes with the associated smells of farmland too, but the house is pretty air tight. We own about 1.3 acres, but the road cuts through our land, so we think of it as just an acre. Most of the sixth of an acre on the other side of the road is used by the farmer. He raises turkeys, so I joked we would charge him two turkeys a year for the use of our land, but then LeeAnn pointed out that he probably would deliver them alive.

We have been in the house for a few weeks, but still have a lot in the garage or basement, because we had painters in, then an electrician, then a plumber, and we have been very busy. We still have a lot of work by a carpenter pending. We found out the roof is leaking badly in one spot, so that became a priority. The heating and air conditioning are old and inefficient, so probably need attention this spring. The joys of home ownership! The biggest problem, emotionally, is our brave tiger [Kramer] has been a little afraid of the skylight at night, when he can see shapes reflected in it. The panther [George] apparently never looks up, so he is fine.

This is a bigger house than we have ever had, so we will have to buy some furniture. That should be fun, if we can get over sticker shock and the stress of the long to-do list. When we got married and went shopping, Will was shocked that stores would want over \$1,000 for a sofa made of pine boards and cloth. Made him regret abusing those antiques in his mother's house growing up! Our house is a split level: the garage and back door enter on the lower floor, where there is a family room, office, laundry, and half bath; down half a flight is the basement, while up half a flight is the main floor accessed by the front door and back deck, with a kitchen and dining room, living room, and foyer; up another half a flight are three bedrooms and two baths. We like the inside. The outside is ugly to Will, but we will fix it with strategic plantings.

We had a little dedication party after our friends helped move our stuff over [while it snowed]. We were tired after a hard week, so we did not do an elaborate teaching or anything, but we prayed thanks for this blessing and asked God to help us use this blessing to bless many others. We foresee hosting ministry groups and social events. We pray that moving out to the fields will not affect our intentionality of reaching out to the people in the village. At our party, the young and agile climbed over things in the garage to write their favorite scriptures on the walls with markers; those of us a little less adventuresome promised to do this later when access was improved.

We recently had two of the best days of our lives, when we found out we were pregnant and saw our baby's heartbeat. Then we had some of the worst days, when we found out at about ten weeks that it was God's will that our baby's heart stopped beating. God gave us peace about this, for which we are grateful; all that theological preparation is paying off. Even with that deep peace, we experienced extreme sadness, and we remain disappointed and frustrated. At this point, we are able to carry on well enough, though there is an underlying sadness sometimes. We are not sure how we got through the first weekend of emotional shock and then the physical effects for the next couple of weeks. That first weekend, Will went to two ministry training events for the teachers in the church and then preached, and all that went ok, but when it came time to share the news with the church at the end of the service, he almost couldn't, both physically and emotionally. Though the Bible does not speak to the issue directly, most Christians believe that babies [whether born or not] who die are whisked into the presence of God in Heaven, so we would hope to meet our child when this struggle in a fallen world is over.

Lots of thankful moments: Will's mother visiting; being able to buy out of our lease; our tenant in Florida renewing for another year; kind neighbors in both old and new places; beauty in nature and in people's hearts; safe travel on icy roads; LeeAnn's job; warm boots and coats; encouragement from so many people...



We continue to be hopeful that God is at work blessing the church, seen here at our fiftieth anniversary party. We have had many prayer requests answered. We were encouraged by the youth teachers coming to a second training session, and sharing thoughts about what they have been reading in Hendricks' book, *Teaching to Change Lives*. Many of the children's teachers also are reading this book, and their first training was an encouragement. We have started new curriculum for Sunday morning in both of

these ministries, and overall we think that is going well. The Sunday afternoon and midweek programs for the youth also are going well. We have met with the young adults a few times, and are delighted by the conversations we have had about what they are seeking spiritually this year, and excited to begin a weekly study of Schlegel's *Satellite Bible Atlas* together. We have a new men's Bible study that is off to a great start. We have had some counseling opportunities which seemed to prove helpful. The elders are praying more together, all three of us on Sundays and two of us with others on Wednesdays. We had successful Christmas events with lots of visitors. We even had lots of visitors to our two "family night" events, as relations came to see the little children participate in the activities. We are finishing chapter three in our verse by verse study of the gospel of John, and have received lots of exciting feedback about the sermon-based devotions.

All those are positive signs as we continue to invest in experiencing and sharing God's truth, grace, and love. Still, there is so much struggle in the lives of any body of people. We are a small church, but we have several people who are chronically ill, others battling acute health issues, others who are just getting old. Then there are the stress and anxiety that attacks us all and which for some requires constant vigilance. There are deaths in families, even suicides among school friends. We gather each Sunday to rejoice in the hope we have, that our salvation is assured and we will one day be in Heaven without such pain and sadness. And we do rejoice; but even Christians suffer in this life, and LeeAnn and I mourn with those who are mourning.

As a church, we still face some challenges. God blessed us with generous giving in December to bring the budget into balance, but giving is down this year, probably in part due to lower attendance with the inclement weather. One couple who has been coming for many years from an hour away just announced they were done making that trip, and they not only were generous givers financially, but with their time and talent also. We are not seeing people take outward steps yet: accept the gospel, ask for water baptism, ask to join the church, seek mentoring or training. We continue to pray and rely on God to bring these blessings. All we can do is give our best to what he has asked us to do; it is up to him to bring results.

As we typed that line originally [a couple of weeks ago], the power went out. Not a sign from Heaven, we hope! Or if it is, we hope we can interpret it to mean God is saying, "Yes, you should rely on me alone!" In ministry, you learn that lesson over and over if you need to, and are reminded over and over regardless. Only God can bring someone to faith or transform someone; yet he chooses to work through humble us. It is a fearsome privilege...

Wm. LeeAnn

We would love to hear how your life is going! We appreciate your prayers and encouragement. Blessings...

www.groben.com / ministry@groben.com / ldg@groben.com / 610.857.3693