

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE

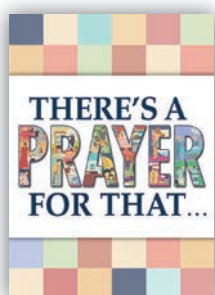
A lifelong treasure

The gospel keeps us focused on Jesus
and our vision clear. *Page 10*

Wherever you go ... take God with you




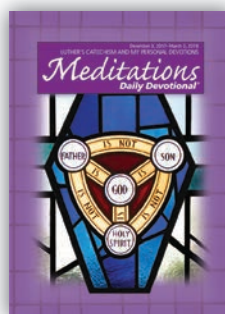
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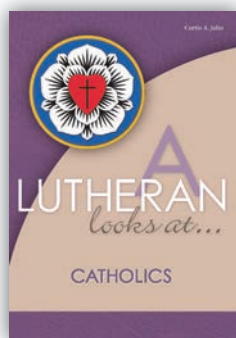
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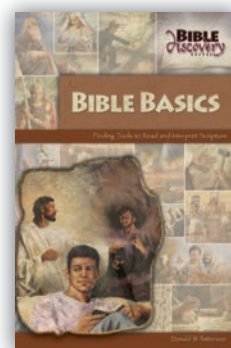
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Vicar in a Mission Setting



Students at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary spend their third year serving full time in congregations throughout North America. This vicar year gives them an opportunity to put classroom lessons into practice and assist congregations' ministries.

Through the Vicar in a Mission Setting program, funded by the seminary and the Board for Home Missions, students learn and serve in mission congregations or established congregations in outreach settings. These opportunities increase students' confidence and commitment to share Jesus with everyone they meet.

For more information, visit wls.wels.net/vims.



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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to *Forward in Christ*, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.


Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print: USA—\$17.99; Canada—\$18.89; all other countries—air mail \$71.99. Digital: USA—\$15.99; Canada—\$16.79; all other countries—\$15.99. Premium: USA—\$18.99; Canada—\$19.94; all other countries—air mail \$72.99. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

 Indicates additional online content

COVER IMAGE: LIGHTSTOCK

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

We like to tell stories in *Forward in Christ*—stories that share how the gospel changes lives and how it serves as a guide and comfort to all of us, no matter what happens in this world.

Take Hue Thao for example. Born in Laos, he didn't know about God's grace until he moved to Kansas City and ran into Bounkeo Lor, a Hmong pastor—a man he actually had met years earlier in a refugee camp in Thailand (p. 30). And now Lor is teaching that same gospel message to Hmong pastors in the communist country of Vietnam (p. 23).

Or what about Yi Zhang, who grew up in China and saw how Christianity changed the mother of her friend (p. 14). Years later she learned about her Savior in a WELS church in Canada, and she shares how that has changed her as well.

But the story that really hit me this month is that of Mike Young. We actually told his story a few months ago in our series "Our treasure: the gospel." His pastor, Nate Buege, wrote about how the message of forgiveness through Jesus changed the outlook of a man who was struggling in life. In a Feedback letter, Buege resumes Mike's story, telling how the gospel continued to bring him peace (p. 6).

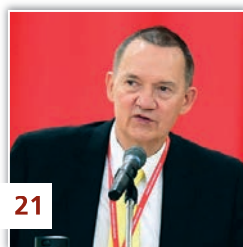
Julie Wietzke



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"Did you wash your hands?"

THE GOSPEL CHANGES LIVES

I wrote an article about how the gospel changed the life of Mike Young ["Our treasure, the gospel," June]. When I sent in that article this past March, nobody except our Savior could have known that on April 27, Mike would be diagnosed with liver cancer, and on June 4, he would enter his heavenly home. I was able to deliver a copy of the issue to Mike before he died. He was so excited to get it.

Mike's faith was sturdy to the end. The Christian peace in his soul made a deep impression on many people during his last days on earth. He simply was unafraid to die. He was ready to be with Jesus. He told me, "Pastor, thank you for sharing Jesus with me. If this cancer had come six years ago, all I'd be thinking about right now is what hell would be like. Instead, all I'm thinking about right now is what heaven is going to be like."

Never underestimate the spectacular impact of one soul coming to faith in Christ! Many of you didn't get to meet Mike on this earth . . . but you sure will enjoy meeting him in glory.

*Nathan Buege
Katy, Texas*

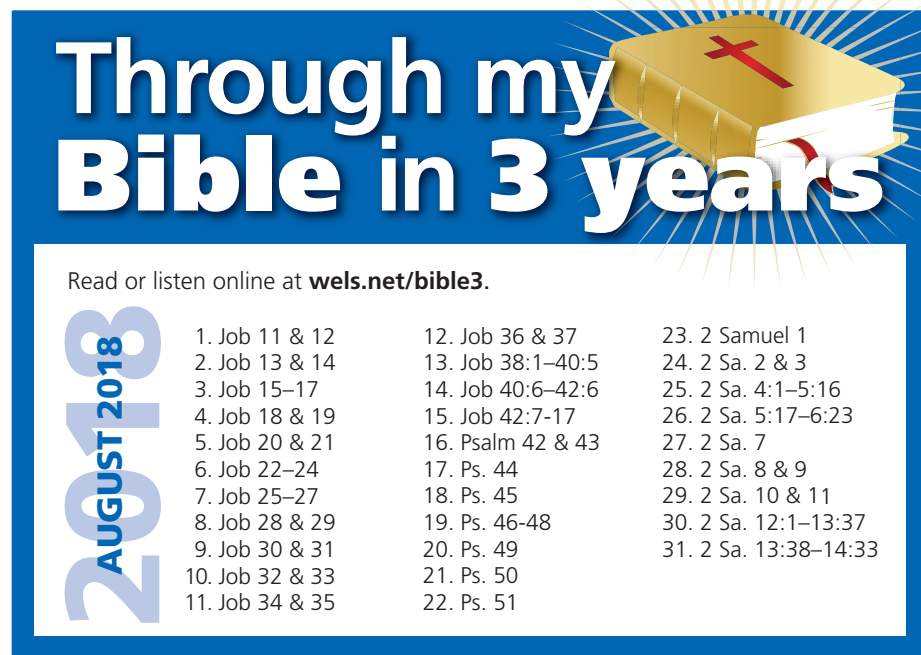
WE ARE LIGHT

"If you are not witnessing . . . then, frankly, why are you breathing?"

My soul has been pricked with a penetrating yet life-bestowing wound. Pastor Hein ["We are light: Our reason for being," May] masterfully cut through all of our rational lies and flimsy excuses for neglecting the necessity of Christian witnessing. We were left defenseless and called to account for each breath we are graciously granted.

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. . . . All are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12,13 ESV).

Without God's mercy, we would and should die. After confronting us with our sin of omission, Pastor Hein skillfully provided the gospel motivation of



Through my Bible in 3 years

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2018 AUGUST

1. Job 11 & 12	12. Job 36 & 37	23. 2 Samuel 1
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forgiveness and Christ's Ascension to joyfully play a role in his saving work.

I am grateful for this compelling article. I admire content of this caliber. We are blessed as a synod to have Pastor Hein's valuable contributions.

*Jude Peck
Columbia, South Carolina*

I think one of the goals for the two-part series "We are light" [May/June] was to inspire readers to witness. However, saying that failing to witness is a sin is an overzealous statement that borders on legalism. . . .

*Greg Alsch
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

THE WORD AMEN

What a fine article by Pastor John Braun on the biblical word *amen* [May]. He draws out the rich meaning of faith's certainty, which first finds expression in a verbal form of that Hebrew word in Genesis 15:6: "Abram *believed* the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."

He correctly notes that *amen* is often rendered as it stands in the Psalms and epistles and that on the lips of Jesus in the gospels, it is translated as "verily" (KJV) and "truly" (ESV and NIV).

Yet, given the subject of the article—the use of *amen* in the Scriptures—I was surprised to find no mention of

the fact that the Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV), in line with the Psalms and epistles, translates *amen* from the lips of our Savior as "amen." . . .

Thanks for the article and for the opportunity to point out that the EHV does what Pastor Braun encourages. It keeps "*amen* on the lips of God's people."

*Roy W. Hefti
Bangor, Wisconsin*

BONDAGE AND FREEDOM

Thank you for the recent article "Bondage and freedom" [June, p. 34]. I thought it was so well done that I used it as the basis of my Trinity/Memorial Day sermon last Sunday. The theme was "Penetrating the hard ceiling of human sense!" In a dying world, it is so refreshing to receive FIC and its Christ-centered articles. It always gives a lift of faith. Atheism and science have become partners, and this is sad. . . .

I can always count on your writing to be deep and at the same time practical.

*Dave Priebe
Seminole, Florida*

Send your letters to Feedback, *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

A hallelujah helper

Hallelujah! . . . The LORD's works are great. . . . He has sent redemption to his people. He has ordained his covenant forever. Psalm 111:1,2,9
Christian Standard Bible

Daniel J. Habben

Millions have used Hamburger Helper since 1971. You may even have a couple boxes in your pantry. The dry mix makes a quick dinner for everyone in the family.

Just as we need help with meal prep from time to time, we Christians often need help with our praise prep. Isn't that especially true during the doldrums of August? The excitement of Easter is long past, and our favorite Christmas hymns are still five months away. Fellow members are away on vacation, so worship lacks its usual energy.

What if there was a product that could fill our mouths and hearts with praise every day? Hamburger Helper can't, but Psalm 111 can. It's a hallelujah helper.

GOD IS WORTH PRAISING

Psalm 111 begins with "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the Lord!" Why praise? For one, because "the LORD's works are great."

Just think how awesome it is that God created the universe in six days. I truly appreciated God's creation feat after being involved with a church building project. In all, it took more than 250 skilled workers 285 days to refurbish our 1,600 sq. ft. church and to build a 3,200 sq. ft. addition. Even then, it wasn't perfect. It took another two years for the finishing touches. And yet, when God was done with his work of creation on that first-ever Friday afternoon, he looked with satisfaction on stars, comets, oceans, animals, and two people named Adam and Eve, and declared them very good. Wow!

But then sin came into the world and ruined everything. So perhaps you don't feel inclined to raise a hallelujah for God's work of creation—not when your summer has had too much family tension and conflict, even on vacation. But



Psalm 111 offers another motivation for our hallelujahs: God "has sent redemption to his people. He has ordained his covenant forever." A covenant is like a contract. I saw a lot of those with our building project. Each contract stated

Be reminded of the
many daily reasons you
have to praise the Lord.

what the plumber or electrician would do in exchange for our payment. Compare those contracts with the covenant God made with you in Baptism. God washed your sins away, gave you the Holy Spirit, and granted you eternal life. What did it cost you? Nothing. So how can we not respond with a hearty "Hallelujah!"?

HIS WORD SHARES HIS GREAT WORKS

And yet days can go by without praises parting our lips. We get too busy to reflect on God's blessings. Psalm 111

describes God's people studying God's great works. The word *study* in Hebrew means to "visit often." Do you visit God's Word as often as you visit Facebook? It's true, the content of *Faithbook* doesn't get updated like the content on Facebook, but don't let Satan convince you that it's pointless to open your Bible frequently. God's Word doesn't change, but your life does. A psalm you read last year may not have seemed to say much to you at that time, but what about today? What new challenges confront you that God's multifaceted Word would speak to?

When you're stuck for a meal idea, you can reach for Hamburger Helper. But when your hallelujahs get stuck in your throat, reach for a hallelujah helper like Psalm 111. Be reminded of the many daily reasons you have to praise the Lord. Your awesome God has saved you from your sin, and he never takes a break from caring for you. Hallelujah!

Contributing editor Daniel Habben is pastor at St. John, Saint John, Antigua.



Mark Schweden

Because you
have trained
[your children]
in God's Word
and have taught
them to know their
Savior, you have
equipped them to
withstand the most
furious attacks.

Trained and ready

Long before soldiers are sent into battle, they undergo rigorous and thorough training. They train to improve their physical strength and endurance and to instill discipline and a sense of teamwork. They learn to use their weapons with skill and confidence. They train and train again, so that when the time comes, the skills they have learned will be used instantly and instinctively, without thought or hesitation.

