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A LUTHERAN VOICE

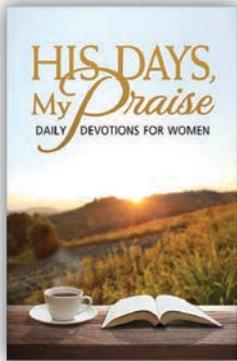


## The path to heaven

When we stumble on our walk through life, Jesus plants our feet firmly on the correct path. *Page 10*

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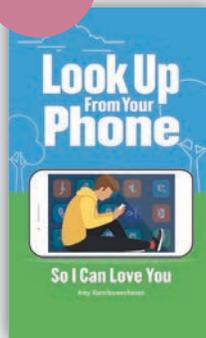
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# *Reflecting* CHRIST'S LOVE

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*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

The road to heaven is narrow, and we often are tempted to veer the wrong way, to stray from the path God has set. In a new series starting this month, Executive Editor John Braun examines Galatians 5:19-23 and what it says about “acts of the flesh” vs. “fruit of the Spirit” (p. 10). The temptations are real, but so is the love of Jesus—a love that can guide us in the right direction.

As we travel down the road to heaven, our mission as Christians is to tell others about that saving love.

- You, our readers, have shared some of your own stories about how you have been ambassadors, how you have let others see Jesus. We’ve printed some of these stories on p. 28. Keep sending them in!
- Pastor Mark Schewe writes about a difficult last-minute trip he had to make and how God opened the door for him to discuss God’s gift of salvation with a Mormon (p. 12).
- Showing God’s love through our actions can lead to opportunities to talk about God’s grace. Read about how WELS members offered relief to those in need after the storms (pp. 20 & 30).

*Julie Wietzke*



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**LETTING THEM SEE JESUS**

I can relate to Jeremiah Gumm and his experience [“Ambassadors: Help them see Jesus,” Feb.]. People are looking for the truth, and there are mixed messages out there. Also, society adds its views on gender equality and what is loving/unloving. I find it best to first listen to the question. When I answer, my first question to myself is, “How is God showing love in this case?” We always need to start with “God is love.”

I have taught people who have obviously read the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, Confucianism, among others. Often I can show them that the gods of those books are demanding and do not offer help. The triune God is loving and planned our salvation before creating the world. He uttered, “It is finished,” from the cross and continues to strengthen our faith.

*John Hoh Jr., Beloit, Wisconsin*

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. Writers’ views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

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2019  
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- |                        |                    |                      |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Jeremiah 48         | 12. Php. 1:12-26   | 23. Eze. 9 & 10      |
| 2. Jer. 49:1-33        | 13. Php. 1:27–2:18 | 24. Eze. 11          |
| 3. Jer. 49:34–50:46    | 14. Php. 2:19-30   | 25. Eze. 12 & 13     |
| 4. Jer. 51:1-58        | 15. Php. 3:1-11    | 26. Eze. 14 & 15     |
| 5. Jer. 51:59–52:34    | 16. Php. 3:12-21   | 27. Eze. 16          |
| 6. Lamentations 1      | 17. Php. 4         | 28. Eze. 17          |
| 7. La. 2               | 18. Ezekiel 1      | 29. Eze. 18 & 19     |
| 8. La. 3               | 19. Eze. 2:1–3:21  | 30. Eze. 20:1-44     |
| 9. La. 4               | 20. Eze. 3:22–5:17 | 31. Eze. 20:45–21:32 |
| 10. La. 5              | 21. Eze. 6 & 7     |                      |
| 11. Philippians 1:1-11 | 22. Eze. 8         |                      |

**CORRECTION:** Leah Adams, not Lisa Adams, wrote “Book Nook” on p. 21 of the April issue. We apologize for the error.



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# Our very great reward

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1

Daniel J. Habben

What is the greatest reward you’ve ever received? Your fifth-grade spelling bee trophy? A medal from a race in which you set a personal record? A work-related bonus delivered to you personally by an appreciative boss?

## THE BEST REWARD POSSIBLE

God once told the patriarch Abraham that he was Abraham’s “very great reward” (Genesis 15:1). I love that phrase. God didn’t just say he was Abraham’s “reward.” He didn’t even say that he was his “great reward.” He said that he was Abraham’s “*very* great reward.”

Think of how that phrase highlights this truth: Our God doesn’t deal in minimums! He didn’t, for example, send his Son Jesus just to forgive past sins and enter us in the race for heaven—leaving it in our hands to finish securing our eternal life. No way! Through Jesus, God forgave our past and future sins. Because of Jesus, we look forward to an eternal life of happiness.

