

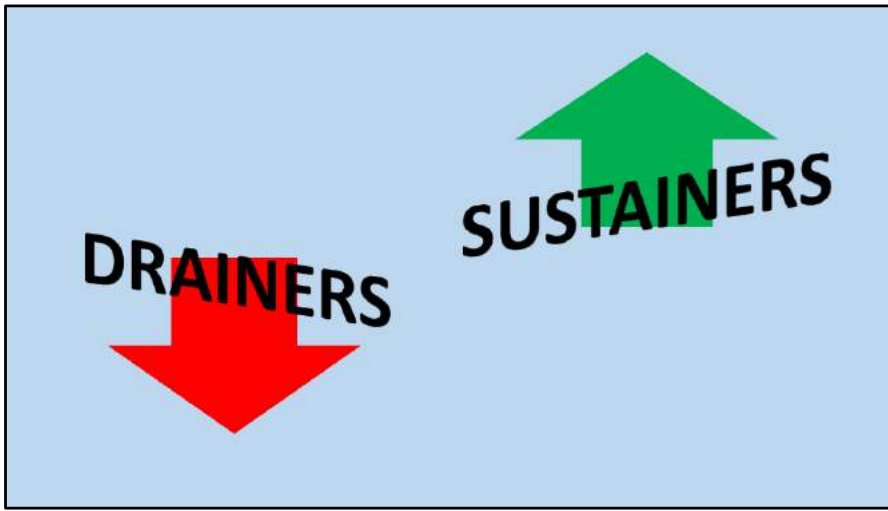
(Intro Slide)



Leeches. Though used medicinally by some, they are considered gross by most.

- In college there was a pond on campus that was full of them.**
- Though I never was thrown in nor threw anyone in, the stories were there of people swung by hands and feet into the muck.**
- They would come up covered by these parasites.**
- If that had been you, wouldn't you have tried to get them off as fast as possible?**
- Sure. Almost nobody likes the idea of some creature sucking, sapping, draining our lifeblood out of us.**

TR: Unfortunately, in the pond of life, there are lots of draining people.

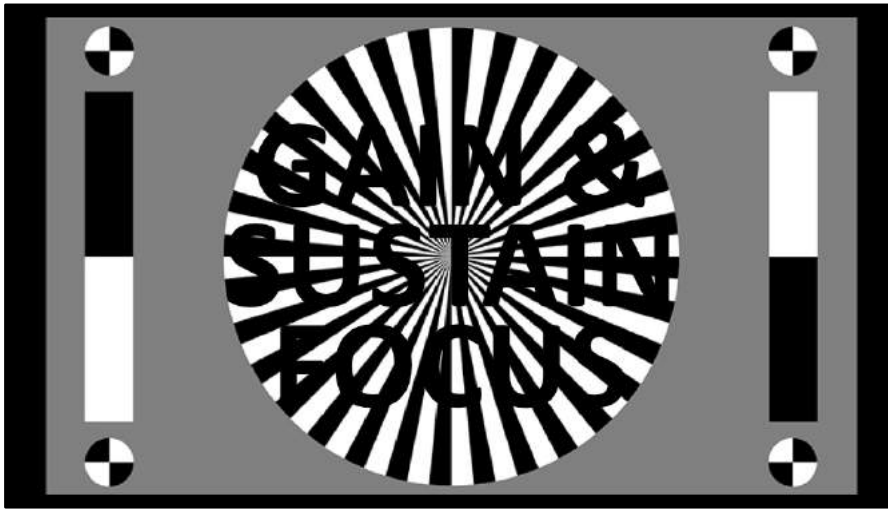


Actually, most folks could be given a label as either a drainer or a sustainer.

-- Today what we want to consider is who we've gathered around ourselves . . .

-- . . . and which kind of person we are to the others around us.

TR: What exactly do some people drain out of us and other sustain?



**It is something that is so easily lost as we respond to God's
CALL TO MORE.**

TR: It is the ability to . . .

GAIN & SUSTAIN FOCUS

. . . gain and sustain focus.

-- When I came to Trinity Fellowship, I was given a huge bound document.

-- The church who had previously owned our then property on Woodward Avenue in Big Rapids had commissioned the development of a strategic plan by a consultant.

-- It was impressive . . . and almost worthless.

-- To GAIN a strategic plan is great, but it accomplishes nothing if the focus is not SUSTAINED.

-- In the business world this sustaining is called EXECUTION or TRACTION.

TR: Others have keyed into the word “FOCUS” . . .