No general would send troops into battle without giving them thorough training. And all soldiers recognize that training is one of the most important factors to achieve success for themselves, for their fellow soldiers, and for their country.

Another important factor for a soldier's success in battle is the support received from "back home." It's the letters and phone calls; prayers; and encouragement of friends, family, and fellow citizens that remind soldiers why they are fighting and help soldiers to devote themselves fully to their mission.

It's August, and throughout our country young men and women are preparing to head into battle. For some, it will be their third or fourth tour of duty. For others, it will be their first taste of combat. The battle will have extremely high stakes for them and for the people they represent. And the enemy they face will be fierce, committed, and unrelenting.

But this battle will not take place in far-away deserts or jungles. Instead, many of our young people will be heading into hostile territory on the campuses of secular colleges and universities. The dangers will come in the ideas, instruction, and pressures they will encounter in classrooms and dormitories. They will encounter furious assaults on their faith, their values, and their very souls.

Atheist professors will try to teach them that there is no such thing as absolute truth—much less biblical truth. Science, despite its changing conclusions, will be elevated to godlike status,

and anyone who believes that God created the universe in six days will be mocked. Faculty and fellow students will vigorously defend the killing of unborn children and promote a distorted view of God-given sexual identity. Our young people will be accused of being bigots when they express their beliefs; they will be branded as naïve when they confess their faith. They will be ostracized from their social circles when they refrain from sexual immorality and the abuse of alcohol and drugs. The attacks against faithful Christian students will be relentless and furious. They will stop only when that Christian student gives in, goes along, or remains silent.

God knows the importance of training for such battles. God says we are responsible to show our children "the way they should go" (Proverbs 22:6). "Bring [your children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). I'm confident that WELS parents who are sending their children off to college have made good use of those 18 years of training time. Because you have trained them in God's Word and have taught them to know their Savior, you have equipped them to withstand the most furious attacks.

So send them out with confidence and trust that God will give them the strength to hold on to their faith and confess their Savior without hesitation. And keep up that support from the home front. Encourage them to be faithful in worship. Help them connect with a WELS Campus Ministry or campus pastor. Remind them who they are and whom they serve. And pray for them. Protected by God's strength and armed with his powerful Word, it's a battle that they will win.

Want to help college students in the battle? Register them with WELS Campus Ministry at wels.net/campus-ministry for free helpful materials, including *Forward in Christ* magazine and *Meditations*.

Light for our path

My godson was baptized 20 years ago in an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America church. He has been involved in his college campus ministry and has decided to be baptized again. What reason would this campus ministry be giving him to be baptized again? He felt that his infant baptism was his parents' choosing a faith for him as a child, and this baptism is his choosing the faith he would have.

James F. Pope

Your question illustrates the need to clarify several points about Baptism.

INFANT BAPTISM

The Bible provides three compelling reasons for baptizing infants:

(1) Children are a part of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), the object of the church’s “baptizing” and “teaching.” “Nations” consist of people of all ages, including infants. Consider that it was the practice of the apostles to baptize households.

(2) Because children are sinful from birth (Psalm 51:5; John 3:5,6), they need the forgiveness of sins. Peter encouraged, “Be baptized . . . for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). The water and Word of God bestows forgiveness and remains valid for children as well as adults.

(3) We baptize children and infants because Scripture tells us they can believe (Matthew 18:6; Luke 18:15-17; 2 Timothy 3:15). They can believe because God is the one who creates faith in people through the gospel (Hebrews 12:2; Romans 10:17).

In carrying out infant Baptism, your godson’s parents did the right thing.

BAPTISM INTO THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A second important point about Baptism is the meaning and significance of your godson’s infant baptism. While his baptism took place in a Lutheran church, the result of that action went far beyond denominational lines. Baptism works forgiveness of sins and gives eternal salvation just as God promises. Therefore, it brings people into the holy Christian church.

This is why there is no need for a rebaptism if a person changes church membership and affiliates with another Christian church: A valid baptism establishes mem-

bership in the church that supersedes membership in any earthly church. The blessing of forgiveness in Baptism stands on God’s promise.

BAPTISM AS AN ACT OF GOD

Finally, your godson’s desire to be rebaptized to “choose his own faith” reflects another misunderstanding of Baptism. Some churches turn Baptism into a human work. It becomes an act associated with a person’s decision to follow Christ. It then amounts to a person’s confession of faith.

That is not what the Bible teaches about Baptism. Scripture explains that Baptism is an act of God. In Baptism, people do not do anything for God; God does something for them. The Holy Spirit works through Baptism to change hearts by connecting them to Jesus Christ in saving faith. Scripture teaches that, in Baptism, people are on the receiving end of God’s powerful work and promise.

So, is there harm in being baptized again? The spiritual harm of another baptism—as in the circumstances you described—is that the person’s actions can amount to a rejection of what the Bible teaches about the power of God in Baptism and a denial of God as the creator of saving faith. You will know whether or not those are the thoughts of your godson only by asking him.

As one of his sponsors, do what you can to remind your godson of what God has already done for him in his infant baptism and continue to remember him in your prayers.

Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

James Pope also answers questions online at wels.net/questions. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your word
is a lamp
for my feet,
a light on
my path.

Psalm 119:105

Our treasure: THE GOSPEL

THIS TREASURE KEEPS OUR VISION CLEAR

The gospel is a lifelong treasure that keeps us focused on Jesus.

Kevin P. Westra

I used to live near the foothills of the Cascade Mountains in Washington State. When I first moved there and drove around the area and gazed at the beauty of God's creation, I remember thinking to myself, *I will never get used to seeing this beautiful scenery*. I was surprised when lifelong residents didn't share my excitement at seeing the mountains every day. I promised myself it would never happen to me. Well, after a few years of living there, the mountains were still there every day and they were just as beautiful as always. But I didn't always notice them.

A MISSING TREASURE

Can something like this happen to us when it comes to the gospel? Many of us grew up in Christian homes. We don't really know a life that doesn't have the beautiful treasure of the gospel in it. This is certainly a wonderful blessing. But it can also be something that Satan uses against us. It's always there, always has been, always will be. We take it for granted.

Sometimes we don't appreciate that treasure until it is gone. Paul and Betty joined a WELS mission church in southeast Ohio. One of their first Sundays there, the pastor announced that he was taking a call to another church. They liked the church and prayed that when a new pastor came, he

would preach that same gospel message that brought them there in the first place. They were not disappointed. Paul and Betty continued to worship there for many years.

Changes in life—getting older and retirement—led them to move away from that town. They found a new home in a retirement village in another town. There was no WELS church nearby. They went to a church in town, one that was a denomination they had been involved with in the past. Though they tried it for a while, they realized something was missing. Unfortunately, it was the clear preaching of the gospel. They were used to hearing about their sin problem and the only solution to that problem—their Savior—week after week. They were no longer hearing the message that for so many years had kept their vision clear and their lives and hearts focused on Jesus. Instead, they heard a lot of talk about society and politics. Something they were used to hearing every time they went to church was missing. The treasure of the gospel was no longer there.

A TREASURED MESSAGE

The idea of living out their golden years without this treasure was both unappealing and scary.

They called their former WELS pastor and said, “What do we do? We live over two hours away from you, and we aren’t getting the gospel here.” The pastor told them that they lived 60 miles away from another WELS church. Would they be willing to make that drive? They tried it out, and they found out the drive was worth it. They went almost every Sunday for a while. Then age made it harder for them to make that drive, so they tried to go on Communion Sundays. Eventually age made that drive too much as well, and they became shut-in members. But they were thankful to have a pastor and a vicar who regularly visited them with Word and sacrament and kept their eyes on the treasure of Jesus their Savior.

During those years, many situations developed in their lives. They had an adult son who lived only a few miles from their new church. He started coming, eventually took classes, and became a member. Shortly after that, he was diagnosed with cancer, which eventually took his life. Another son who lived in a different state lost his job and his wife left him. He moved to Ohio with his parents and began looking to start a new life. He was then diagnosed with leukemia. He has since been baptized and has started taking

In all of life’s ups
and downs,
the gospel keeps
reminding us of
the beautiful treasures
we have in Jesus.

instruction classes. He continues his health battle. One year ago, Betty started having some serious health issues, and God called her home.

Paul continues to get older, and his body is wearing down. He has moved to an assisted living home and has plans to move across the courtyard to a place that offers more care if he needs it and if God continues to bless him with more days.

On one of my visits with Paul, we were discussing all the challenges he has faced in his life. He made the comment, “I don’t know how anyone deals with all these things without Christ in their life. How do you deal with things like cancer, death, job loss, divorce, sin, and guilt without knowing Jesus? How do you live without that treasure?”

A CLEAR VISION

Paul and Betty’s life story is not much different from your story. Some of us

may have more hardships in our lives and some may have less. But we all deal with life and everything that comes with it. The longer we live here, the more challenges it seems we have to face. What a blessing it is to have the treasure of the gospel as we deal with all the things that life can throw at us. It keeps our vision clear. The Scriptures remind us so clearly, “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who is the author of our faith and the one who brings it to its goal” (Hebrews 12:2 Evangelical Heritage Version). We know life can be hard sometimes. But what a treasure it is to know that our sins are forgiven, our hardships here on earth are only temporary, and we have a home waiting for us in heaven. When we keep our eyes on Jesus and the treasure of the gospel, our vision is clear. In all of life’s ups and downs, the gospel keeps reminding us of the beautiful treasures we have in Jesus.

Fourteen years after moving away from the mountains, I still miss them. The first several months that I lived in Ohio I would find myself looking toward the western sky, hoping to see the mountains. They still haven’t shown up. I didn’t always appreciate them when I could. Don’t let that happen with the treasure of the gospel. God’s gospel gift is here for you. It is here to keep your vision clear and to keep your eyes focused on your Savior, Jesus.

As you think about what that treasure means to you, remember there are people who don’t know the message of their Savior. That treasure that is here for you is also a treasure to share with others.

Kevin Westra is pastor at Beautiful Savior, Grove City, Ohio.

This is the fourth article in a six-part series on the power of the gospel.



Listening

Donn G. Dobberstein

The average human speaks 125 to 150 words per minute, but the human brain is capable of comprehending and listening to 600 words per minute. We listen to music and movies for enjoyment. We listen to directions to reach our destination. We listen to podcasts and educational videos for continued growth.

Given all the listening that we do, you would think that we'd be good at it. Yet researchers believe we only remember somewhere between 25 to 50 percent of what we hear.

WE DON'T REALLY LISTEN

Why is that? I'll venture out on a limb to give some answers:

1. People like to talk more than they listen.

Studies have shown that 40 percent of everyday speech is devoted to

telling other people how we feel or what we think. So, for most of us, we think we know where the conversation is going and we begin formulating our response. Instead of concentrating on what is being said, we are busy preparing our reply or mentally rejecting the other person's point of view. We're half-eared, because our attention is divided.

2. People are more interested in what they are doing.

How many of us haven't been part of a conversation that goes something like this:

Mom: "Hey Sweetie, can you take the recyclables out to the garage and take the laundry basket of clothes to your room?"

Distracted teen watching TV or playing a game: "Uh, yeah . . . okay."

A half hour later . . .

Annoyed Mom: "Didn't I ask you to

do something? Why haven't you done it yet?"

Distracted teen: "Yeah, I heard. . . . I'm going to do it in a sec."

Another half hour later . . .

Exasperated Mom: "Why does everyone around here ignore what I say? I feel like I'm talking to myself!"

You may ask them to repeat back what you just said to see if they were really listening. Even if they regurgitate it correctly, it still doesn't address what annoyed you in the first place or what they think is more important. It's the frustrating feeling of not being heard.

JESUS SHOWS US HOW TO LISTEN

In John chapter 4, Jesus models what real listening looks like in a short conversation with a Samaritan woman. During those few minutes, Jesus took the conversation from friendly and casual to deeply spiritual and personal.

The conversation went something like this:

Jesus: “Can I have a drink of water?”

Samaritan woman: “Are you sure you want to ask ME for a drink?” (Jewish men did not talk to women, and she was not with the women of the village.)