To put this mind-boggling gift in earthly terms, that’s like saying that even though we’ve cheated on our taxes, the tax auditor not only refuses to press charges but also gives us a check for a million dollars! Likewise, Jesus doesn’t just keep us out of hell; he also gives us heaven.

## A REWARD WE DO NOT EARN

But how can God really be our “very great reward”? Isn’t a reward something that is earned?

If we’re honest, we have to admit that we’ve done nothing to earn God’s favor. Even those kind words we spoke this week—weren’t they partly shared to feel good about ourselves and to receive praise from others? Or consider why you’re reading this devotion. I hope it’s because you want the Holy Spirit to work through the message to



strengthen your faith. But is there also a part of you that picks up this magazine because, well, you paid for the subscription, so you might as well read it? You’re expected to keep up with what’s going on in our church body anyway. I know I approach the study of God’s Word that way sometimes—as if it’s just a textbook that I use in my preaching and teaching.

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There’s only one  
reward that matters:  
the “very great  
reward” of his grace.

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So how can we say that God’s love is our reward when we often do the right things for the wrong reasons? We can say it because whenever the heavenly Father looks at us, he sees his perfect Son to whom we have been joined in Baptism. It’s like Jesus is the star vocalist in the choir who covered up my

mistakes. “The choir was great today, Pastor!” members often comment. Ah yes, by joining his voice to the choir’s, the star vocalist makes the congregation smile. Jesus, of course, doesn’t simply add to what we have done. No, his life and his death are the sole reasons that heaven is ours. What we have done—no matter how great—is not enough. The reward that we have received from him is a reward of grace.

“I am . . . your very great reward.” God gave Abraham this reminder after the patriarch had returned from a successful mission to rescue his nephew Lot, who had been carried away as a prisoner of war. Maybe Abraham felt on top of the world after that experience. Yet God reminded Abraham, and now he reminds us, that no matter what success we enjoy in life, there’s only one reward that matters: the “very great reward” of his grace.

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



Mark Schwab

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Millennials, like every generation before them, are sinners who need a Savior.

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## In defense of millennials

“One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

There is no doubt that every “older generation” tends to view the “younger generation” with a good measure of suspicion, condemnation, and fear for the future. I’m a member of the Baby Boomer generation; I entered high school in the turbulent ’60s. My generation introduced America to men’s long hair, hippies, Woodstock, the drug culture, anti-war demonstrations, and earsplitting rock-and-roll music.

Criticizing the next generation is nothing new. Here are some examples:

- “They think they know everything and are always quite sure about it . . . because they have not yet been humbled by life.”—Aristotle, 4th century B.C.
- “Youth were never more savagely disrespectful. . . . The elderly are scorned, the honorable are condemned, the judge is not dreaded.”—Thomas Barnes, 1624.
- “[They are] a fearful multitude of untutored savages. . . . [They] care for nobody. . . . The morals of children are tenfold worse than formerly.”—Anthony Cooper, 1843.
- “There is, as never before, an attitude on the part of young folk which is best described as grossly thoughtless, rude, and utterly selfish.”—*Daily Mail*, 1925.
- “Many [young people] are so pampered nowadays that they have forgotten that there was such a thing as walking.”—Newspaper editorial, 1951.
- “What really distinguishes this generation from those before it is that it’s the first generation in American history to live so well and complain so bitterly about it.”—*Washington Post*, 1993.

And now we have the millennials. Boomers shake their heads at millennials and paint an entire generation with a broad brush of criticism and disdain. “They’re lazy. They want success to come easily, without putting in

the effort. They’re self-obsessed. They think they know everything. They are too cautious and indecisive. They don’t want to grow up. They don’t know the value of money. They party too much and read too little. They don’t trust or respect institutions and organizations.”

All these criticisms are generalizations and are not entirely fair; I know many millennials whom those words would not describe. In addition, positive things can be said about millennials. Millennials generally value personal relationships more than previous generations did. What better place to establish and grow relationships than in a congregation with people whose faith and values they share and who show a genuine concern for them?

Millennials love to collaborate. Where better to work together with others than in the body of Christ with its many members?

Millennials demand authenticity and sincerity. Where could they better find something authentic and true than in a church that teaches and proclaims the unchanging truth of God’s Word?

Millennials are altruistic, placing a high value on helping and serving others. Our congregations are in a great position to offer young people many opportunities to use their time and skills in service to others.

Millennials understand technology and modern communications. We can put them to use in the church to help communicate the saving gospel to more people than ever before.

Perhaps most true of all is that millennials, like every generation before them, are sinners who need a Savior. As the Spirit works in them through the power of the Word, God will build his church.