**FOLLOW
ONE
COURSE
UNTIL
SUCCESS**

. . . that we have to READ SLIDE

-- As we've been asking God to use the historical account of Nehemiah in the 400's before Christ . . .

-- . . . many of us have begun to wait on God, with prayer and fasting, for His CALL TO MORE.

-- We've been asking for the resolve to resist the myths that keep us from beginning the execution of God's call.

-- And, now today, we are pleading with our Lord to help us gain some insights to help us deal with the draining leeches who want to suck the focus right out of our hearts.

-- Next week we'll see some of the internal enemies of fulfilling God's call on our lives.

-- This week we will uncover how external enemies can drain our vision.

TR: In our sermon notes, we begin with the “WHY” this is important.

The Call MUST be sustained through:



7

**That is, the declaration that the call of God MUST be sustained.
-- We don't get to success. We don't finish well. We don't
fulfill the call of God . . . if we do not sustain.**

TR: Let's pick up the account in Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah 4:1
Page 440 in Handout Bibles

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews.

ESV

Page 440 in the handout Bibles

- We run into members of what I have called, "The Tormenting Trio."**
- They hated the idea of the wall.**
- They had a vested interest in the status quo.**
- READ SLIDE**

TR: Verse 2

Nehemiah 4:2

And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?"

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- This seems to be Sanballat "preaching to the choir", but the news of what he says gets back to Nehemiah and the people.

TR: Another tormentor chimes in . . .

Nehemiah 4:3

Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- This wall is so weak, that even if a light-footed creature like a fox jumped on it, it would crumble.

TR: This reminds us that the call **MUST be sustained through .
..**

The Call MUST be sustained through:

1. Mockery

... READ SLIDE

TR: This mockery behind their backs morphs into something more. Look down in verse 7.

Nehemiah 4:7-8

But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. ⁸And they all **plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: The anger and being enraged of verse 1 now festers from mockery to . . .

The Call MUST be sustained through:

- 1. Mockery**
- 2. Threats and Confusion**

. . . READ SLIDE

TR: Sustaining the call through these is so hard, but the foundation of our focus really starts to crumble when these outward attacks begin to worm their way into our hearts. Look down to verse 10.

Nehemiah 4:10-11

In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall."
¹¹And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

ESV

READ SLIDE

- These are not the words of Sanballat or Tobiah.
- These are not the taunts of the Arabs, Ammonites, or Ashdodites.
- This is what is being said within the people of God.
- The external verbal attacks have started to impact the morale of the workers.

TR: The buzz in the midst of the rubble piles was . . . "we won't know what hit us."

Nehemiah 4:12

At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times, "You must return to us."

ESV

And then in verse 12 . . . READ SLIDE

- Focus is almost lost.**
- Repeated 10 TIMES . . . "You must return to us."**
- "You can't leave us so vulnerable while you work on this wall."**
- "You say you are looking to make us more secure but we'll be killed before you pie-in-the-sky plan comes to fruition."**

TR: Isn't this the way it so often works. One of the greatest enemies to sustaining focus is . . .

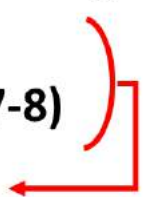
The Call MUST be sustained through:

- 1. Mockery**
- 2. Threats and Confusion**
- 3. Discouragement**

. . . READ SLIDE

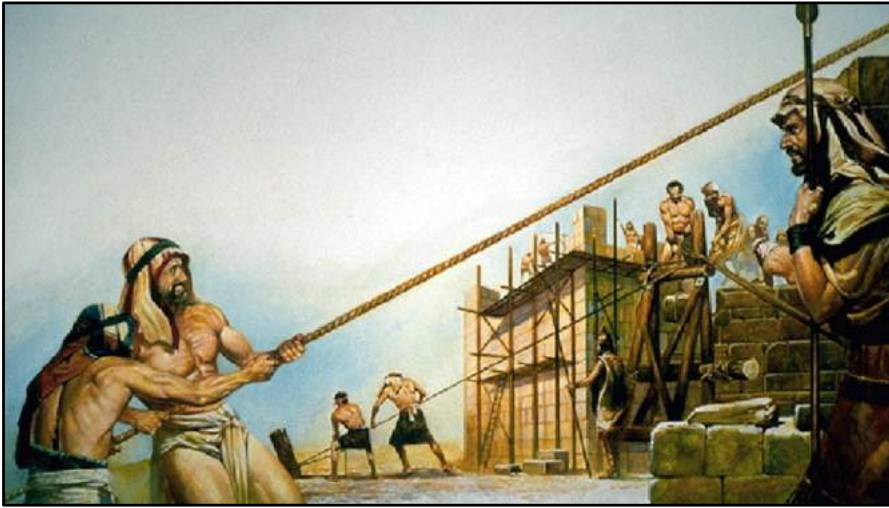
TR: The relationship between these three enemies of SUSTAINED FOCUS on God's call could be mapped like this . . .