Jesus: “If you knew who was asking you for a drink, you’d ask him to give you a drink of living water.”

Samaritan woman: “Are you saying you’re greater than our ancestor, Jacob, who made this well?”

Jesus: “Jacob’s water will leave you still thirsty. The water I give takes away thirst forever.”

Samaritan woman: “Give me some of your water so I don’t have to keep coming back here!”

A discussion about water led Jesus to speak about spiritual thirst that only God can quench. Every response to her questions led to deeper conversation. Jesus did it in such a way that it did not end the conversation. Rather he steered the conversation toward her personal life, which mattered most to him. Even when the woman later tried to redirect the topic away from her marred marital history toward the location of worship (4:16-24), Jesus kept the focus on her heart with simple, sacred truth.

Jesus did more than talk. He listened. With every word he spoke, Jesus was telling her, “I’m listening to you.”

LISTENING IS A WAY OF LOVING

There is a direct connect between the words *love* and *listen*. When you really love someone, you desire to hear them. In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey explains the ways we listen:

- We *ignore* a person (not listening. at all).
- We *pretend* to be listening. (“Yeah. Uh-huh. Right.”)
- We *pay close attention* to what someone is saying (active listening).

But the highest form of listening is the kind that dives into someone else’s world in order to understand his or her perspective. How many of your best friends are your best friends because they truly “listen” to you? Is not listening a way of loving? That’s Jesus!

He walked straight into this alienated woman’s world of isolation and brokenness. He observed her hands drawing water—out of the sight of others—and understood why. He knew her crushed heart and the baggage she was carrying inside. He listened and watched to understand her questions.

The better we
get at listening,
the less scary it is
to share our faith.

We don’t possess Jesus’ ability to see within a person and know their real needs. How much more then is our need to *listen* rather than talk! Are we losing the ability and willingness to love by not listening to people who sound and look nothing like us? Does prejudice block our ears? We say we love people, but do we show love only if it is on our terms or if they are interested in coming to our church or if they respect our way of life?

Listening is important. When you need to pour out your heart or seek sound advice, to whom do you go to talk? Is it someone who can talk a good talk or someone who intently listens to you because they genuinely care about you?

Jesus engaged and listened to a Samaritan woman because he genuinely loved her. Our love for others often takes a backseat. It’s me and my self-absorption that doesn’t like to listen to someone who may have absolutely nothing to

offer me in terms of personal friendship. Self-absorption is not love.

LISTENING HELPS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have in building relationships with others for Jesus:

- **Listening provides a direct connection with people.** It is a way to engage in a relationship. The better we get at listening, the less scary it is to share our faith. Becoming a better listener can improve your ability to influence with God’s Word. What’s more, you’ll avoid conflict and misunderstandings.
- **Listening creates “space” for someone else to open up and talk.** It will mean you have to be quiet. Can you do that? Can you set yourself and your life aside in order to focus 100 percent on another person? Some have said that the best conversations with me were the ones when I hardly said anything! I just listened to them as they unburdened themselves.
- **Listening sounds easy, yet it’s one of the hardest things to do.** It takes time and practice. And it takes a caring heart.

Next time you’re in a conversation with someone, try giving both ears to him or her! Listening tells people they matter. If love for God begins with listening to his Word, then love for others is learning to listen to them.

“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9).

Donn Dobberstein, director of discipleship for WELS, is a member at Trinity, Waukesha, Wisconsin.

This is the second article in a four-part series on evangelism lessons from the account of the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4.

Curiosity and a long journey brought a woman to the Bible and changed her life.

Yi Zhang

I was raised in a northwest city of China in a nonreligious environment. My parents were loving, caring, and hardworking people who struggled to put enough food on the table every day. They insisted on sending my sister and me to school, provided financial support to my grandparents who lived in another city far away, and did everything to raise up their children physically healthy and happy.

CURIOSITY

My first experience with a church goes back to when I was a first-year university student in China. My university was located in Tianjin, a historical city of China. The city was colonized from 1858 to 1930 by Europeans living in China. They left behind buildings, including beautiful Catholic churches. Whenever I passed by those beautiful church buildings, I always felt that some myth or mystery existed behind the walls, and I was curious to find out what it was.

One Sunday morning, I was finally brave enough to push the carved doors open. I saw hundreds of people kneel-

ing down with the voice of a priest echoing in the air. An old slim usher, in a low but firm tone, suggested I kneel down too. Being a bit unprepared and confused, I quietly withdrew and stepped outside.

For some reason, the usher's emotionless face and voice dampened my curiosity, until I witnessed some unbelievable changes in Auntie Zhao.

ONE CHANGED LIFE

Auntie Zhao is the mom of my closest friend in high school. Whenever I went to her house, Auntie Zhao always sat at the other side of the table, looking at us with quiet smiles. I liked her gentle eyes and soft voice. One day, my friend was not around, and Auntie Zhao started telling me her own story. I don't remember how we started the conversation or the details of her story. All that I remember is pieces of scenes that tore her life apart, and her tears.

After that conversation, every time I went to my friend's home, I always tried to find a way to chat with Auntie Zhao for a moment. Quite often, the only thing I could do was listen to different stories of the journey of her life. The tears often streamed out of her gentle eyes down her cheeks.

When I went on to the university in Tianjin, over 1,000 km away from my hometown, I only got to visit Auntie

Zhao two times a year. Each time I went there, the heaviness and struggling behind the quiet and gentle smiles were still lingering.

During winter break of 1996, when I stepped into my friend's house, I heard Auntie Zhao singing for the first time. I saw her laughing over the dinner table for the first time. Unbelievably, she had turned into a completely different person, a newly created person! She told me that she was so happy to find her dear Father in heaven. She was so happy to be a Christian! I wondered, *What is a Christian? What kind of power removes an old cumbersome shell that had been covering her for over 30 years just within a year?*

A LONG JOURNEY AND CURIOSITY AGAIN

I left China three years later. But before I left for Canada, Auntie Zhao gave me two tiny pocket books in Chinese—a Holy Bible and a hymnal—and a piece of paper with her handwriting of the Lord's Prayer. She told me whenever I felt sad or frustrated, I could read aloud this prayer and then my spirit would be cheered up. This was the first time I opened a Bible. But after flipping a few pages, I found the sentences were written in those Chinese characters that I seldom used in my daily life. The sentences or paragraphs just appeared too complicated

Confessions OF FAITH



for me to understand. So everything was still a mystery to me.

In Ottawa, there were two beautiful church buildings five or six blocks away from my new home. Every time I went grocery shopping, I passed by the buildings. The image of Auntie Zhao and the curiosity filled my mind again. Finally, one afternoon of a sunny day in summer, I decided to hold my breath and approached one church building. Suddenly, I saw a homeless man standing in the backyard of the church, staring at me without any emotion. I remembered the face of the old usher in the Catholic church of Tianjin. I paused, turned away, and walked toward the next church down the road, St. Paul's.

Gently knocking on the side door, I heard footsteps approaching the door. The door opened, and a peaceful face with a quiet smile and beautiful sky-blue eyes was right in front me. "Hi!" she said. I smiled back, and in my stumbled English, I asked, "Can I borrow a Bible?"

A little surprise was on her face, "Sure, just a minute." She went into her office and came back with a Holy Bible in her hand. "By the way, if you are interested, we have a Bible information class for students each Sunday. You are more than welcome to join us!"

A few weeks later, I sat in a room with a group of other international students and started the Bible study.

Honestly, my initial intention was to improve my English and to continue seeking that mysterious magic power that had changed Auntie Zhao. In the beginning of the class, despite the fact that the leader explained each verse patiently, slowly, and cheerfully, I was nervous, shy, and struggling with the meaning and pronunciation of some English words. But the urge to find that magnificent power became stronger and stronger. Over time, the stories and messages became clearer; they were no longer just a story or a fairy tale. They started touching my real life.

Over the years, I had been constantly looking for the magic power that touched Auntie Zhao. I was lost, confused, and covered by various sins that I never realized. Then the Bible gently tapped my soul, woke up my curiosity, and slowly pulled me closer and closer to Jesus Christ and granted me a spiritual introduction to him. I used to think that coming to Canada was just to seek a new adventure. Now I know that the Lord guided me to come to Canada to know more about him and to be his dear child.

There are moments that I feel worried and stressed. But I know there's always a place and a hand there where



Yi Zhang

I can cast all my worries. Every single day, I'm constantly wrestling and distracted by the earthly routines. But I know the Eyes from the Above are watching me, the Hands from the Above are holding me, and I pray for the Spirit from the Above to guide me through daily activities in honoring his name. Under his grace, I pray that I will continuously grow in faith and that I will never be lost.

Yi Zhang is a member at St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.





heart to heart parent conversations

What's the best way to support our kids when they're not the best at something? Do we reward effort and encourage them to keep trying? Steer them toward areas in which they excel? Praise mediocrity? Offer honest feedback? As with so much of parenting, the answer probably changes depending on the child and the circumstances.

This month's authors give us some go-to options when our children are struggling with the very real feelings that go along with realizing that they are not going to be the best at everything, that some things are hard. If you don't have time to read all three articles, I'd encourage you to read at least the last paragraph of each one. A wealth of godly wisdom is found in those final paragraphs.

Nicole Balza

**Join the
conversation!**

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist
and look for the
Heart to heart link.

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT A CHILD WHO IS STRUGGLING?

My husband and I have raised three boys who are incredibly different from one another and have very different gifts, despite their shared DNA. It has made parenting them interesting . . . and challenging. What came so easily to one was a struggle for another. One lived for the grade school science fair and eagerly cultivated bacteria in petri dishes for weeks. The other started his project the night before it was due.

Sound familiar? As parents, how do we support our kids when they don't excel in a certain area?

First of all, remind your kids (and yourself!) not to believe everything they see on social media. A scroll through your Facebook feed will convince you that everyone else's kids are destined to be doctors, pro athletes, rocket scientists, etc. Don't buy into the lie! Discuss with your kids how social media can be about sharing "mountaintop" experiences—the perfect facade people present to the world. In reality, all kids fail, feel excluded, and struggle with self-doubt. They just might not show it.

Help your kids realize that struggles in this sinful world are inevitable. Satan has made sure of that. The

My three teenagers experience a fair amount of worldly success in academics, sports, and music. This is not a bragging moment; it is simply an acknowledgement that God has given my kids a range of abilities, which are gifts they can't take credit for in the same way they can't take credit for their natural hair color. (Curious about this? Check out Letter 14 in *Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis.)

So, for those who are used to consistent success, what happens when they encounter something they're not naturally good at?

Well, first, we simply accept those weaknesses. Society, in the name of well-rounded kiddos, places an awful lot of pressure on them to do everything. In reality,

"I'm no good at anything."

"Sam is the best. Why can't I be like him?"

"Everyone else can do it but me!"

Do these words activate your parent panic alarm? These phrases and others like them are a common and normal part of the growing process. However, as a parent I feel the need to spring into action and do something. My natural instinct is to argue, "You are good at many things." Enter kid response, "No, I'm not." Followed by my educated, all-knowing parental response, "Yes, you are."

Perhaps in my panic of seeing my child hurting, this "No, I'm not/yes, you are" approach could turn into more of an argument than anything else. I have found it a little (maybe a lot) more challenging for me to take a more unnatural approach during times like this. In fact, **I have had to tell myself to STOP—and just listen.** An expression of feelings associated with not excelling in a certain area can first be acknowledged—then argued with (kidding about the arguing). Here's my secret template:

important thing is what we do with those struggles. We don't let them define us; we let them teach us. Sometimes our kids' struggles will lead them down a path they never would have chosen for themselves. Help them identify the valuable life lessons that can be learned from struggles.

Remind your kids that struggles are in God's perfect plan for their lives. Wise King Solomon reminds us, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (Proverbs 16:9). Remember that God knows what our kids need better than we do. In our time-bound, earthly thinking, we cannot comprehend how all the disparate pieces of our kids' lives—their successes and struggles—are part of God's divine plan for them and fulfill his purposes.

