



Remembering Keith Crider

Keith Crider was many things before he was a member of the MAM board, but we will remember him best as a hardworking, deeply interested supporter of the work in Guatemala.

When MAM approached the Southeastern Conference in 2019 about providing a board member, Keith was put forward for his interest in the work and his knowledge of Spanish. He was soon assigned the role of assistant chairman. He worked hard in that capacity, making frequent visits to Guatemala, fielding questions, making agendas, and maintaining contact with missionaries.

Keith and Eva traveled to Guatemala on Tuesday, January 23 to accompany their son Andrew and his family on their big move to Guatemala. Their presence helped with logistics and added emotional support. But it was to be Keith's last trip.

After breakfast on Friday morning, the devotional reading and discussion was on Jesus raising Lazarus, and the promise of eternal life. After prayer and singing, Keith grabbed a broom and busied himself tidying up the compound. A little later, he climbed a ladder to help install a metal roof.

Keith sent his last message to the board at 9:49 on Friday morning. Less than two hours later, he broke through a skylight, fell eighteen feet onto concrete, and died almost instantly.

Keith's fall ended his active service with MAM. We'll miss his

presence at board meetings, his insights into the work, and his energy in service. But his example and influence live on and will be felt for a long time.

One board member put it this way: "Who left us? A man transformed by Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit. A man of integrity who loved Jesus and the work of His kingdom . . . To one special sister, a dear husband. To his children, a beloved father. To the Southeastern church, a respected and effective leader. To CLP, a senior editor. To MAM, a very wise and proactive board member. God has not left us, nor has He been diminished; but a man of God has left us to be with Him. Let us bow and worship even as we grieve."

May God's kingdom never lack such men to work and serve in His labor.



Keith and Eva Crider



EDITORIAL

Justin Zimmerman

What is God telling us?

On Monday, January 15, 2024, we received the stunning news that my brother Jordan had been killed in a freak work accident. We flew to Pennsylvania a couple of days later for the services. Jordan was just twenty-one months younger than I, and while we were growing up, we had often been asked if we were twins. After my wife, I counted him as my closest earthly friend, and we often consulted each other on various matters. We buried Jordan's body on Saturday, January 20.

Still raw with grief, we flew back to Guatemala on January 25th. The next day, I witnessed the death of Brother Keith Crider, as he fell to the concrete a mere 12 feet from where I was standing.

Although I had only known Brother Keith for about three years, he was a man I deeply respected and appreciated as a member of the MAM board. Last March, Keith and his son Andrew briefly visited us in Mixcolajá, over the time that my parents and my brother Jordan and his wife were visiting. Only God knew that just ten months later, two men from that gathering would be called to their eternal home in remarkably similar ways.

During these last few weeks, I have heard the same question from several sources: "What is God telling us?" This is an important question; one I want to "get right." In the midst of tragedy, what is God telling me? A few things have come to my heart, which I will share here.

1. Life is uncertain.

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away (James 4:14). We have no promise that we will see tomorrow. My plans for the last few weeks were completely

changed. Jordan was planning and preparing for the busy spring season of his business. Keith had plans too. But God has higher plans and ways. *If the Lord wills, we will live, and do this, or that* (James 4:15). So, make today count for eternity. Jordan and Keith both did a good job of making their days count.

2. No one is indispensable.

This is a phrase that I only recall Keith saying once or twice in my presence, but I gathered from the Crider family that it was an oft-repeated refrain. From our perspective, a 31-year-old husband with a 3-month-old son, a growing business with two employees, and various roles in church and community outreach would be indispensable. A 64-year-old husband, father, granddad, minister of the Gospel, a bishop charged with three congregations, a writer of Christian literature, and a member of boards and committees for several mission efforts seems indispensable.

But God says otherwise. Someone else will have to take Jordan's bus route for Bible clubs. Someone else will have to serve as bishop in Keith's place, and someone else will have to write books. The work of the church will not stop just because two useful men have passed away.