Someday aging Christian millennials will shake their heads and criticize the sorry generation that follows them. But they will be equipped to tell the next generation of God’s mighty acts, just as our generation had told them.

# Light for our path

**Can the devil personally be tempting me and a lot of other people at exactly the same time?**

James F. Pope

Your question leads us to look in Scripture and examine how the devil measures up against God and people.

## THE DEVIL AND PEOPLE

The Bible makes it clear that the devil has abilities superior to those of human beings. “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:11,12).

While the devil’s abilities are superior to people’s, they are inferior to God’s. That brings us to the heart of your question.

## THE DEVIL AND GOD

As an angel—a fallen one at that—the devil is not omniscient. Only God is. The devil cannot read hearts and minds. Only God can do that (1 Kings 8:39). The devil operates by observing patterns in people’s lives. As an angel, the devil is not omnipresent either. Only God the Creator is (Psalm 139:7-10). Much as the human soul, housed in a body, can occupy only one space at one time, so the devil, a spirit being, can occupy only one space at one time.

Yet, as a spirit being without a body, the devil is able to move from one space to another faster than human beings can. And move he does. Job 1:7 and Job 2:2 describe the devil “roaming throughout the earth.” First Peter 5:8 states that the devil “prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” *Roaming* and *prowling* describe the devil’s non-stop activity as he moves from person to person, seeking to destroy all.

Although the devil himself may not be able to tempt you and a lot of other people at the same time, he has helpers to assist him in his dastardly work (Matthew

25:41). The devil’s minions flit about from person to person on seek-and-destroy missions.

## THE DEVIL AND THE SINFUL NATURE

More than having helpers in the form of evil angels, we need to recognize that the devil has an accomplice inside each person. The sinful nature, passed on from generation to generation, is hostile toward God (Romans 8:7). The sinful nature hates anything good and godly and desires to do the devil’s bidding (Galatians 5:19-21). So while the devil is not personally present in the life of a Christian 24/7, his ally, the sinful nature, is.

With intermittent and ever-present enemies like these, what is a Christian to do? “Put on the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13) and launch a counteroffensive. That is not a foolhardy course of action. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7) is God’s instruction and promise. More than that, we combat our sinful nature through daily contrition and repentance, and we build up the new self through God’s gospel in Word and sacrament (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Finally, we remember that our spiritual enemies are not permanent. Our sinful nature is limited to life on this earth. Satan is an enemy whom Jesus has already defeated (Genesis 3:15). One day, he will lose all ability to tempt us (Revelation 20:10).

*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](http://wels.net/questions). Submit your questions there or to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net).

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

Psalm 119:105

# Walk by the Spirit

We are surrounded by immorality, but we are different. In the love of Jesus, we find strength to love.

John A. Braun

When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, he sets us on the path to heaven. The early Christians described that path as “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 24:14). We know Jesus is the Way. We walk on that path through life to the destination of heaven, but that path is also a way of acting and thinking.

As we follow the path, we encounter crossroads that can lead us in different directions. We know they lead us away from the Way, and our sinful flesh is often tempted. As saints and sinners at the same time, we often need correction to avoid paths that lead us astray.

In Galatians 5:19-23, the apostle Paul warns us about the crossroads he calls “acts of the flesh,” and then he encourages us to retain the “fruit of the Spirit.”

First on the apostle’s list of acts of the flesh are “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery.”

## **ACTS OF THE FLESH: SEXUAL IMMORALITY, IMPURITY, AND DEBAUCHERY**

These acts of the flesh are not hard to find. Again and again they cross our paths to lure us from our way. We see them as we browse the internet, as we watch television and movies, and as we read magazines or books. Their temptation invades much of what we hear and see in our entertainment choices. And because we still have the sinful flesh, we are not immune to their attraction.

We find ourselves leaning a bit toward immorality. We laugh at situations and jokes that are off-color. Our entertainment choices push the buttons on our desires of the flesh. We monitor what our children watch in order to shield them from the worst influences, but our own choices sometimes reveal a compromise with the acts of the flesh. We find it difficult to resist some of the influences, and sometimes we pause at the crossroad, looking longingly down the road of temptation.

But it all leads in the wrong direction.

# IMPURITY

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: **sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like**” (Galatians 5:19-21).

Child pornography and sexual misconduct lead to late-night news stories exposing teachers, politicians, reporters, clergy, and even news agencies. Some lose their jobs. But the immorality persists. Even these consequences are not enough. Some of it still attracts us and can lure us into sin.