Gently help your kids deal with failure. Kids no longer know how to fail! This sounds odd, but think about our society. It rewards kids with medals and trophies just for participating. Our attempts not to let any child's feelings get hurt are doing kids a disservice. When they get older, they will not always be #1 or #2 but might be #27 or #1,127. Kids need to learn how to deal with failure and how to work through the depression and anxiety they might feel when they realize they aren't #1 at everything they do. At the same time, remind

your kids that the "place" or "rank" the world has assigned to them in no way changes the way you, or their heavenly Father, love and cherish them.

Help your kids identify and cultivate their God-given gifts and areas where they excel. Think about what motivates them. What makes them come alive? What can they do for hours without looking at the clock? Sometimes it's easier for us, as parents and observers, to see where our kids' gifts lie. It is our job to help them discover and use those gifts for God's glory. Remind them that God gives everyone different gifts (Romans 12:6-8) and that they shouldn't compare their gifts to the gifts of others. Assure them that God's love does not depend on their success and neither does your love for them.

Ultimately, let's pray for God's guidance in teaching our kids that their most important status is that of redeemed child of God, purchased with Jesus' blood on the cross.

Ann Jahns and her husband, Thad, have three sons and a recently emptied nest.



it's refreshing to say, "We're not even going to worry about that." Not pressuring them to strive for things that aren't in their wheelhouse gives them a chance to celebrate others' successes and gifts.

Then, after our kids accept their weaknesses, we encourage them not to completely accept their weaknesses (and not just because we're trying to mess with them!). The parenting cliché "You don't have to be the best, but you need to do your best" is a good one to use here.

Kids can't just blow off math or English because it's not their gift. Certain skills do need to be learned. Plus, with so many things, kids are accountable to a team or a group, so they need to work on their portion of the robotics project

or practice free throws or rehearse their music. People are counting on them to contribute. This is where character is built. As kids struggle, they learn perseverance, determination, empathy, and humility. They learn that there is often a greater sense of satisfaction that comes along with hard work than from accomplishments that come easy.

Mainly, it boils down to giving thanks. We give thanks for the natural gifts God has given our kids. Then we give thanks for the lessons they learn as they work through their struggles.

Linda Buxa and her husband, Greg, have two daughters and a son.



"Sounds like you felt a little (insert feeling word here) when (insert event here) happened."

It feels a bit unnatural to me, but I have found that if I do not give our kids an understanding of how they feel, nothing else I say seems to be heard. It makes me think of the accounts in Scripture when Jesus sat with the woman at the well and when he walked along the road to Emmaus with the disciples. He seemed to join them and express his understanding before teaching them a new way.

So what's next? I've joined my child and expressed an understanding of how he feels about not excelling in a certain area. Now it's time to debate, right? Set this child straight and tell him what he is good at and he will walk away with new confidence, right?

Maybe sometimes that approach is needed. Maybe it helps at times to minimize a mistake or encourage hard work and practice. Maybe sometimes it is an opportunity to acknowledge the effort and not the end result. Lots of helpful approaches can be used at different times and special situations.

As I keep my radar up for a teachable moment, **one thing I tend to be on guard for in my kids is their sense that Mom and Dad will only love them if they are the best.** Wrong! This becomes a great opportunity for a reminder of God's unconditional love. He loves us all with our successes and failures. We as parents try to use that as our guide. While we were still sinners (failures, broken, not good at anything), Christ died for us. There was nothing we had to do to earn God's love. It is unconditional.

As parents, we can remain watchful for opportunities to express understanding when our kids experience disappointments and do not excel in a certain area. Let's ask for the Lord's guidance to help us use the best tool of redirection at the right time and always to be aware of the moments we are given to remind our kids of God's unconditional love.

Dan Nommensen and his wife, Kelly, have a teenage daughter and a preteen son.





teentalk

Tune in

It's easy for our minds to drift when we hear God's Word, but it's important to tune in.

Rebekah M. Stahmann

We've all been there: sitting in the pew early on Sunday morning, using all your strength to keep yourself from nodding off for the fifth time during the seemingly eternal sermon. No matter how hard you try to listen, the words coming from the pastor's mouth sound like nothing new as he repeats the gospel message you've heard hundreds of times before. And not only do you have to stay for the entire service, but you also have to sit through another entire Bible study based on the book of Deuteronomy, which is just so BORING for you as a teen.

Sure, your love for Jesus is strong and your faith is the most important thing to you, but sometimes as a teen it's just so hard to connect to the material being taught in a church that's primarily filled with those who are much older than you.

As the 17-year-old daughter of a pastor and Lutheran school teacher, I get it. Taking sermons and devotions to heart can be extremely difficult if they don't seem to correlate to our everyday lives as teenagers. Sometimes as a teen, it's hard to relate to the old biblical teachings that we've been hearing for years and years. You know how the saying

goes: "In one ear and out the other!" Truly tuning in to the words being spoken to us can be challenging and frustrating.

Through my personal struggle with paying attention during church and connecting the words to my life, I've come up with some ways to take God's words he is preaching to us truly to heart.

When we prepare our hearts for worship, our number-one focus should be growing in our faith and in our relationship with God. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the one doing the work, and it's not all about us. The time we have to study God's Word and reflect on it is precious, and we should never take it for granted, no matter how tired we are from staying up late on Saturday night.

I've heard that advice so often and I've tried to put it into practice. When I sit down in the pew on Sunday morning, I take the time to tune in to the words and focus on the message that the pastor feels is important to share. That message is for me. Remember that God is speaking through his called servant, and he wants us to listen.

Believe it or not, this same problem was very much present during biblical times as well. The most obvious example was in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus was preparing for his betrayal and death. Jesus had instructed his disciples to keep watch and pray while he was gone. The disciples, like us, were sinful and gave in to the temptations of falling asleep, not unlike the occasional dozing off during church. Jesus quickly rebuked them: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

Jesus gives us many opportunities to study his Word, which we should willingly hear and learn. His words are there specifically to help us in our everyday struggles of life. Remember regularly to tune in to the sermon or any other Bible study you might attend. The words have been prepared for your benefit.

Ask God to bless your studies and keep your mind alert, even after those Saturday night Netflix marathons.

Rebekah Stahmann, a 2018 graduate of Arizona Lutheran Academy, Phoenix, Arizona, is a member at Salem, Scottsdale, Arizona.

CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Cherney, Ethan, to Our Savior, Pomona, Calif.
Cloute, Justin, to St. Luke, Watertown, Wis.
Guenther, Robert, to St. John's, New Ulm, Minn.
Gumm, Tim, to St. John, Doylestown, Wis.
Hansen, Eric, to Crown of Life, Corona, Calif.
Hoff, Joel, to Trinity, Neenah, Wis.
Jensen, Robert, to Living Water, Hot Springs Village, Ark.
Kuehn, Paul, to Salem, Loretto, Minn.
Laabs, David, to retirement
Metzger, Peter, to St. Peter, St. Albert, Alberta, Canada
Micheel, Paul, to St. Paul, Grant Park, Ill.
Roecker, James, to St. Andrew's, Saint Paul Park, Minn.
Seeger, Norman, to retirement
Spiegelberg II, Thomas, to Saving Grace, Mobile, Ala.
Walther, Peter, to Our Savior's, East Brunswick, N.J.
Witt III, James, to retirement

Teachers

Achey, Erin, to St. John, Lake City, Minn.
Adickes, Philip, to Illinois Lutheran High School, Crete, Ill.
Anthony, Darnell, to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Anthony, Scott, to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.
Bremer, Steven, to Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, Waco, Neb.
Cesar, Robert, to Mt. Lebanon, Milwaukee, Wis.
Datka, James, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Gorzalski, Emily, to St. Lucas, Milwaukee, Wis.
Grys, Cassandra, to St. John, Maribel, Wis.
Habeck, David, to Evergreen Lutheran High School, Tacoma, Wash.
Heiderich, Deborah, to St. John, Maribel, Wis.
Herlich, Lisa, to Redeemer, Tucson, Ariz.
Hoenecke, Henry, to Crown of Life Christian Academy, Fort Myers, Fla.
Humann, Amanda, to St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.
Humann, Brian, to St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.
Jensen, Renee, to Bethany, Hustisford, Wis.
Kock, Seth, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.
Krause, Melody, to Trinity, Kaukauna, Wis.
Lecker, David, to Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wis.
Luehring, Karen, to Shepherd of the Valley, Westminster, Colo.

Mattes, Dane, to Northdale, Tampa, Fla.
Moon, Ju Yeon, to Jerusalem, Morton Grove, Ill.
Nelson, Joshua, to Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Nommensen, Dyann, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
Nottling, Rachel, to Divine Grace, Lake Orion, Mich.
Obry, Ryan, to Samuel, Marshall, Minn.
Oertel, Ryan, to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.
Pieper, Susan, to Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.
Platzer, Emily, to Our Savior, Grafton, Wis.
Schaffer, Megan, to St. John, Mukwonago, Wis.
Schmiege, Jennifer, to Trinity, Marinette, Wis.
Schultz, Daniel, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Schultz, Monica, to Bloomington, Bloomington, Minn.
Scriver, Bailey, to Lord of Life, Friendswood, Texas
Sievert, Amy, to St. John, Watertown, Wis.
Smukowski, Tammy, to St. Paul, Cudahy, Wis.
Sprewer, Shawn, to Kingdom Prep Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.
Sullivan, Amy, to Christ Our Savior, Rockford, Mich.
Uher, Jennifer, to Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.
Walker, Joshua, to St. Jacobi, Greenfield, Wis.
Wardell, Kelly, to St. Philip, Milwaukee, Wis.
Wehausen, Andrew, to St. Paul, Onalaska, Wis.

Staff minister

Favorite, Jonathan, to St. Peter, Appleton, Wis.

ANNIVERSARIES

Cornell, Wis.—St. John (100). Aug. 4–5. Aug. 4. Open house/ice cream social, 1–4 P.M. Aug. 5. Worship, 3 P.M.; meal to follow. No RSVP necessary. 715-239-6081.
Anchorage, Alaska—Faith (50). Aug. 5. Anniversary worship, 10:30 A.M.; potluck and program to follow. Website, faithalaska.com. 907-563-3499.
Kaukauna, Wis.—St. John (150). Aug. 12. Website, stjohnekaukauna.com.
Waco, Neb.—Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School (40). Aug. 12. All school reunion. Fellowship, 3 P.M.; opening service and picnic to follow. Website, nelhs.org.
Hutchinson, Minn.—Immanuel Lutheran School (100). Aug. 25–26. Aug. 25. Afternoon activities and food truck picnic; evening concert with The Divers. Aug. 26.

Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered meal to follow. Tickets are \$10 adult, \$5 ten and under. 320-587-6138; pastor@immanuelhutch.com.

Jackson, Wis.—David's Star (175). Aug. 26. Mission Festival service, 9:30 A.M.; meal to follow. Oct. 14. Worship, 10:15 A.M. at Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School; meal to follow at David's Star. 262-677-2412. Website, davidsstar.org.

Prior Lake, Minn.—Faith (50). Sept. 9. Worship, 3 P.M.; catered dinner, 4:30 P.M. RSVP requested. pastorschmiel@gmail.com.

St. Croix Falls, Wis.—Redeemer (75). Sept. 9. Concert, 2:30 P.M.; worship service, 3 P.M.; program and dinner, 4 P.M. 715-483-3401.

Apacheland, Ariz.—Native American mission work (125). Oct. 26, self-guided reservation tours. Oct. 27, 11 A.M.–4 P.M., crafts, music history; 4 P.M., worship; 5 P.M., dinner. Oct. 28, anniversary worship throughout Apache reservation. Debbie Dietrich, NativeChristians1@gmail.com. Website, nativechristians.org.

COMING EVENTS

WELS Night at Miller Park—Aug. 3. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Brewers vs. Rockies. Order tickets at reduced rates at brewers.com/wels.

Christian Educators for Special Education annual conference—Aug. 7. Country Springs, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

Lutheran Girl Pioneer international convention—Oct. 6. St. Paul's, Franklin, Wis. Karen Martinez, karen.martinez@wels.net. Website, welsrc.net/event/lutheran-girl-pioneer-international-convention/.