3. God is sovereign.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die . . . (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2). Jordan didn't wake up early on that Monday morning, nor did Keith wake up early that Friday morning with any idea it would be the last time they did so. But God was not taken by surprise. Since before time began, God knew how many days each would live on this earth.

I can personally testify that Jordan's life was spared multiple times in years past, but this time God allowed his life to end. I am sure the same was true for Keith. From our earthly viewpoint, both Jordan and Keith had decades of productivity left within them.

But our sovereign God—who exercises power without limitation—decided that each would get less than the average American life expectancy. God determines when our work is done. God gives life, preserves life, and takes life according to His own counsel.

4. God directs our steps.

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps (Proverbs 16:9). Over and over these past weeks, I have seen this verse play out in real life. My plan for January 26th was to leave mission headquarters early to avoid traffic and get home to Mixcolajá to rest and recuperate. But our pickup truck did not work, so we stayed for breakfast and devotions. I offered to help with the metal roofing project so the mechanic, who was in charge of the project, could work on my truck. Just minutes later, Keith stepped on a skylight on his way to the edge of the roof to help lift the new metal into place. I was the first to Keith's side and immediately saw that consciousness had fled to return no more. My wife and I were there as the Crider family gathered around the body. We shared in their grief in a way we could not have just two weeks earlier. God had allowed a little sensor wire on my truck to break so that we would still be there at 10:15 that morning. This is just one of many "coincidences" we experienced or heard about relating to these sudden deaths. We so often miss or ignore the fact that what we might call a coincidence is really God directing our steps.

5. God's grace is sufficient.

How is it that I have not drowned in grief or bitterness? How can I get out of bed and still function (almost) normally after all I have been through in January 2024? One reason only: God's sustaining grace. Yes, I feel bat-

tered emotionally. But I also see and feel God at work in me and in those around me in ways I never noticed before.

Hundreds of people have shared that they are praying for us. Thank you. That is very encouraging, as are the notes, conversations, and gestures of kindness. The blessing of being part of a brotherhood of believers is never more keenly felt than during such times as these last weeks. And while I do believe that part of God's grace is imparted to us through the brothers and sisters in Christ around us, we must primarily seek our consolation in God directly.

To those facing grief . . . read His Word. Do not stop praying. Do not stop singing (it is normal to choke up at certain points but keep trying to sing!). *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

6. Live "ready to go."

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:27 ESV). Death is inevitable (apart from the return of the Lord). To those of you reading this who are not ready to meet the Judge of all the earth, today is the day to get ready. Jordan and Keith lived in such a way that they were ready to go instantly. They had no time to repent or make anything right. Thankfully, they had already done so years before, and "stayed current" in their daily walk with Jesus. They are now a part of that "cloud of witnesses," waiting for us to finish our race. Will you be there in glory too?

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:6, 7).

Staff News

Prayer and Praise Items

- Pray for the health of Domitila Muñoz (wife of bishop Isaias Muñoz).
- Pray for the Andrew Crider family as they grieve and adjust.
- Pray for God's direction as more men are ordained for the work in Guatemala.
- Praise God for directing the steps of those who serve Him.
- Praise God for sending more workers to the field in Guatemala!



Jason and Leanna Stoltzfus

Jason and Leanna Stoltzfus came on February 1st and will serve as houseparents at headquarters for six months. They are from Somerset, Pennsylvania, and are members of Allegheny Valley Mennonite Church.



Wendell and Jenny and family

Wendell and Jenny Deim returned to Guatemala in January, after living in Pennsylvania for about four and a half years. They will be helping with the church, school, and clinic in Oratorio.



Andrew and Laurretta and family

Andrew and Laurretta Crider arrived in Guatemala City in January. They are members of Strasburg Mennonite Church in Strasburg, Virginia. Andrew will be taking on various administration responsibilities at headquarters in Guatemala City.

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