But we don't like to hear that word *sin*. That word confronts us with its accusation. If as children of God, we use it to describe these acts of the flesh, we are sometimes ridiculed as prudish, old-fashioned, and out of touch with the modern world. We live in that world and mingle with people who have a different attitude toward sexual immorality. We do not wish to be ridiculed for our morality, so at times we go along and hide our Christian way of thinking.

The world doesn't think carefully about how destructive these temptations become. A family is destroyed by sexual unfaithfulness. A child is murdered by a live-in boyfriend who is not the father. Pornography addiction quietly ruins relationships and marriages. Drugs and human trafficking flow from these acts of the flesh to destroy men and especially women. Children are considered objects of desire, not precious gifts of God. Love is distorted, as some look for love only in intimacy. It results in a “total eclipse of the heart,” as the popular song even acknowledges.

But we must not become Pharisees and point the finger at all this evil as if it remains on the other side of the street. Christian marriages are sometimes heaped on the jagged rocks of acts of the flesh. Lives have been destroyed. Pornography seeps quietly into Christian lives, destroying some and altering others. It distorts the at-

titudes of Christian love and marriage. Parents don't teach their children about alternatives to immorality. Pastors, teachers, church leaders, friends, and relatives abandon fruit of the Spirit for acts of the flesh and discredit the message of Christ.

## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: LOVE

The Holy Spirit through the gospel has created a new attitude within us. We are children of God by faith (Galatians 3:26). But we are not perfect yet. Within us we still carry the old sinful nature and the desire to yield to those temptations of the flesh. We want to live as children of God, but so often we discover a desire to be rebellious and disobedient renegades. We struggle. Paul says the Spirit and the flesh are “in conflict with each other” (Galatians 5:17). Paul mentioned sexual immorality first among the acts of the flesh. He also mentions love first among the fruit of the Spirit.

The path to sexual immorality will frequently beckon us. When it does, the love of Jesus gives us strength and the willingness to take positive steps as children of God. Love is part of our thinking and acting on the Christian path. We love. Of course, love has many applications. One of them is that it is the opposite of the sexual sins. So Paul mentions it here.

While many have a distorted view of love, Christians understand love from Jesus. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). How different the Christian concept of love is. Paul expands the definition: “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another

in love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:9,10; cf. 1 Corinthians 13).

Jesus unselfishly did what we could not do for ourselves. He shed his blood for us, while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). He gave himself for us. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We are his. We love and have the fruit of the Spirit. We have an unselfish concern for others that changes our relationships and alters the way we think of sex and immorality.

Paul encourages us to turn away from acts of the flesh. Love, as Jesus taught it, helps partners in marriage remain devoted to each other and find a God-pleasing place for sexual intimacy. Our relationships in families and friendships honor others and seek their good. We do not exploit others to gratify ourselves. We pursue what is good and turn from what is evil.

Yet we struggle with our sinful nature. We may have seriously underestimated its grip on us, even as Christians. Acts of the flesh may have destroyed our relationships with spouses, children, friends, and others. The boundless love of Jesus calls us to repent, turn away from our failures, walk by the Spirit, and refuse to gratify the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). The loving arms of Jesus are always ready to embrace us with forgiveness and strength. When we stumble, he can plant our feet firmly on the correct path and keep us headed toward our room in his Father's mansion.

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*John Braun is the executive editor of Forward in Christ magazine.*

This is the first article in a six-part series on acts of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit.

# LOVE

“But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires**” (Galatians 5:22-24).



# SUCCESS or FAILURE?

**Failing health brings the assurance that one journey here on earth ended successfully in the glory of heaven.**

Mark H. Schewe

“My mom is failing.”

That’s what crossed my mind as I ran around the house throwing things into a carry-on bag. It was Ash Wednesday. I had been working at church late in the morning, and my dad called from Wisconsin with news of my mom. She was not doing well.

#### **THE SITUATION**

They had traveled together to the Twin Cities to visit my sister and her family.

But the visit had been interrupted by a hospital visit. My mom had a heart attack three days before my dad’s call. The heart attack hadn’t seemed serious; she had even walked into the emergency room to tell them about her chest tightness. After they had whisked her into surgery and had performed a triple bypass, the doctor had reported that everything went well.

But it soon became clear that her heart was badly damaged. As she recovered

from the surgery, her body showed signs that other systems were beginning to shut down. They had not been able to remove life support. By that Wednesday morning, her condition grew worse. As I talked to my dad, it dawned on me that I needed to get on the next available flight to be with them both. After all, she was failing.

For some reason, a travel website allowed me to book a flight that left in one hour. After a hurried conver-

sation with an elder at church so that he could cover the Ash Wednesday service, I sped home. I grabbed clothes and jammed them in a bag. My wife rushed me to the airport where I rushed through security and sprinted to the gate. The last four people were standing in line to scan their boarding passes. Made it!