Women's Ministry retreat—Oct. 6. Theme: "Grace." Peace, Loves Park, Ill. Website, peaceelp.com/womens-retreat.

Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors convention—Oct. 10–12. Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, Wis. For all seniors, age 55 and older. Register now. Website, wels.net/events.

Christian Life Resources' Celebration of Life event—Oct. 20. Theme: "Transformed." Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis. Website, clrevents.com.

Lutheran Recovery Ministries recovery retreat—Oct. 26–28. Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery, Phoenix, Ariz. Website, wels.net/events.

WELS National Multi-Site conference—Nov. 12–14. Ingleside Hotel and Conference Center, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/multi-site-2018/.

Find additional community events and resources at **welsrc.net**. To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.

Delegates gather for district conventions

Each of WELS' 12 districts met in convention this June, considering local ministry topics along with issues that apply to the entire synod.

Delegates of the Michigan and Minnesota Districts elected new presidents to replace retiring pastors John Seifert and Charles Degner, respectively. Snowden (Gene) Sims is now leading the Michigan District, and Dennis Klatt is president of the Minnesota District. Both men will join the other district presidents as well as the synod president and two synod vice presidents to form WELS' Conference of Presidents, which maintains the synod's doctrine and practice and is responsible for funding the synod budget.

"All the members of the Conference of Presidents—not to mention the members of our synod—are grateful for the faithful service and leadership of Pastor John Seifert and Pastor Charles Degner," says WELS President Mark Schroeder. "We also thank their wives and families for sharing their husband and father with us. We look forward to working with Pastor Sims and Pastor Klatt. They have big shoes to fill, but we are confident that the Lord will equip them for their important work."

Synod leaders presented ministry updates regarding WELS' schools, committees, and areas of ministry. Representatives from WELS Congregational Services presented on the current state

of the synod and how WELS members and congregations can serve their communities with the gospel. Delegates to the Dakota-Montana and Northern Wisconsin District Conventions commented on Jonathan Hein's presentation titled "God's country—a vision for 21st-century rural ministry in WELS" that encouraged delegates to reach out with Christ's love to their communities intentionally and strategically. Jason Liebenow, a pastor of a tri-parish near Florence, Wis., called the presentation "a life-changer."

For more photos, visit [flickr.com/photos/welslutherans/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/welslutherans/). Choose "Albums" and then "District Conventions 2018."

MICHIGAN

The Michigan District experienced a power outage during its convention at Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. In darkness and with no microphones, the convention continued as the doors were opened to let in natural sunlight and a megaphone was used to conduct business. Pictured from left: Jacob Behnken, pastor at Good Shepherd, Midland, Mich.; John Seifert, retiring district president; Gene Sims, newly elected district president.



SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Almost 450 pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and lay delegates gathered at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., for the Southeastern Wisconsin District Convention. Delegates celebrated the 100th anniversary of the district with the theme "Looking back . . . at a century of God's grace. Moving forward . . . with prayer and resolve."

WESTERN WISCONSIN



The Western Wisconsin District held its convention at Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. They held elections (pictured) for district officers, circuit pastors, and district committee members.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST



The Pacific Northwest District celebrated its 100th anniversary in a variety of ways, including a worship service that included a sermon from the district's former president, Ted Lambert, and a program that included a performance by Andrew Schwartz and Joel Nitz (guitar).

NORTHERN WISCONSIN



Manitowoc Lutheran High School, Manitowoc, Wis., hosted the Northern Wisconsin District Convention. The convention theme, "Not in vain," was taken from 1 Corinthians 15:58, the sermon text used by WELS President G.E. Bergemann on Aug. 14, 1918, at the first convention of the Northern Wisconsin District.

DAKOTA-MONTANA

Many delegates to the Dakota-Montana District Convention noted that the highlight was a presentation given by Jon Hein (pictured), director of WELS Congregational Services, on his paper, "God's country—a vision for 21st-century rural ministry in WELS." Hein also provided ministry updates from Congregational Services, including the launch of an online resource and training center aimed at helping congregational leaders carry out gospel ministry at the local level. Visit welscongregationalservices.net to learn more.



ARIZONA-CALIFORNIA



The Arizona-California District celebrated the 125th anniversary of WELS world mission work. WELS' first world mission was on the Apache reservation, which is located in the district.

MINNESOTA



Charles Degner served as president of the Minnesota District for the past 10 years. Delegates honored him for his service and also celebrated the 100th anniversary of the district at its convention, which was held at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

SOUTH ATLANTIC

Paul Prange, administrator of WELS' Board for Ministerial Education, gave the keynote address at the South Atlantic District Convention. The presentation was titled "Machine, family, jungle, theater: Biblical perspectives on congregation and school."



SOUTH CENTRAL



Delegates to the South Central District Convention elected the following district officers (from left): Bradley Taylor, secretary; Donald Patterson, president; John Vieths, first vice president; and John Hering, second vice president.

NORTH ATLANTIC

Jared Oldenburg, home missionary at Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colo., was the mission speaker for the North Atlantic District Convention. His presentation emphasized how we can use our unique talents to engage our communities.



NEBRASKA



The opening service of the Nebraska District Convention was held on June 4 at Bethel, York, Neb. The presiding minister was Philip Hirsch, president of the Nebraska District, and the preaching minister was James Huebner, first vice president of WELS.

Forward in Christ's district reporters contributed to this coverage: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; D-M—Andrew Hussman; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Philip Gurgel; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; PNW—David Birsching; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

Getting to know your district presidents

DENNIS KLATT

On June 13, Dennis Klatt was elected to serve as the district president of the Minnesota District. Klatt is pastor at Holy Trinity, New Hope, Minn.

Q: What was your upbringing like and how did you come to be a pastor?

A: I was born and raised on a dairy farm west of Menomonie, Wis., the fourth of eight children. God planted the desire to serve in the pastoral ministry in my heart at the age of five—largely due to my respect for and admiration of Pastor Martin Schwartz who served St. Paul's, Menomonie. My parents provided strong encouragement toward ministry as my school years progressed.

Q: What ministry and service opportunities has God placed before you that helped prepare you to serve as district president?

A: For 30 years God has given me the privilege of serving as a parish pastor in both rural and suburban settings. My current congregation, Holy Trinity in New Hope, Minn., is a diverse group of believers from European, Asian, African, and Hispanic backgrounds. I am currently involved with

coordinating and teaching two Pastoral Studies Institute students. Also during my ministry I have had the joy of serving the Minnesota District in a variety of roles—Commission on Evangelism member, Commission on Adult Discipleship chairman, circuit pastor, and district vice president.

Q: How would you describe the role of the district president?

A: The district president is a servant. He serves God and his district by encouraging and fostering faithfulness to God's Word in doctrine and practice along with making use of every opportunity to reach the lost and nurture the found. The president also assists congregations and schools in the process of calling pastors, teachers, and staff ministers to carry out the ministry of the Word among them.



Dennis Klatt and his wife, Cindy, have been married 30 years and have three children—(from left) Ryan, Caleb, and Megan. In his free time, Klatt says he enjoys “home and auto repair projects, gardening, softball, and—in recent years—an occasional nap!”

SNOWDEN (GENE) SIMS

Gene Sims was elected to serve as the district president of the Michigan District on June 12. Sims is pastor at St. Paul's, Columbus, Ohio.

Q: What was your upbringing like and how did you come to be a pastor?

A: I was born in Lima, Ohio. My mother moved from Lima, taking me and an older brother, Gregory, to Milwaukee, Wis., when I was six. My first contact with a Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran church came through Sunday school at St. Marcus Lutheran Church. My brother and I were enrolled in Jerusalem Lutheran School and baptized and confirmed at Jerusalem. I spent my high school years at Wisconsin Lutheran High School.

One day in my sophomore year, two teachers asked if I had ever thought about becoming a pastor. My answer was “no” at the time. They continued to encourage me to think about it. I enjoyed reading the Word, living it, and sharing it. My junior year, our swing choir director, Pastor Mark Bitter, drove me six hours to meet my family in Ohio after a performance over a holiday. We talked about ministry most of that time.

Q: What ministry and service opportunities has God placed before you that helped prepare you to serve as district president?

A: After graduation, I served as a tutor, teacher, professor, and dean at Northwestern Preparatory School/Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis., over the course of two different calls. My time there gave me valuable insight into addressing different situations and dealing with people in crisis, along with parents. My relational skills were definitely sharpened.

Early in my career I also served at Salem, Milwaukee, with three other pastors, one of whom was a retiring district president. I also served as the vicar to a district president.

Q: How would you describe the role of the district president?

A: I guess a way to sum it up is that the district president is in a position that assists in making the body of the district function as a member of the body of the synod, and, more important, as a member of the body of Christ.



Gene Sims with his wife, Melinda, and their daughter, Erika. Sims' recent vicar, David Spaude, says, “Pastor Sims' careful understanding of Scripture will help him offer excellent oversight of doctrine and practice in the Michigan District.”

Unprecedented opportunities in Vietnam

“You have brought us the truth—and that has changed our lives.”

Until a few short years ago, Chonghoua Vang, a pastor in the Hmong Fellowship Church (HFC) in Vietnam, lived by the law. And he taught the law. “I treated people with contempt. If I saw a member committing sin, I hated them. If they had addictions, I hated them. Now, as I look back, I see that I was a Pharisee at that time.”

It was what he saw growing up as a Christian and what he was taught in his studies as a pastor. “Looking back, I see that while we talked about Jesus as our Savior, we didn’t understand law and gospel and we promoted a lot of work righteousness,” he says.

Vang began to understand grace when he started attending training sessions conducted by Bounkeo Lor, Hmong Asia ministry coordinator, in 2015. The church leadership had invited Lor to Vietnam in 2013 to train them after they saw sermons he had posted online. Lor and members of the Pastoral Studies Institute have made more than 24 training trips since then to train 60 HFC leaders.

“Now I see Christ at the center of the Bible and the center of everything that is taught,” says Vang. “I truly believe that salvation comes through faith alone, through Christ alone, through Scripture alone. This foundation has made me confident as a Christian and confident in my salvation.”

And this is something he shares with his 140-member congregation and the 12 additional congregations he oversees. “Before the training, so many others were just like me. My members were just like me. But now we have compassion and love. And now we have joy.”

Members and leaders don’t only have joy; they have unity. Tsavxwm Ham, HFC chairman, says that in the past the HFC pastors interpreted the Bible based on their own ideas or from what they had learned from other church bodies. “Now we have both physical

and spiritual unity. The Lutheran doctrine has brought peace and harmony to the people in the villages—and as a result, our members are sharing their faith and our churches are multiplying.” In the years WELS has provided training, the HFC has grown from 65,000 to 100,000 members and formed 53 new churches.

The changes are so visible that the Communist government has noticed. And it likes what it is seeing, so much so that it is offering WELS an opportunity to build a permanent facility in Hanoi for theological training.

“WELS is being given a priority that other [foreign] church bodies don’t have,” says Larry Schlomer, administrator of WELS World Missions. “It’s an unprecedented, unique door that God is opening up for us.”

Schlomer and Sean Young, director of WELS Missions Operations, traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam, in June to meet with leaders of the HFC and the Vietnamese Fellowship Church (VFC) to discuss the possibilities. The HFC is a subset of the Vietnamese Fellowship Church, a Protestant church body that is officially recognized by the government. WELS will need to work closely with the VFC to build a training facility because foreign church bodies can’t legally own land in Vietnam.

While the VFC has its own government-approved training facility in Ho

Chi Minh City, the facility is not big enough to train all the Hmong pastors. Lessons also are taught in Vietnamese, which many of the Hmong do not understand. “They want us to build a training facility for the ethnic minorities, and there is a clear understanding that we will teach Lutheran doctrine,” says Schlomer.

Building a new facility will allow the HFC more autonomy to set its own schedule for training; will give students from the hill country outside Hanoi a place to stay when attending classes; and will provide worship space for local Hmong to attend services.

Schlomer and Young plan to return to Vietnam in the fall to work out more details.

Says Young, “This opening in communist Vietnam is an incredible gift from God. There are tens of thousands of Hmong people who are thirsty for the Word, and this opportunity is ready to go.”

Learn more at wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach.



