

Dear friends of Vital Signs Ministries,

August 2024



It was a busy July but, as you'll note immediately from the photos I have included in this month's letter, there were some "high" highlights that were particularly memorable. I'll get to those "mountain moments" in a bit. But first -- a quick review of this month's VSM activities.

As usual, we had delightful times at each of our 10 "When Swing Was King" shows in July. And our Sunday afternoon church services at Aksarben Village Senior Living were also great fun as well as spiritually productive. Much more somber ministries, of course, were our mornings of prayers and pro-life witness in front of the dastardly Planned Parenthood abortion business. Then there were our many correspondence and social media duties; hosting the quarterly Vital Signs Board meeting and 2 letter-writing parties; attending a Board meeting of the Business and Professional People for Life (BP4L) and helping prepare that organization's newsletter and September luncheon; compiling and sending The Top 5 every Saturday; preaching engagements at Wellspring Lutheran Church and Prairie Lane Christian Reformed Church; and posting such Vital Signs Blog articles as "The Images That Break Your Heart," "Up, Up and Away...Forever," and several short pieces on abortion and evolution.

Okay, now on to our latest Colorado 14er adventure -- with illustrations, no less. But, if you will allow, let me begin by putting this mountain hike tradition in perspective. You see, it was over 10 years ago now that God graciously directed Claire and I to begin a strict Paleo diet. Being overweight and far removed from an athletic past, I was in dire need of radical change. And God provided exactly what I needed. 1) A compelling **Motivation** to return to healthy eating and exercise. 2) The right **Method** (for us) regarding weight loss and discipline. 3) Extremely encouraging **Momentum** as we saw dramatic changes right away. Also very important was that accompanying the commitment to lose weight was a renewed dedication to physical exercise, especially long-distance walking and bicycle riding.

Therefore, in 2016 when my 65th birthday was approaching, I looked for a special accomplishment (rather than just a celebration) to mark the milestone. My youngest brother Ric suggested climbing one of the mountains back in my home state of Colorado that was 14,000 feet or higher in elevation. Not having a clue about the difficulties of such a project, I took him up on the idea. Well, climbing Mt. Bierstadt on July 5 that summer ended up being the hardest physical test I had ever experienced and they certainly haven't gotten easier -- age, a torn meniscus, a torn calf muscle, arthritis, a propensity for nosebleeds at mountain altitudes, complications from vertigo and, of course, in 2021 there was that terrible fall in the rock field following my second summit of Bierstadt. Still, I have been humbled to the max, richly blessed, and mercifully helped along the way and have now made 7 14er summits. Thank You, Lord!

With this history, you can perhaps better appreciate why I consider myself so honored to have been given these opportunities. But please note that they are, as God's bountiful gifts always are to His beloved children, carefully crafted for us individually to build spiritual character, stimulate Christian service, and increase our "gratitude attitude."



Okay, let's get on with the job at hand. Photo # 1 shows the ruins of the Dauntless Mine which is a short (but steep) distance from the trailhead where Ron Scheffler, Ryan Garvey, Aldo de la Cruz, and myself had started our hike towards Mt. Sherman at 6:10. It was 28 degrees. The road you see comes from just south of

Fairplay and it is 12 miles of rough, rutted, and very rocky driving -- particularly nerve-wracking when you're driving it in pre-dawn hours.

2 above -- Not too far up from the old Dauntless is one of the snow-fed pools we encountered along the way. There we caught our first clear sight of Mt. Sherman standing proud and 10,036 feet high in the Mosquito Range. Our course from here will take us zigzagging our way up, over, and around that hill you see on your left in order to get to Mt. Sherman's southwest base.



3 above and to the right -- We have already had over an hour of hard, steady hiking before even seeing up to our left the route we need to take to the saddle between Mount Sherman and Mt. Sheridan. But we can take in from here the sobering fact that this arduous ascent (with its rocky, narrow ledges near the summit) means a much more trying test is coming up.



4 and # 5 – “Hey, let’s climb a 14er, they said. It’ll be fun, they said!” While it’s true that Mt. Sherman was the shortest distance hike of any of my 14er climbs so far, none had presented so nearly as dramatic a challenge to my vertigo as did the dreaded section of really

rugged terrain and way-too-thin ledges shown in # 4. And then, as #5 suggests, the final pitch wasn’t a whole lot more comfortable! Plus, as we’re nearing 13,800 feet, the altitude is sure taking a toll on our breathing, muscles, energy, and general psyche.

6 below -- The reason we didn’t climb on my birthday (as I always have before) was because Colorado had such heavy and late snowfalls this year. So we postponed the climb for three weeks to have a better chance of avoiding the slipping and sliding that is inevitable when traversing deep snow fields like this one which occupied a large section of the summit.



7 and # 8 and #9 are photos from the mountaintop. With the awful forest fires in Arizona and Canada, the air was full of haze, muting the grand vistas that we normally take in. Still, the scenes from the summit were breathtaking (literally) and superb. Also at the summit we had wonderful conversations with fellow hikers. Several eagerly accepted my offer to pose for photos with the American flag I had brought in my pack.



These “summit friendships” are pretty common but that day we had a few that were truly exceptional. For instance, there was a 60-year old new grandfather from Texas with whom we had struck up a friendship early on the trail. He was really taken with the guys in our group, admiring our camaraderie as well as the



winsome ways we were engaging with others on the trail. The fellow (who I had simply called “Texas” all morning) ended up leaving a note on our car -- a note we will all treasure for a long time to come. It read, “Ryan, Ron, Aldo, and Denny. It was great meeting you today and lots of fun hiking together. You 4 embody the spirit of the mountains I love so much! Enjoy the rest of your time in this beautiful place! Tim --- (aka Texas).” Cool, huh?



And finally # 9 shows the Nebraska crew at the summit unfurling the American flag I mentioned earlier -- Aldo, Ron, Ryan, and me. An outstanding group of guys, all who I esteem as great friends and fellow-adventurers. “Texas” was right -- they do “embody the spirit of the mountains!” Thanks, guys!

Yet with all this said (and shown), I must mention that the climb itself was only a part of our four-day experience. There were sweet and stimulating conversations, stories, and prayers. There was the serene beauty of the mountains and a gorgeous rental home high up in the pines. Terrific meals. A tour of historic South Park City. And, of course, Claire and Ron’s wife Linda were indispensable to the success of the adventure. Thanks, girls!

And that’s just about it for this month’s LifeSharer letter. All that’s left is to give quick ministry previews -- there’s more details on Vital Signs Blog and our Facebook pages. The next Vital Signs Book Brunch is Saturday morning, September 21 from 10 until noon where Dr. Harold Berry will be there in person talking about his newest book, *Genesis: Daily Scriptures to Receive, Reflect, and Respond*. There are also activities coming the first week of September featuring our friend and pro-life colleague from Birmingham, England, Dr. Greg Gardner. And then the luncheon of the BP4L is on September 12. Again, more info at the Vital Signs sites.

Thanks to you all for your every prayer, every note and call of encouragement, every utilization of our material, and every financial donation. We are deeply and forever grateful.

Denny (for Claire too)