## THE OPPORTUNITY

I sat morosely on my first flight, sweating from the workout. This flight was a short one, just over an hour. As I sat there with conflicting emotions about my mom failing, I heard a voice in the seat behind me say to the gentleman next to her, “Hi, I’m a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Do you belong to a church?” Despite my emotional state at the moment, I couldn’t help but hear the conversation. The man was polite but guarded, and the conversation wasn’t going anywhere.

Then it occurred to me: I have to open the door. I wondered how to begin a conversation to share Jesus.

I’ve seen the evangelism campaign from our WELS ministry called Truth in Love Ministry (TILM). We need to open the door—have a conversation about the gospel with these Mormon missionaries who are far from home. And I actually had an open seat next to me.

But now? As my thoughts about my mom failing were churning? Shouldn’t I just try to process my own concerns and what I feared was happening miles away?

But I knew. I knew that the Lord had put me in a situation where I could “open the seat” on that flight and share the good news. In fact, I was compelled to make something good come out of a trip that I did not want to be taking.

## THE CONVERSATION

I turned around, said hello, and mentioned that I had heard her introduce

herself as a Latter-day Saint. I asked if she could come up to answer a couple questions when she was done with her conversation. She was willing. After she moved up, we talked. She shared that she was 20 years old and had been away for quite a while on her mission trip. Now she was headed home.

I asked her what Mormons believe and what I would have to know to go to heaven.

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## Christ’s grace and perfection make us winners forever.

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“You have to perfect yourself,” she answered. “You have to be holy and perfect. Just as Jesus perfected himself to go live with the heavenly Father, we must do the same.”

I don’t remember all the ins and outs of that conversation, but I repeatedly pointed to our inability to perfect ourselves on our own and to our need for a Savior to give us holiness and perfection. I pulled out some of the clearest passages I could remember. I wanted to be so clear about how salvation is a gift of God, not by works. I asked about some of the other teachings of Mormonism that are not in line with Scripture. But after that, our conversation waned, and the flight landed. It had been a respectful, yet honest, conversation, probably the most pointed discussion I’ve ever had with a Mormon.

## THE REALIZATION

And then it occurred to me. My mom was not failing. Yes, her flesh and heart were failing (cf. Psalm 73:26), and her days were numbered unless a miracle happened. But what was her situation? Peter wrote in his first epistle: “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled

with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8,9).

My mom was winning. Because of the season of Lent, which was beginning that very day, and because of the events of Easter, she was going to receive the crown of life. She knew Jesus and served him throughout her life. Now she was going to receive the end result of her faith—the salvation of her soul. She was going to meet the Lord whom she had known so well throughout her life—the same Lord she had shared with me, my sisters, her grandchildren, and her extended family in so many ways during her 79 years.

Failing? The ones who ultimately fail are those who reject the robe of righteousness won by the Savior and resolve to stand before God on their own merits. My mom was not failing at all. Three days later, she received that crown of life and now sees her Savior face-to-face in glory.

My trip was not a “failure” either, as I was able to share the gospel with that young lady. God used me as a witness to share the truth she needed to know. Has she forgotten about our conversation and the Bible verses I shared? Or do those verses from the living, active Word of God still linger in her memory from time to time? I pray that the Holy Spirit enlightens her to understand how we “win,” so she might know the perfection we have as a gift.

Failing? Christ’s grace and perfection make us winners forever, victors in heaven where we will rejoice with my mother and all the saints in glory everlasting.

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*Mark Schewe is pastor at St. Peter, Clovis, California.*

Learn more about Truth in Love Ministry at [tilm.org](http://tilm.org).

## An assault survivor shares how her life went from tragedy to triumph and how that has helped her reach out to others.

Alicia A. Neumann

Jay Lore says there was “nothing spectacular” about the way her story started. She was born to a working-class family in New Jersey in the late 1950s. She says they weren’t especially religious, but she and her brother did attend the Baptist church down the street. “I learned the Bible verses. I learned Jesus loves me. I listened to the felt-board stories about all the people God uses to do mighty things.”

She says her mom described her as a “happy-go-lucky kid.” But that all changed when she was four years old and was sexually assaulted by her older sister’s husband. “He was a monster,” Jay says. “He said if I tell [my family], they wouldn’t love me. So what choice did I have? Who else would I tell? Who would believe me?” She says it wasn’t a topic that anyone talked about in the 1960s.