(Top) Chonghoua Vang, a pastor in the Hmong Fellowship Church, at a training seminar in Hanoi. (Bottom) WELS Missions leaders (from left) Sean Young, Larry Schlomer, and Bounkeo Lor met with leaders from the Hmong Fellowship Church and the Vietnamese Fellowship Church in Vietnam in June to discuss building a theological training facility.

Witnessing key feature to outreach film

When Mike Hintz, retired director of WELS Commission on Evangelism, traveled to Ouarzazate, Morocco, earlier this year to supervise the filming of the new WELS outreach film *To the Ends of the Earth*, he didn't expect many openings for witnessing.

But God had other ideas. "The movie dialogue was carefully written to point to Jesus as the Savior of the world and the only one through whom we have the gifts of forgiveness of sins and eternal life," says Hintz. "As the actors and actresses worked through their lines and the production staff listened to them, it generated numerous opportunities for me to speak to them about why we wrote it that way. People came up to me to ask questions, and the conversation regularly turned to an opportunity to witness about Christ."

Encouraging witnessing is an important feature of the film, which tells the story of the apostle Paul and his work in Philippi. Its title is taken directly from Jesus' command to his disciples at his Ascension: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The film highlights four major events from the book of Acts—the conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus, the conversion of Lydia, the casting out of a demon from the slave girl, and Paul and Silas in prison followed by the baptisms of the jailer and his household. "Since the movie focuses on mission activity, it reminds us of the important work that we have as we serve Christ—to reach out with the gospel to the ends of the earth," says Hintz.

That's why film resources—including worship materials; adult, small group, teen, and children Bible studies; an Advent by Candlelight program; and personal reflections—will discuss how to witness and share your faith.

Congregations can use the film and its accompanying materials for several different purposes:

- As an option for celebrating a synod-wide Mission and Ministry Sunday,

planned for Oct. 21. "It's an opportunity to give thanks as we look at the ways we in WELS, as congregations and a synod, work to reach out with the gospel, but also to look at opportunities that are still around us and how to make the most of them as we continue to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth," says Hintz.

- As a training resource for the upcoming synodwide outreach campaign called C18. "We want to reach one million people with the gospel by Christmas Eve 2018. That will only happen if all WELS members look for ways to share their faith," says Jonathan Hein, coordinator of WELS Congregational Services. "We are hoping that this fall congregations will use the witnessing training materials that work with this film to prepare their members to talk about Jesus, the Savior of the world, this Christmas."
- As a giveaway to congregation members and prospects. Hintz says that his experiences while filming in Morocco reminded him of the witnessing opportunities this movie can provide for all WELS members: "It can help them start a conversation with their friends and relatives about Jesus and how important he is for their lives," he says. "He is the one that gives them the peace and joy of salvation." A special bulk order price will be available until Sept. 7.

This movie is the final installment in a series of four outreach movies that are a collaboration between WELS Commission on Evangelism, WELS Commission on Discipleship, Northwestern Publishing House, WELS Multi-Language Publications, and Boettcher+Trinklein Television, Inc. Funding from CM CARES, Church Mutual Insurance Company Foundation; WELS Foundation's Shared Blessings donor advised fund; WELS Multi-Language Publications; and gifts from groups, congregations, and individuals helped make this film possible.

The film will be released Sept. 1. View a trailer and learn more at wels.net/totheendsoftheearth.



TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH
A WELS OUTREACH FILM

Pre-order now for this limited-time offer.

100 DVDs at only \$200 per box, plus shipping. That's only \$2 per DVD!

Bulk orders must be received by **Sept. 7**. Orders will be shipped mid-September.

wels.net/ToTheEndsOfTheEarth

Order your copies today!

Booknook

A look at books published by Northwestern Publishing House. For more information, visit nph.net or call 1-800-662-6022.



I think I know better. Too often my thoughts and actions suggest that I think I even know better than God! I wish God would see things my way. Shall I give advice to God?

I am not the only one. Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden, Jesus' doubting disciples, our pride today—people have consistently considered their foolishness greater than God's wisdom. Such is the nature of our sinful wisdom, which only leads to destruction.

That's why we so desperately need God's Word and God's wisdom. That's where Daniel Deutschlander takes us—to God's Word—with his two-volume devotional *On Giving Advice to God*. The first volume focuses on the life and work of Christ for our salvation as it follows the half of the church year from Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany to Lent, Easter, and Jesus' Ascension. The second volume spans the Pentecost/Trinity half of the church year, with



PRICE: \$39.18 for the set

emphasis on our maturing in the faith and sharing it with others.

Valuable for Christians seeking daily spiritual refreshment, each devotion highlights a Bible passage, contrasting what amounts to our sinful opinions and advice regarding life's problems with God's merciful and gracious solutions.

Reading each devotion, I was reminded how my ways and my advice fall short of God's perfection. If I had my way, the result would be a life of sorrow and disaster. But then, with fresh insights into familiar Bible stories, Pastor Deutschlander directs me to the Bible where I see God's wisdom and perfect plan that rescues me from myself, the devil, and eternal death. Pastor Deutschlander points me to Jesus and the cross, and I see God's abounding grace.

Brian Heintz, Henderson, Nevada

New director for the Commission on Evangelism

Eric Roecker has accepted the call to serve as the director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, a ministry of WELS Congregational Services. He is replacing Mike Hintz, who has retired.

A 1998 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Roecker has been serving as pastor at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wis., for five years. Prior to serving at Pilgrim, he served Resurrection, Chesapeake, Va.

"One of the things that affected my decision to accept the call was that I had the opportunity to serve in an outlying district as well as the opportunity to serve here in the Midwest in a congregation with a grade school," says Roecker. "I thought that's probably a good thing for this position, to have experienced both, because I've discovered there's some major differences in the area of outreach between those two ministry settings."

He says he's looking forward to working with a broader segment of WELS members and energizing and helping them share the good news of Jesus.

"Every WELS member wants to evangelize, and we know that because Christ lives in them and Christ wants us to evangelize. All of us want to tell others about Jesus, but there are things that get in the way of that, whether it's

our own sinful natures or our fear of not having answers or not knowing how to do it," says Roecker.

He continues, "The two things I'd like to encourage the members of WELS to do are, first of all, just start reaching out. As you do it, you'll learn how to do it better through experience. And second, prepare yourselves to do it. That's where we hope we can help by providing resources to help people prepare to evangelize."

Roecker will continue to reside in Menomonee Falls with his wife and two children.



Eric Roecker and his family: wife, Mary; son, Rees; and daughter, Riley.

WELS news briefs

SPECIAL MINISTRIES

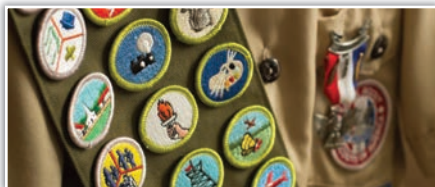
414-256-3241; specialministries@wels.net

Each year the Organization of WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) holds an **annual convention** that allows its members to gather together to worship, be spiritually enriched, see old friends and meet new ones, and offer support. This year, OWLS is inviting all seniors age 55 or older from WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to its convention, Oct. 10–12, at the Osthoff Resort, Elkhart Lake, Wis. “We are reaching out to seniors in both synods since we believe that these conventions can assist all seniors in their faith life through the Christian fellowship motivated by the love of their Savior,” says Werner Lemke, chair of the convention planning committee. Under the theme “Finish your race,” the convention will feature area tours, including the Road America racetrack, and offer workshops and speakers that will help Christian seniors run the race the Lord has prepared for them. Find out more and register at wels.net/events.

CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

414-256-3201; mark.schroeder@wels.net

The Conference of Presidents (COP) has completed its **review of the current Scouting organization** to determine whether Scouting has changed in a way that would remove its objectionable features. Several congregations



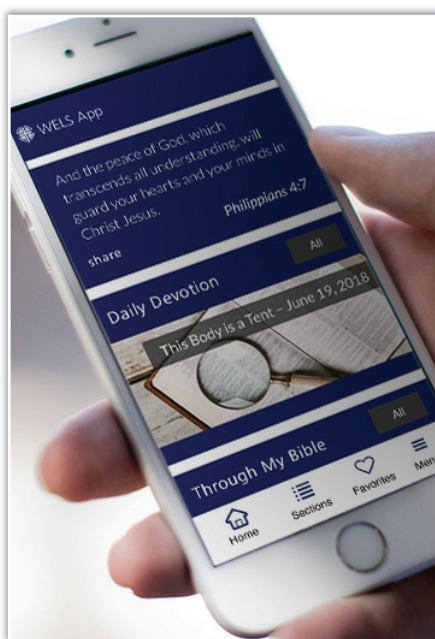
and called workers asked for this review to clarify the issues. The COP has determined that in substance nothing has changed and Scouting still contains religious elements and espouses a religious philosophy that contradicts the Scriptures. The COP

has developed a new 12-lesson Bible study called “Devoted” that digs deeper into Scouting and the doctrine of fellowship. Find the study online at welscongregationalservices.net under “Timely topics.”

TECHNOLOGY

414-259-4357; martin.spriggs@wels.net

WELS has released a **new version of the WELS mobile app**. This version replaces WELS Mobile, which was retired in July. Now called WELS App, this progressive web app still offers a



quick and easy way to get WELS web-based devotional, news, and synod information from your mobile device. It also includes new features like favoriting, sharing, and expanded content. As a progressive web app, WELS App will give users all the features of a store app, but it can be updated more frequently and offer similar experiences on any device. It also gets progressively better as users’ devices (and their browsers) get more capabilities. Find the app online at <https://wels.app>.

Obituaries

Nadine A. Krueger, 1952–2018

Nadine Krueger (née Wangler) was born June 7, 1952, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died March 9, 2018, in Waukesha, Wis.

She taught at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, David; one son; one daughter; three grandchildren; and one sister. She is preceded in death by her parents.

Laurence E. Clark, 1945–2018

Laurence Clark was born Sept. 25, 1945, in Geneva, N.Y. He died March 14, 2018, in La Crosse, Wis.

He served at Mt. Calvary, La Crosse, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Martha; one daughter; two sons; and five grandchildren. He is preceded in death by one sister and one brother.

Lynn L. Hartzell, 1952–2018

Lynn Hartzell (née Stuebs) was born July 10, 1952, in Algoma, Wis. She died March 29, 2018, in Lakeside, Ariz.

A 1974 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., she taught at East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz., and East Fork Lutheran High School, Whiteriver, Ariz.

She is survived by her husband, Ralan; 3 sons; 1 daughter; 11 grandchildren; 1 brother; and 1 sister.

David A. Tetzlaff, 1933–2018

David Tetzlaff was born March 20, 1933, in Cudahy, Wis. He died March 31, 2018, in Fond du Lac, Wis.

A 1958 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. John, Ixonia, Wis.; St. John, Whitewater, Wis.; Christus, Delavan, Wis.; St. Paul, South Haven, Mich.; Christ, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Wisconsin Lutheran Institutional Ministries.

He is survived by his wife, Donna; two daughters; three sons; nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and one sister. He is preceded in death by one brother.

District news

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Six youth from the **Havenwoods campus of Lighthouse Youth Center** in Milwaukee, Wis., helped create and implement an Easter for Kids outreach event for its partner congregation, Redemption, Milwaukee.

MINNESOTA



St. Mark, Mankato, Minn., held a South Sudanese outreach event in June, which was aimed at sharing the gospel with South Sudanese children.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

AZ-CA—On June 10, **St. Peter, Clovis, Calif.**, celebrated the 30th anniversary of its church building's dedication.

MN—On June 4, **Peace, Marshfield, Mo.**, celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Trinity, Nicollet, Minn., celebrated its 150th anniversary on June 17.

On June 24, **Petra, Sauk Rapids, Minn.**, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

SEW—On May 20, Resurrection, Aurora, Ill., celebrated the 40th an-

niversary in the pastoral ministry of **Philip Schupmann**.

Illinois Lutheran Schools celebrated the teaching ministry anniversaries of **Joe Archer** and **Tim Rimpel** (40 years) and **Scott Sievert** and **Beth Schuppe** (35 years), as well as the 15th anniversary of **Troy Swenson's** service in the pastoral ministry.