The Call MUST be sustained through:

1. Mockery (4:1-3)
 2. Threats and Confusion (4:7-8)
 3. Discouragement (4:10-12)
- 

. . . the mockery and threats produce confusion and fear.
 -- And that leads to discouragement and despair.
 -- Instead of moving forward with God's plan for us, we feel so drained of courage that we just want to slink back into what we already know, the status quo.
 -- Isn't it amazing how so many people choose the pain they know, rather than press through to the hope of God's call.
 -- Is that us? Are we so discouraged that we are choosing the pain that we know rather than God's call?

TR: Kathy summarized last week's message with its MYTHS . . .
 "It is going to be hard!"



If we want to be like Nehemiah and the builders who worked NEXT TO and NEXT TO . . . we cannot merely see that the call MUST be sustained . . .

TR: We need to know HOW to deal with these focus-sucking leeches. Being squeamish is not enough.

The Call CAN be sustained through:

19

Moving down in our notes, I would like to go back through the verses we skipped earlier.

-- These are tucked-in-between texts, that deal with the DRAINERS of mockery, threats, confusion and discouragement.

TR: Look back to verse 4, in response to the jeers by Sanballat and Tobiah . . .

Nehemiah 4:4-5

Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for **they have provoked you** to anger in the presence of the builders.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- The modeled response begins where all Godly focus is sustained . . . in prayer.
- Perhaps so few finish what they start and so many give up because we imagine prayer isn't that important.

TR: But they didn't just pray . . .

Nehemiah 4:6

So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Mockery and taunts do not need to weaken our resolve.**
- What did Nehemiah model in his prayer?**
- He showed us that if we leave room for the vengeance of God, we can resist the temptation to get into a spitting war with the drainers.**
- If we do that, the trash-talkers win.**
- We can have a mind to work on what God has called us to when we make PRAY FIRST more than a slogan, but a lifestyle.**

TR: How important is it today to be reminded that the call CAN be sustained through . . .

The Call CAN be sustained through:

1. Prayer

... READ SLIDE ?

- Some folks are anti-planning.**
- But, if planning is waiting on God, writing down what you believe He said. Confirming that it lines up with the revealed truth of Scripture. And then, doing what He said. How can that be wrong?**
- Being focused in prayer helps us remain focused on the call God has put into our lives.**
- It is so easy to be side-tracked into defending ourselves against the jeers.**

TR: The second attack came when the anger that motivated the mockery festered into threats that would breed confusion. Look how they sustained focus then in verse 9.

Nehemiah 4:9

And we prayed to our God **and** set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- There is no hint that setting a guard is evidence of a lack of faith.
- We must always begin with prayer. But, when God has given us the insight needed to take a practical follow-up steps, let's take them.

TR: The call CAN be sustained through . . .

The Call CAN be sustained through:

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. Practical Solutions**

. . . READ SLIDE

-- A great question that a sustainer asks is, "How can I help remove the obstacles that are keeping you from reaching God's calling in your life?"

TR: The Call CAN be sustained through prayer and practical solutions. Nehemiah builds on this in dealing with the discouragement that had crept into the camp. Look at verse 13.

Nehemiah 4:13

So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: This sounds like more detailed follow-up on the practical solution of setting a guard day and night. But there was more . . .

Nehemiah 4:14

And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. **Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.**"

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: In line with all the rousing speeches that rally the troops, Nehemiah helped SUSTAIN the call through . . .

The Call CAN be sustained through:

- 1. Prayer***
- 2. Practical Solutions***
- 3. Positive Exhortations***

READ SLIDE

- To remind people of who the Lord is and why they are called to be courageous.**
- To remind us of what we are fighting for.**

TR: These three active steps that help move COULD to SHOULD to WILL BE are then reviewed again, with an addition. Beginning in verse 15.

Nehemiah 4:15-16a

When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- There is an acknowledgement that it was God who had frustrated their plan, in response to their prayers.

TR: Verse 16 continues . . .

Nehemiah 4:16b-18a

And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, ¹⁷who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. ¹⁸And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: The practical solutions continue in the second part of verse 18

Nehemiah 4:18b-20

The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. ²⁰**In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- A practical solution about how to have each others' backs even when the work was so spread out.
- But, it is also a reminder that our great and awesome God is the One who will ultimately fight for us.
- These are further positive exhortations.