### SPIRALING DOWNWARD

Afraid of the consequences, Jay says she kept silent for years as the abuse continued. She eventually turned to drugs to numb the pain. “I worshiped the euphoric, pain-free feeling,” she

says. “That became my mission: to numb all feelings. I was hell-bent on self-destruction.” By the time she was 16, Jay says she had tried suicide twice. “I was filthy, inside and out. Tainted. Broken. I felt like the great God of the felt-board stories was absent and silent; he had better people to take care of anyway,” she says.

She calls the next decade her “drug years.” She says, “It was just a mess. Things got progressively worse. I started dealing drugs to support my habit.” During that time, she also had three children. “I thought I was going to screw up three more lives,” she says. “It was a frightening thing. I thought, *How do I protect them if I can’t protect myself?*”

Things finally reached a breaking point in 1987. Jay describes that night: “I decided I had had enough. There was nothing left to lose. I had lost my house, my car, my kids, my dog, my hope. And now I was going to lose myself. I remember screaming at God with fists clenched, ‘Where are you? You’re supposed to be so great and good! What have I done to deserve this?’ I lay down to die. A billion thoughts were racing, then everything got so still. I thought, *This is it.* In the stillness, a voice said, ‘Jay, come.’ I turned my head slightly, and a hand wiped a tear. I could not move.” Hallucination from drugs? A desperate mental hope? Jay is convinced it was Jesus.

### DISCOVERING FORGIVENESS

A few days later, Jay went to a nearby clinic—the first step in her long road to recovery. With the help of her counselor, she was able to get sober and finally start processing everything that had happened to her. Eventually, her counselor invited Jay to attend a Lutheran church. “When I got there, I thought the roof would fall on my head!” she says. “But then I realized this is what’s been missing. I heard that Jesus loves me and my sins are forgiven, washed away. The more I heard it, I thought, *Really, even me?* And the answer was yes, even me!” She continued attending and was eventually baptized.

As Jay continued her recovery, she got her kids back—and she insisted they go to counseling. “It wasn’t just me who suffered,” she says. “They needed help too.” She says it took time, but they worked through it together. “My son was in the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program in school, and he wrote an essay on me and my recovery and how proud he was. He won the D.A.R.E. bear for his essay and gave it to me. That meant so much; I still have that bear.”

Jay started helping her counselor give presentations to different community groups on the topic of abuse. She also began reaching out to other survivors. “Those who have experienced it are the best counselors,” Jay says. “I tell them, ‘I’ve done everything. I’ve made mis-

# Confessions OF FAITH



takes. You're not alone anymore. You do not have to dry your tears. I'll hold your hand. I'll walk with you through it.' I want to help them take that first step."

### FINDING A HOME

Fast forward to 2016. Jay was asked if she could help start an adult support group in Colorado. After a lot of consideration and prayer, she loaded all of her possessions into her car and headed west. She was staying with one of her friends in Commerce City as they worked to get the new group started, but then her friend unexpectedly died. "I looked to heaven and said, 'Now what?' I had no family, no friends, no place to stay, and I was a stranger in a strange land." Soon after, her car blew up. Jay was stranded.

"I have an issue with depression, and I could feel it hovering," she says. "I knew despair wasn't far off. I was sinking into the muck. Old, ugly thoughts started rising. I thought of taking my own life. I was in deep trouble."

Living Hope was across the street, and she felt that being in God's house would help. She said the people were friendly and it was a good experience—until communion. "About 20 people went up and I was left sitting alone, excluded from the Lord's Supper," she says. "I was offended. A vicar was preaching that day, and I asked him about it, but the poor guy couldn't answer my rapid-fire questions. I left, vowing never to return."

But then the new pastor reached out to Jay. They talked about the church and the practice of close communion. "He asked me to visit again, and I said I'd think about it, but I didn't," she says. "I wasn't going back there, period."

But she did return. "If that wasn't the Holy Spirit moving me, I don't know what is. When I got there, I made eye contact with the pastor and I knew I was home."

Jay says her fellow members at Living Hope have shown her the goodness of God. They provided her with transportation and helped her find a place to live. "It was an answer to my prayers," she says. "I have found a home here with these folks, and I can't do enough for God—not because I need to but rather because of all he's done for me."

Now Jay greets everyone at the door each Sunday. She calls herself an "ambassador for Jesus" and hopes that sharing her story with others will show them what God can do.

