

**WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE AND THANKSGIVING**  
**Reflections on the Life of David Benjamin Bauman**  
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“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” In the contradictory, upside down way that so many of Jesus’ words revealed truths about God and humanity, this particularly odd statement, the third in the list of Beatitudes in Matthew’s account, seems to me to paint a strikingly vivid image of the life of David Bauman. More than anyone I have ever known, my father was meek. I don’t mean that he was weak, or that he lacked conviction or purpose. Much to the contrary – I’m not sure I will ever encounter someone of greater courage, purpose, or principle. Rather, Dad’s meekness was in the absolute reality that his life was ultimately never focused on himself. For 87 years his central purpose, the heartbeat throbbing at the core of his being, was completely in tune with God’s purpose and God’s kingdom on earth.

Jesus doesn’t say, “Blessed are the meek, for they will achieve great success.” Like all great experimenters and tinkerers, Dad seemed uncertain of success. And, for the most part, he didn’t pay it much heed. He lived his commitments for the sheer love of them, not for any gain they might bring him.

His work over 35 years as a missionary in India was so varied that as a child I often struggled to explain exactly what he did. My earliest memories include him as a supervisor of a boarding home for boys attached to a Christian school for children from nearby villages. He later spent 13 years in pastoral administration, as a District Superintendent for the Methodist churches in the area. Ultimately, and I believe most significantly, he settled into a mix of ministries that he not only created and defined, but that he seemed to inhabit, to give life: economic development and Christian education work among the poorest of the villagers in the countryside surrounding the town in which we lived. The work was inventive, his approach creative, his attitude impatient and eager, looking for something, for progress: smokeless wood stoves made of clay to enable tear-less food preparation in village homes; irrigation and well-digging projects for farmers eking out a living from tiny plots of corn or rice; mango tree planting into areas made barren by decades of wood cutting; dairy cow farming experiments among village folk more used to water buffaloes; week-long intensive vacation Bible school camps held simultaneously in 2 or even 3 villages; methane gas converters to squeeze valuable gas fuel out of the animal manure so abundant in rural India; innovative audio-visual ministry bringing Christian motion pictures to the center of a village street along which most homes had yet to have their own electricity. He was willing to try anything.

Some of it worked. Most of it... well, you couldn’t really be sure. When he and Mom finally retired after a lifetime in India, their first stop on their journey west was to Chris’ and my little apartment provided us by the Boston University School of Theology (the same institution from which he had set off in ministry more than four decades earlier). He seemed moody, almost despondent, reflecting on the uncertainties, acknowledging that after all that effort, he didn’t really know if he had made much of a difference. Blessed are the meek.

Once settled into their home on Middle Ridge Road here in Amherst Township, he and Mom got restless again, and it wasn't long before his spirit led to a return visit to India – just once more to see their lifelong true home again. And again... and again.... I have long since lost track how many times they have been back for this, just once more “final” trip. And each time, like the tinkering inventor whose endless series of disappointments and uncertainties eventually uncovers that one golden discovery, hidden all the while, that defines a life, he and Mom have had revealed to them over and over by a multitude of those whose lives they had touched that one golden truth: the powerful spirit of God, which, surprisingly, had been at work all along through their simple act of living their faith. “Remember me?”, a young pastor building a new church start in a previously unchurched region asks. “I was in the hostel for boys when you were there.” “Do you know me?”, the pioneering church educator questions of them. “You used to come to our village, and because of you I went to college.” Out of a mishmash of interests, passions, commitments, ideas, and experiments is born a world of Christian faith and action. Remember the meek? They shall inherit the earth.

Mid-way through my senior year at the boarding school in which I lived three days' journey away from my folks, I came home to be with them for the long winter break. Mark was far away in the United States, in college, and I spent the three months feeling lonely and lost. Dad felt my restlessness too, and sometimes after a tedious day of paperwork at his desk, he would turn to me and say, “Come on Philip, let's go for a ride.” We would climb onto his old beat up motorcycle with the dent on the front fender where an ornery camel had kicked it, to putter out to watch the sun set over the reservoir a mile or so from our house. Or if we needed extra time to shake the blues from our bones, we'd go out a little further, out into the countryside, where a series of low hills hugged the parched earth, each no more than a pile of a few dozen rough granite boulders. We would talk, out on these evening excursions, of dreams and disappointments, of science and astronomy, of the mysteries of the cosmos. Once, lying listlessly against the solid heft of a particularly large boulder at the base of a hillock, we wondered, “Wouldn't it be great if even in this bright light of late afternoon, we could get our eyes to pick out Venus?” Well, Venus is of course the night sky's brightest object after the moon, but here we lay in almost broad daylight. We knew exactly where to look; Dad was after all a superb astronomer. We stared up intently, willing our vision out. Focus far... far... beyond that flitting bug overhead... beyond that circling bird... beyond the sky. Farther out, make your eyes go unfocused – that far. Venus will be so dim in this brightly lit sky. Just stare, don't come in close, go long.... And suddenly, there it was! A sparkling twinkle exactly where we had been gazing, once hidden by a focus too narrow, now revealed to both of us at the same instant. Don't let go! Don't let your focus drift in close again! Hold on! Keep it. We have it! We had found that most lovely of all planets of the canopy of night, here, here in the broad light of dusk. And then the shock: “That's not Venus!”, Dad exclaimed. “That's Jupiter!” And sure enough, it was Venus' follower, the gas giant Jupiter, the *next* most brightest of night planets. And now, breathing quickly, but knowing our way, we eagerly followed the imaginary line down toward the horizon and triumphantly captured Venus, too.

We had only been trying for the impossible. We hadn't known we would achieve the unimaginable. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.