TR: The results were fantastic.

Nehemiah 4:21-22

So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. ²²I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Nehemiah does one more thing that any leader must remember if they are to be a SUSTAINER in the lives of others.

Nehemiah 4:23

So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Nehemiah and those he had direct influence over set the example by . . .

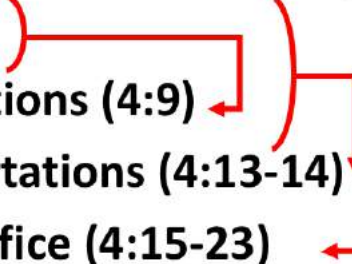
The Call CAN be sustained through:

- 1. Prayer**
- 2. Practical Solutions**
- 3. Positive Exhortations**
- 4. Personal Sacrifice**

READ SLIDE

TR: It seems to me that the four action steps, toward making sure the Call is sustained, build on each other.

The Call CAN be sustained through:

1. Prayer (4:4-6)
 2. Practical Solutions (4:9)
 3. Positive Exhortations (4:13-14)
 4. Personal Sacrifice (4:15-23)
- 

That is, **REVIEW SLIDE**

-- It does not perfectly fit into this model, but it reminds us that we must **PRAY FIRST**.

-- We must not make a false dichotomy between prayer and practical solutions.

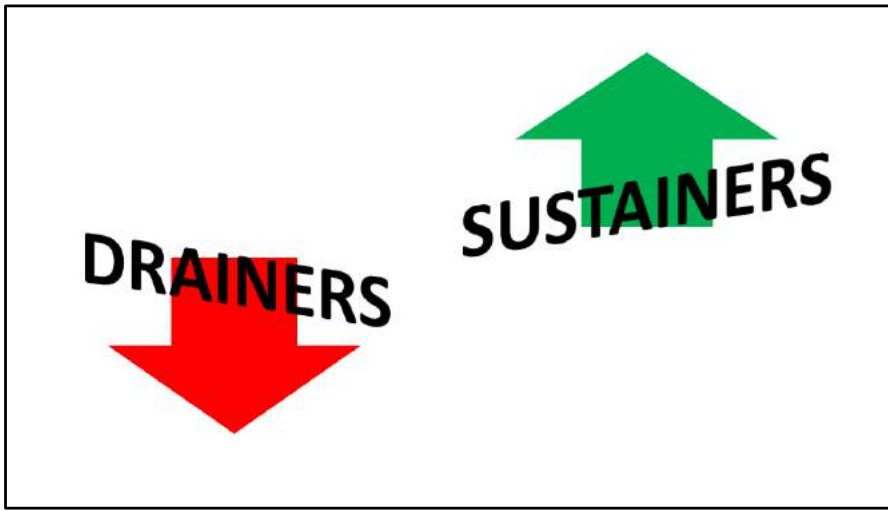
-- Our words matters.

-- But our sustaining impact is greatest when we have skin in the game, when it costs us something.

-- SO, we see modeled that while we must **GAIN AND SUSTAIN FOCUS** on the calling of God, it is terribly easy to lose that focus.

TR: It Impacts whether we finish well, making a good ending to this chapter of our lives, or if we are those who just hang

around.



People who have received a vision of what COULD BE and the courage of what SHOULD be, can easily give up, so that it will never BE.

- Sanballat, Tobiah and crew were drainers.**
- Nehemiah was a sustainer.**

-- We need to sustain through pain and not allow the drainers to discourage us into just seeking relief from the pain.

-- We need to sustain focus in the midst of prosperity and not allow the drainers to tempt us into a “eat, drink, and be merry” lifestyle of loving this world and the things of this world.

TR: We are reminded that . . .

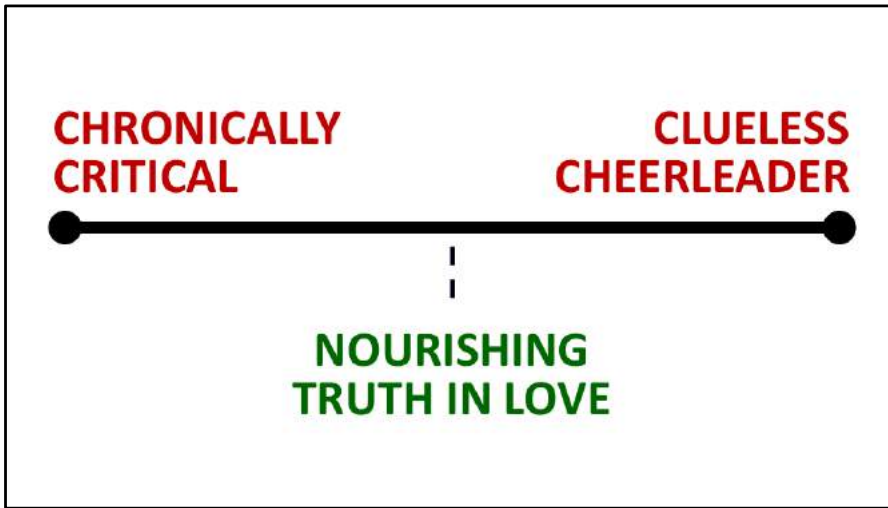
Vision and a sense of God's calling
can be DRAINED through . . .