The district reporters for this month are: AZ-CA—Michael Schroeder; MI—John Eich; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; SC—Andrew Retberg; SEW—Scott Oelhafen.

SOUTH CENTRAL



Five congregations sent a total of 33 teen and 14 adult volunteers to serve WELS' Apache mission field from June 15-23. Volunteers came from Holy Word, Austin, Texas; Atonement, Plano, Texas; Christ the Rock, Round Rock, Texas; Eternal Rock, Castle Rock, Colo.; and Carbon Valley, Firestone, Colo.

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



Students from the National Honor Society of Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis., raised funds to provide Bibles for children in inner-city Milwaukee. The original goal was to provide 126 Bibles. On May 4, the high school students delivered 535 Bibles to two Christian elementary schools in Milwaukee.

MICHIGAN



In May, more than two hundred students from seven WELS elementary schools in Michigan gathered to help clean up invasive species and water plants and to help make bird food at Bay City State Park. Participating schools included St. John, Bethel, and Trinity, Bay City; St. Bartholomew, Kawkawlin; St. Luke's, Vassar; New Salem, Sebawaing; and St. John, Pigeon.



A simple word can carry such negative energy, yet it also can bring great comfort.

Sarah E. Proeber

“No.”

It can be the worst word to hear.

“No, I’m sorry you are not able to have your own children.”

“No, we aren’t able to offer you the job.”

“No, I’m just not interested in having a relationship right now.”

We are told no more often than we would like. Those two letters strung together to make one little word can have such a negative impact on our day, our week, or even our lives.

But what if I told you that *no* is one of my favorite words?

I don’t enjoy it when my husband says no to going out for ice cream or when my boss says, “No, you can’t have that day off.”

I surely didn’t like it when my pastor told me as a young eighth grader, “No, you cannot have Romans 8:38,39 as your confirmation verse. It’s too long.” (What he didn’t know was that I actually wanted verses 31-39. But I figured eight verses was too much to ask for.)

While his no was devastating to hear, it didn’t stop me from adoring those two letters strung together to make one little word, *no*, within these verses:

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to sepa-

rate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-39)

There it is. *No*. Read it again. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . *No*.”

As an insecure, 13-year-old, middle school girl, the word *no* unnerved me more than I’d like to admit. As that young girl, I heard *no* in various sentences, such as:

“No, we don’t want to be your friend.”

“No, you can’t have a cell phone.”

“No, you didn’t make the team.”

All of these *nos* made my heart sink and the tears come.

But God, he knew. Yes, he knew those two letters strung together to make one little word could make my heart sing and my spirit soar when he showed me the meaning of the message behind them.

In these verses I found my love for that one little word. He changed the connotation of that little word for me when he said, “No, my sweet child. Nothing will be able to separate you from my love.”

When my life seemed like it was over because I was the only kid in my class who didn’t have a cell phone, God said *no*. “Dear daughter, your cup overflows” (cf. Psalm 23:5).

When a fellow classmate declared that she wouldn’t be my friend and I felt alone, like nobody cared, God said *no*. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command” (cf. John 15:13,14).

When the coach said I didn’t make the team and I felt unwanted, like I wouldn’t ever be good enough, God said *no*. “Now you are the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Who would have thought that one little word could leave us with two very different emotions? When a person tells us *no*, we are left with an empty feeling. When God tells us *no*, we are filled with his peace, with his joy, with his love. He reminds us, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8,9).

When there is a *no* in your life, God is saying, “I have something better in store for you. You cannot understand my plans. I am greater than you and greater than all things of the world. Wait and see, my child. *No*, I am not granting you your wish. I am giving you something even greater.”

Ponder the fact that *no* means God is working in our lives.

So, *no*! Those two letters strung together to make one little word are not meant to defeat us. They are meant to remind us that although not everything may go our way in this life, nothing can separate us from his love or his plans.

Maybe God says *no* to all your earthly yearnings. Maybe you never get the child you have prayed for as Hannah did in the Old Testament. Maybe you never find “the one” who you will spend your life with and raise a family. Possibly you’re stuck in a job you would rather run from as Jonah did.

But shall these things separate you from the love of Christ?

No!

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Ponder the fact that *no* means God is working in our lives. He is using us as integral parts of his perfect plan. The *no* from God doesn’t leave us empty. The *no* from God gives us purpose and peace in the truth that his ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts.

So listen again to the words of my desired confirmation passage from Romans 8: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Come what may in this short, little life, we are conquerors.

No, nothing can take us away from the love of God, and nothing can alter our future home in God’s eternal kingdom. Our salvation has been won.

Now here is my question: Are you left feeling empty?

No.

Sarah Proeber is a member at St. Mark, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

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FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SKIES:

Bounkeo Lor

THE STORY OF HUE THAO

I knew Hue Thao and his story before the Lord took him home. I hope he will forgive me for putting words in his mouth so he can tell you his story in his own words. Hue Thao would tell you the following:

“The oceans belong to the fish; the sky belongs to the birds; the mountains belong to the Hmong.” (Hmong saying)

My story begins in the mountains of Laos. That’s where the Lord gave me life, although I didn’t come to know him until many years later. I grew up and developed a love of learning. I was one of the few fortunate enough to attend college. I became a school teacher in the village of Nammoung, Laos.

Because of dangerous conditions in Laos following the Vietnam War, I fled to Thailand in 1988, and I stayed in the Ban Vinai refugee camp, not far from the Mekong River, for many years. I studied medicine and became a physician’s assistant. I met Bounkeo Lor, but he was just an acquaintance at that time.

Then I had the opportunity to come to the United States. I settled in Fresno, California, and drove a truck, ran a laundromat, and did other things to earn a living.

SOMETHING MARVELOUS

A few years later, I moved to Kansas City. That’s where something marvelous happened. The Holy Spirit brought me to



Jesus. I had known a few Hmong Christians over the years. I knew a little bit about the religion, but nothing clicked. Then I met Bounkeo Lor again. Now he was the pastor of Grace Hmong Lutheran Church.

A relative of mine is married to his sister, and we both happened to be at their house one day. We got to talking, and he invited me to his church. I attended a worship service, and he invited me to meet with him later that week. We sat down, and he presented the gospel of Jesus Christ. I had never really heard God’s grace explained to me before. If I had heard this earlier, I might have become a Christian years ago! But this was the time God chose to work in my heart and lead me to faith. My wife, Mai Vue, and I were baptized at Grace on Jan. 5, 2012.

SOMETHING EXCITING

The Holy Spirit kept up his work. I was excited to learn more about Jesus, to study his Word, and to bring the good news to my people, who are still under the power of Satan. The Lord gave me opportunities to do all this. I also started theological studies in the Pastoral Studies Institute (PSI) run by professors from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

In the fall of 2016, I was called to be an evangelist at Grace Hmong Lutheran Church. I was excited to go and make contacts with the Hmong community. I

enjoy talking and building relationships. I also continued my studies with the PSI. It was a one-year call, and I was looking forward to serving another one-year call as a pastoral vicar. I was hoping to hear in February if I would be asked to do this.

I also started helping Pastor Lor with his work in various ways. I often served as his much-needed chauffeur. On one occasion I drove him and two visitors from Vietnam to meet Synod President Mark Schroeder in Wisconsin. I also served as a driver when we met some contacts in Laos.

Pastor Lor invited me to go with him to Asia on several trips. While I was not ready to do any preaching or teaching myself, except for parts of Luther's Small Catechism, I was part of his support team. I was hopeful that in the future I would be able to help with the preaching and teaching as well.

The Lord gave me a love of music, and I wanted to use this talent in the Lord's service as well. My wife, Mai, is frequently asked to sing at various events in the Hmong community, and we have put together several CDs with Hmong songs. Recently we were working on a CD with Christian music. I was hoping to use this CD to bring the gospel to more Hmong people.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED

Then something unexpected happened. Early in the morning of Feb. 18, 2018, the Lord called me home. It was a bit of a surprise, because I was not suffering from any major illness.

And so my story ends, or should I say, begins in the skies. Could I have reached more souls if I had lived longer? Our loving Lord in his wisdom had other plans, and his plans are always the best. But there are still many more souls to reach. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into the harvest field.

Bounkeo Lor is the Hmong Asia ministry coordinator for WELS.

Learn more about Hmong ministry opportunities in Vietnam on p. 23.

HUE THAO'S FUNERAL



Hue Thao and his wife, Mai.

Hue Thao's funeral was an interesting hybrid of Hmong customs and Christian doctrine. Hmong funerals last for days, and many in the Hmong community come to the funeral, even if they do not know the deceased personally. The custom is to serve big meals for everyone who attends.

According to Hmong custom, the coffin is made out of wood, not metal. Hmong traditional religion teaches that after death the soul director guides the soul to its birthplace to retrieve the placenta with which it was born because it is considered the person's original clothes. Then the soul director sends the soul to hell. The Christian teaching is much different. The Holy Spirit works through Baptism to clothe the soul with Jesus. He has directed the soul to the one thing needful: faith in Jesus. In other words, the Soul Director guides the soul of the believer to heaven to be with Jesus.

Hue's funeral started with a worship service on Saturday, April 14, followed, of course, by a meal. Another worship service followed on Sunday. This service lasted almost three hours! There was a sermonette in English, followed by a full sermon in Hmong. Hmong choirs from Grace Hmong Lutheran Church sang songs of comfort and hope. Then there was a meal with about 250 people in attendance. Many of these people were not Christian. The worship service was a great opportunity to present the gospel of Jesus Christ and to invite the people to worship at Grace. After the sermons on Sunday evening, a family in Hue Thao's relation brought two of their sons to me to ask for theological training. They wanted to follow their Uncle Hue's footsteps to serve the Lord.

One pastor chose the words of Jesus for his sermonette: "As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:4,5). Hue's early death is a reminder that our time is short. We need to use it wisely, to get to know Jesus better through his Word, and to share him with others.



Above: Hue Thao (left) and Pastor Bounkeo Lor (right) visiting local Hmong pastors in Vietnam. Facing page: Hue Thao presenting to Hmong church leaders in Vietnam.

Free, but expensive

Earle D. Treptow

While the
Christian
doesn't pay
anything to
pray, the
Christian
does incur
significant cost
by praying.

"I'll keep you in my prayers," a Christian says upon hearing about the challenges an individual is facing. Occasionally, the words come as a reflex, uttered without much thought. It feels like the perfect thing for a Christian to say, and not only because the words roll easily off the tongue and encourage the person who's hurting. In addition, since a Christian may offer a prayer anywhere at any time at no charge, it seems like an easy promise both to make and to keep.

But this needs to be said: Prayer is free, but expensive.

A Christian doesn't have to pay for an audience with the Lord. She's not required to show herself deserving of God's ear. But strangely, the cost of prayer may be a problem. Some have suggested that people tend to take for granted that which is free. If that's the case, we need to look at prayer a little more closely. Prayer is expensive. In fact, "expensive" doesn't begin to express the reality. The highest price was paid to secure the privilege of prayer for the children of God: God himself took on flesh to shed his blood for sinners so they might pray freely and often.

That's not the only reason to consider prayer expensive. While the Christian doesn't pay anything to pray, the Christian does incur significant cost by praying. The Christian who prays gives up the cherished illusion that he can solve the problems in his life all by himself. In approaching the Lord in prayer, he acknowledges what his sinful flesh has no interest in confessing: "I'm powerless to solve this problem. I'm not the one directing all things. God is, and he alone." Given the pride of the sinful nature that clings to Christians, prayer is expensive—an admission that we are powerless.

A Christian who has listened to God's Word knows the way God chooses to operate. He typically works indirectly, through ordinary means, rather than through miracles. Instead of dropping food from the sky, for example, he gives

people the ability to work and earn the money needed to purchase the food they need. The Lord who generally answers the prayers of his people indirectly may decide to use the Christian herself as the answer to her own prayer.