"My life went from tragedy to triumph; I went from a mess to a messenger," she



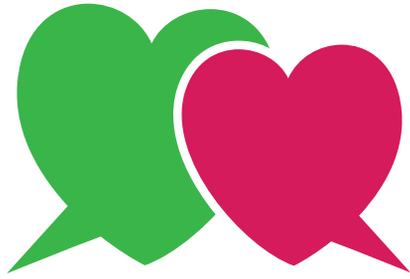
Jay Lore and Jack Sullivan, a fellow member at Living Hope, Commerce City, Colo. "He was my first friend in the church, and he's my mentor," says Jay. "I adore the man."

says. "I live in the joy of the trial. I sometimes wonder what potential was stolen, but it's all good. And I truly believe we all go through what we go through in hopes that we turn to God and he can give us the triumph."

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*Alicia Neumann is a member at Christ, Zumbrota, Minnesota.*

Jay says anyone who is struggling because of addiction or abuse and needs someone to talk to can contact her at [skythunderchief@msn.com](mailto:skythunderchief@msn.com).



## heart to heart parent conversations

It's not often that I don't chime in with my opinion on a topic, but this is going to be one of those rare moments. My oldest just turned 13, and although the prospect of dating is getting closer every day, this is not a topic with which I have any experience. Honestly, just the idea of my daughter dating makes me a little panicky. That's why I'm grateful that I can turn to wise Christian parents who have been through this stage of parenting—and in some cases still are navigating it—for tips and advice.

Do you have any anecdotes or advice about how to approach a child's dating years? If so, e-mail [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net) or comment on the articles posted at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net).

*Nicole Balza*

Join the  
conversation!

Visit [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist)  
and look for the  
*Heart to heart* link.

## WHAT'S A PARENT'S ROLE AS A CHILD DATES?

**I remember when** my oldest son went on his first date as a high school freshman. It was hardly the stuff of romantic legend. Since neither he nor his girlfriend could drive, their "date" consisted of sitting in a corner booth at Culver's while I parked myself in a booth nearby and tried to be inconspicuous. If only dating could remain this innocent! But as our teens get older and their relationships become more serious, what's a parent's role as a child dates? How much—or how little—do we get involved?

**From the outset, be very clear about dating parameters.** Ask *where*, *when*, and *what* questions. Give firm expectations about rules and curfews, and enforce consequences when rules are broken.

**Meet your child's date and connect with his or her parents via phone call or text.** It's important for both sets of parents to be a "team" when it comes to dating expectations and guidelines.

**Have THE TALK with your child—again.** Sorry, I know it will be cringeworthy and awkward, but your child needs to learn about sex from you, not the internet or peers. Look

**I'm a parent of** two boys and two girls ages 15 to 22. I have a front-row seat to view the corn maze called courting. I admit to thoughts of electronic surveillance, homing devices, and background checks. Making it more complicated is that the way my kids date is as unique as they are. They open up to my wife and me in different ways and to varying degrees.

Along the way, I have learned a few things:

**First, crushes are an innocent way of saying, "I like you and want to spend time with you."** Young teens are practicing their dating legs. They are learning social skills. The early years are building the skills they need for future and more serious relationships.

**You can never prevent them from getting hurt.** Sometimes a parent sees and offers caution, such as, "Does the person to whom you're giving your heart make you a better person or bring you down? Liking someone is one thing, but if he makes

**Ah, the halcyon days** of dating! The excitement, the romance, the mystery! Will he call? Does she like me? But now, you are the parent, and the word *dating* seems more worrisome than wonderful. What is your role as a parent in Christian courtship?

**Pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17).** God would have us pray about everything. Certainly early and numerous prayers for our child and his or her future spouse and all things dating fall under this category.

**Teach (Proverbs 22:6).** Godly conversations about the blessings of dating, marriage, and sex should start early and continue age appropriately as your child matures. Not entirely comfortable with these conversations? Christian books to the rescue! Remind your child that he or she is a special and loved child of God—single, dating, or married.

**Model (1 Corinthians 13).** Actions speak louder than words! Pray that God gives you the strength to make your

at what God says about purity in relationships (1 Corinthians 6:18-20) and read Galatians 2:20 together to remind your teen that Christ lives in both of them. Discuss the very real consequences of a sexual relationship outside of marriage—everything from STDs to pregnancy—and the emotional and spiritual impacts it has.

**Be your child's "brain."** It's a scientific fact that the brain isn't fully wired until about age 25. The developing teen brain plus raging hormones equals the opportunity for some very poor choices. Parents can help be their child's surrogate brain during the teen years. Although teens have to learn to make their own choices and understand the consequences of their actions, we can help guide them through the dating minefield.

**Model healthy and loving male/female relationships.** Dads, cherish your wife in front of your daughters. Moms, hold your sons accountable by teaching them to respect you and respect women. Talk about what is and is not acceptable in a dating relationship. Verbal, emotional, and physical abuse are NEVER okay. If your child is uncomfortable or injured in a relationship, teach him or her to speak up.

you feel worse about yourself, ditch him. I don't care how good looking he is." Yet they still get hurt . . . and your heart breaks when your child's heart breaks.