**“leeches,
parasites,
VDPs (very draining people),
de-motivators,
discouragers,
the chronically-critical”**

READ SLIDE

- One author shares some examples of people who let **DRAINERS** keep them from sustaining their focus on God's calling (see photocopy from A. Stanley, Visioneering, p. 146)
- Probably all of us could right now name a **DRAINER**.
- A face pops into mind of a chronically-critical person who just seems to suck the life out of us.
- Yes, we must make sure that we don't fixate on the emails, texts, and snide comments of these folks.
- But, we must first make sure that by God's grace we are not on of the names that pops up in someone else's mind as a leech on their souls.

TR: Don't misunderstand, I don't think the answer is to swing the pendulum.



I don't believe we are called to belong to the tribe of the chronically critical.

-- But neither do I believe we are to try out for the clueless cheerleader.

-- Sustaining others is not done by enabling them.

-- It is not done by flattering them.

-- When we just love others with a worldly love of giving in, we are in fact bribing them to love us.

-- No, to be a NOURISHING person, we must learn to speak the truth in love.

-- We must be honest about the danger of attack, but then lovingly remind them of the greatness of God and for whom they are fighting.

-- Back in verse 14, "Remember the Lord, who is great and

awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

-- Nehemiah was nourishing . . . not just empty calories. But, truth in love.

-- EX: A very memorable complement . . . you are a nourishing person.

TR: Isn't that who we yearn to have around us? Isn't that who we want to be? Because . . .

Vision and a sense of God's calling
can be SUSTAINED through . . .

**“motivators,
encouragers,
problem solvers,
morale builders,
nourishing people”**

READ SLIDE

- Drainers point out the pitfalls. Sustainers provide solutions to the pitfalls.
- Drainers mock our naïve hearts. Sustainers affirm our good motivations.
- Drainers remind us of past failures. Sustainers remind us of God's power.
- Drainers dissipate our energy by making us focus on vengeance. Sustainers encourage us to leave room for the vengeance of God.
- EX: Pastor who was helping to lead a church toward health. Tried to add a staff member and the result was failure. But what was worse is that without sustainers around him, he gave up on trying. He seemed to coast the rest of the way to

retirement. And “the wall was breeched.” He was drained and not sustained.

TR: It is hard to change. The status quo has a huge power over us. It also has that power of inertia in the lives of others. We all want sustainers in our lives, but the question is, when someone gets thrown into the pond of our influence . . .



. . . do they come up . . . READ SLIDE

-- EX: Do we help folks who voice repentance and ask forgiveness. Do we help them sustain repentance until the fruits of repentance become evident and trust is rebuilt. Or are we looking for them to fail?

-- EX: Do we speak the truth in love and help people sustain focus on the mission and values God has given their personal lives and ministry? Or do we just mindlessly cheerlead them when they are running the wrong way on the football field?

-- EX: Do we help sustain people, so that they can do the right thing until the right thing is done?

TR: I want to be a SUSTAINER, not a DRAINER. I don't want people who fall into the pond of my influence to come out covered with leeches.

The Call CAN be sustained through:

- 1. Prayer***
- 2. Practical Solutions***
- 3. Positive Exhortations***
- 4. Personal Sacrifice***

We CAN be sustainers by . . .

- Prayer: Choosing for ourselves and helping others to leave room for the vengeance of God**
- Practical Solutions: Help remove the barriers that keep them from success.**
- Positive exhortations: Exalting God and refocusing them on the COULD, SHOULD, WILL BE.**
- Affirm their positive motivations. Remind them of the power of God. Refocus them on the mission.**
- Personal Sacrifice: Set an example worth following.**

- Would your spouse, your children, your friends, your workmates ever think of calling you a nutritious, NOURISHING person?**
- By God's grace, may it be so!**