The Christian who prays that the Lord would encourage her friend who lost her job may see the Lord do so through her ears and mouth, as she listens intently to her friend and speaks God's promises to her. The Christian who asks God to have mercy on those whose homes were destroyed by a tornado may find the Lord answering his prayer through the money currently in his savings account. The Christian who prays for godly people to serve in government might see the Lord grant that request by leading her to run for office. Prayer is indeed free, but it may prove expensive.

Might that be a reason we're sometimes slow to pray? We've observed how the Lord answers prayers, and we're not convinced we can afford the answer. We see under-supplied bank accounts and overflowing calendars, with scarcely an ounce of emotional energy remaining. Rather than looking for more people and situations for which to pray, we withdraw into our own lives. But we need not withdraw. The Lord promises to strengthen his people and to meet all their needs in Christ, freeing them up to serve others.

So go ahead and pray for others. Then watch the Lord use you as an answer to prayer and marvel at the way he empowers you to serve.

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MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

NAHUM: A PROPHET OF . . . COMFORT?!?

Nahum means “comfort.”

But Nahum’s prophecy begins: “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath” (1:2).

That’s . . . *comfort*? Let’s talk about it.

A MESSAGE OF WRATH

The book of Nahum is directed primarily against Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian empire. The Assyrians built their empire by ferociously attacking other nations, killing, pillaging, then exacting exorbitant tribute. Their cruelty was breathtaking; their warfare, brutal.

Yet what did God do? In amazing grace, God sent Jonah to prophesy to the Ninevites. And amazingly, the people of Nineveh repented! Jonah’s book ends with a beautiful statement of God’s love even for Nineveh: “And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?” (Jonah 4:11).

But it wasn’t long until Nineveh was back at it. About 40 years later, they would conquer the Northern Kingdom, killing or exiling most of its inhabitants. The Assyrians then imported other captured peoples into the conquered north, and the intermarriage between them and the remaining Israelites resulted in the people called Samaritans. Later (about 701 B.C.) they would invade Judah and decimate most of the country, but God miraculously intervened and preserved Judah (cf. Isaiah 37:36,37).

Now it was Nahum’s time, and God’s patience with Nineveh had run out. Yes, God is “slow to anger,” but he also “will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:3). Although “the LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble” (1:7), it’s also true that “with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of

Nineveh” (1:8). God had been incredibly gracious! He’d even sent a prophet to Nineveh. But Nineveh had abused his patient grace. So now they would feel God’s severe punishment: “Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses” (3:3).

Jonah taught us that God graciously cared for Nineveh; Nahum tells us that the Ninevites, who scorned God’s grace, would feel God’s wrath.

A MESSAGE OF COMFORT

And this is *comfort*?

For the people of God, yes, it’s comfort, for it reminds us of important truths:

- God will not be mocked. Those who stand against God will eventually feel his wrath.
- God advanced his plan of salvation through the Ninevites. Their judgment meant God was serious about disobedience and rebellion, and that judgment brought the Southern Kingdom to its knees in repentance.
- Even in the middle of this judgment, the Lord held out grace and mercy to his faithful.

And those comforts remain today. Those who stand against God will feel his wrath. God acts sometimes with brutal force to bring people to repentance. But we find comfort because “the LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (1:7).

And that’s a great comfort.

Contributing editor Thomas Kock, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Atone-ment, Milwaukee.

This is the seventh article in a 12-part series on the minor prophets.

HOSEA

JOEL

JONAH

AMOS

OBADIAH

MICAH

NAHUM

Home: Elkosh. Maybe in southern Judah?

Dates: Sometime between 663 (fall of Thebes) and 612 B.C. (fall of Nineveh).

Unique feature: Almost completely directed against one nation—Assyria (and Nineveh, its capital).

Key verse: 2:13 and 3:5. “‘I am against you,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI



Only one key
can unlock a
human heart. . . .
The gospel
is the key.

Unlocked by God's power

C. S. Lewis wrote that he believed the damned are “rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside” (“Hell” from *The Problem of Pain*). Jesus tells us in the parable of the beggar Lazarus (Luke chapter 16) that the rich man wanted to warn his five brothers so they would not “come to this place of torment” (v. 28). The rich man was told that there was “a great chasm” so that no one could cross over from hell to heaven.

I don't think that C. S. Lewis would disagree with the description of hell by Jesus, but Lewis makes a different point. He suggests that those who are in hell are rebels who have opposed God and always oppose God. Satan is the prime example. We don't have to think too long for other examples. We know others who, at least in this life, have opposed Jesus, Christianity, and Christians without remorse. Their hearts are locked from the inside. The familiar painting of Jesus knocking at the door comes to mind. For them, the door is locked to prevent Jesus from entering.

Think about that a moment. David says that he was “sinful at birth” (Psalm 51:5). Paul describes us as “dead” (Ephesians 2:1). But what we have by birth is not just a passive defect. It's an active opposition and rebellion against God. Paul also wrote, “The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). Hostile and rebellious. So, in reality, our hearts were locked from the inside too. All hearts are by nature.

In the first chapter of Corinthians, Paul writes of those whose hearts are locked. He suggests that the Gentiles think that the gospel is so much foolishness and the Jews think it is a stumbling block. His experiences remind us that culture does not matter. His experiences reveal opposition, imprisonment, and beatings from Jews and Gentiles. (See his summary in 2 Corinthians 11:24-26.)

Paul's experiences are not just ancient oppositions to a new idea, oppositions that disappeared in the modern era. We also experience opposition. Some Christians in the world we know today have been shunned, beaten, imprisoned, and killed. Hearts are still locked. There are rebels, hostile to the God who has graciously provided forgiveness and eternal life through his Son Jesus and wants all to be saved.

But Paul was different, David was different, and so are we. Why? What happened to cause us to unlock our hearts? We have not decided to open our hearts to Jesus. By nature we, like everyone else, want the door to remain locked. Did we find some power within us to open our hearts? No!

Only one key can unlock a human heart. Paul clearly identified that key: “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it the power of God that brings salvation” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the key. It doesn't come from inside any of our hearts. It comes from outside, when we are baptized or when we hear and read about Christ crucified. Through the gospel, the Holy Spirit unbolts the lock of our rebellious and hostile hearts. His power, not ours, unlocks our hearts. Once our hearts are unlocked, we understand that the message of Christ crucified is the wisdom of God.

Amazingly, God entrusts that key to us to trust it, live it, and share it. In our experience, that key won't open every locked heart. Hostility will persist. But by his grace some hearts are opened by the gospel.



COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

Joel S. Heckendorf

NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

“DID YOU WASH YOUR HANDS?” (LUKE 11:37-54)

Moms, how many times have you asked the question, “Did you wash your hands?” And if your child says yes, what’s your follow-up question? “Did you use soap?”

Washing hands before you touch food is a good routine. And yet, it’s something that Jesus intentionally refused to do on occasion. Strange, isn’t it? Even a bit uncivilized. Why did the Savior, who deemed it necessary to wash his disciples’ feet before they ate his special meal, refuse to wash his hands when he was a guest at another meal?

It had nothing to do with hygiene. It had everything to do with hypocrisy. Jesus was willing to risk some germs on his hands so he could address the sin germinating in the heart of his host. “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness” (Luke 11:39).

Whoa! That’s pretty bold for Jesus to address the host in such a way. To call the host out was a feather-ruffling, wave-making statement, especially when you consider the host didn’t even voice his disapproval of Jesus’ dirty hands. He simply noticed it (v. 38). But Jesus wasn’t afraid to get his hands dirty and address the host’s sin straight on. For the many times that we dance around addressing

sin because we don’t want to “offend someone,” appreciate Jesus’ comments. Appreciate Jesus’ love and concern and his willingness to do the dirty work. He didn’t care about whose toes he stepped on or about which tradition he broke. Even when others chimed in, “Hey, that hurts my feelings. You’re insulting us also” (cf. v. 45), Jesus didn’t let their feelings get in the way about how he felt about their spiritual condition. Six times Jesus scolded, “Woe to you.”

Considering we live in a society that promotes so much tolerance, Jesus’ willingness to have tough conversations catches our attention. His “woes” make us say, “Whoa!”

But should we be surprised? Jesus was always willing to do the tough thing. He doesn’t just love people enough to address sin with his words. He was also willing to roll up his sleeves and get his hands dirty to address sin with his actions. As he went to the cross, he carried in his hands our lack of love. His hands were stained with our pride, our poor leadership, our hypocrisy. For all the times we hid the gospel from someone or unnecessarily burdened their consciences, Jesus took matters into his own hands. Jesus got his hands dirty so he could wash our hearts. As we see Jesus’ hands dirty on the outside, know

that it was because he wanted to make us clean on the inside.

And so, we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts”—your willingness to call sin a sin but also your willingness to cleanse our hearts—“to us be blessed. Amen.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What traditions may get in the way of the spiritual condition of our hearts?
2. “The church is simply a bunch of hypocrites!” How do you respond?
3. Jesus calls out six particular sins of the Pharisees and experts of the law. Which sins most apply to you? To our culture?

Contributing editor Joel Heckendorf is pastor at Immanuel, Greenville, Wisconsin.



This is the ninth article in a 12-part series that looks at Jesus as a mealtime guest and how he blessed his fellow diners—and us—with his living presence. Find the article and answers online after Aug. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.

A tall saguaro cactus stands prominently on the left side of the page, its arms reaching upwards. The background is a desert landscape at sunset, with warm orange and yellow light on the horizon and a clear blue sky above. The title "Water for the soul" is written in a large, white, cursive font across the top right.

Water for the soul

The Lord loves the lost, the weary, and the thirsty. In Christ crucified, he offers the relief we all crave. Lincoln A. Albrecht

For many, the end of August is an enchanting time. Like a fireworks grand finale, summer often saves the best for last. Parents and children prize these last summer days—the campfires, the fireflies, and the long weekends at the lake—because they know the end is coming. Summer is a season to be savored.

But in the Sonoran Desert, summer is a season to survive. People from Phoenix know the drill. Keep in the shade. Drink plenty of water. Stay where it's cool. Find places with free air-conditioning.

HAVING A ROUGH DAY

All that can drive a mission planter stir crazy. At least, that's how I was feeling late last August. So I packed up a backpack full of flyers and hit the streets shortly after sunup. I wanted to get a couple hundred flyers hung before the temperature reached 100 degrees.

Near the end of my route, a man stormed up to me with a scowl on his face. He had a handful of my flyers and a mouthful of unkind words. He shoved the flyers into my chest. I tried to muster up a smile, but I'm sure it didn't fool him.

The Lord knows there will be days like this.

Later that afternoon, a message popped up on our church's Facebook page. I was excited . . . until I read it. Someone had taken great offense to our flyer: "Rude!!! Even though my family is looking for a church, this will ensure that I won't be coming. Clearly there is no respect." In my haste to hang as many flyers as possible, I had missed her sign about not wanting religious pamphlets. I sent her an apology message.

The Lord knows there will be days like this.

FINDING RELIEF

The next day, there was another Facebook message. Part of me didn't want to click it at all. Ignorance can be a kind of temporary bliss . . . but I clicked it anyway.

This time, it was someone new, and the message was something entirely different: "I found one of your flyers on my front step. . . . I looked up your website and started listening to your podcast this morning. I feel like it's water to my thirsty, parched soul."

The Lord knows there will be days like this.

He prepared this moment. For her. For me. For the advancement of his kingdom. "The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade" (Psalm 121:5).

So many people living in the growing outskirts of Phoenix are just trying to survive. They hope and dream of better days. They are looking for relief, but they don't know where to find it. They have no idea what they're looking for . . . no idea how lost they really are.

But the Lord knows there are people like this.

His Word proclaims what no human mind can conceive. He loves the lost, the weary, and the thirsty. God loves survival-mode people so much that he sent his Son to save them. In Christ crucified, God offers the relief we all crave.

There will be days filled with people who don't want to hear the message of hope and comfort. But there will also be days when maybe even a single thirsty soul is ready to drink of the living water. So we keep at it.

The Lord knows there will be days like these. He watches over our coming and going. He is our shade. That's something special. That's something to savor. Especially during summertime in the Sonoran Desert.

Lincoln Albrecht is pastor at River of Life, a home mission in Goodyear, Arizona.

Read more stories from WELS Missions at wels.net/missions.