**Take their feelings seriously.** I never make light of their feelings. I may view it as puppy love, but to a teenager, those feelings of the moment are huge and all-consuming. Validate that their feelings are real . . . and realize that these feelings may change at any moment.

I also know I'm still learning . . .

**To know when to quit talking so I can be a better listener.** A good listener will be able to repeat everything back. A *deep* listener internalizes it, mulls it around, and empathizes with a child. A note of caution—being a listener doesn't qualify you as their "relationship fixer." Parents can't fix relationships. I may want to offer advice on every conversation point. But more important than getting my point across is allowing them

marriage a Christian model of sacrificial love. Show your child that your marriage is a priority and a blessing. Fathers, show love and respect to your wives and daughters. Mothers, respect and encourage your husbands and sons in their Christian roles.

**Advise (Psalm 119:105).** As dating age approaches, look for moments during car rides or while walking the dog that are good talking and listening times. You can regale your children with stories of your own courtship and marriage. But also remind them that while dating can be fun, the ultimate purpose is to look for a husband or wife and that is serious business. Most important, continue to point them to God's Word. How about a Saturday coffee outing that includes a Bible study with your child, looking at passages on God's love for us, our love for God and others, friendship, marriage, God's timing, temptation, true beauty, forgiveness, what to look for in a marriage partner, and how to handle a breakup?

**Be realistic about your teen's dating journey.** Are you married to the first person you dated? It happens, but it's not likely. Keep in mind that dating for our teens is about exploring who they are and what they are looking for in a future spouse. Don't push too hard or encourage your child's dating relationship to be more serious than it should be, yet don't be so hands-off that you are unaware of what is happening.

**Pray continually.** I recently told a friend, "I will pray for you. It's the least I can do." She gently corrected me, "No, it's the most you can do." She's right. We forget how powerful and effective prayer is. Bring your child's dating relationship to God in prayer. Ask him to help your child remain pure, make wise choices, and stay safe. Also pray for a God-fearing spouse for your child someday, if they choose to marry. Finally, pray for patience and for understanding and to be able to lovingly keep the lines of communication open with your teen as he or she navigates the world of dating.

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



to share. That may mean your tongue will bleed from biting it.

**Not to be afraid to ask the hard questions:** "Does your boyfriend drink?" "Are you getting in the car with him?" "Will there be parents supervising that party?"

Sometimes, a boyfriend/girlfriend can be controlling, like when you see a child with ONLY this one person and no longer with friends. But differentiate between a red flag and a child who is private. There's a difference between hiding things and not wanting to talk about things.

Finally, I believe that the best way to model dating for your children is to treat your spouse well. It's like the map that helps them through that corn maze.

*Donn Dobberstein and his wife, Beth, have four children ranging in age from 15 to 22.*



**Host (1 Peter 4:9).** Plan gatherings for your child's class—boys and girls—at your home. Encourage your son or daughter to have their girlfriend or boyfriend over for game nights, baking, movies, and devotions. We call this "family dating." It's a cheap date, but it's also a way for the boyfriend/girlfriend to get to know you, the other siblings, the dog (a true test!), and the Christian values your family holds dear.

Dating. Ever since God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" in Genesis 2:18, men and women have been seeking the perfect partner. Welcome to this exciting/scary/exhilarating/wonderful phase of parenting! God's blessings as you pray, teach, model, advise, and host your dating child of God, relying on God's good guidance and timing.

*Ann Ponath and her husband, David, have four kids ranging in age from 14 to 23.*



# Reaching the goal

When concerns about earthly goals arise, we remember that Jesus already accomplished the goal of our faith: the salvation of our souls.

Jonathan P. Bilitz

Take a deep breath. Okay, let it out. One more time—inhale deeply . . . and exhale. Do you ever use this relaxation technique?

**For many college students, anxiety marks this time of year.** Final exams have arrived or lurk around the corner. Late nights of studying, deep breathing, extra coffee—all of these can be ways students cope with the end of a semester and the tests that accompany the finish.

How do you cope? Some students set parameters for themselves. “I will be in bed by 1:00 A.M.” “I am going over all the material three times and then calling it good.” “I am going to eat a healthy breakfast before the test.” The bottom line is that students want to have successful results on the exams they take. Successful test results mean a degree, which translates into a profession that provides joy-filled work and income to live.

Maybe that is why final exams have pressure attached to them. The future might depend on the results!

**Semester exams can serve as a picture of the trials God’s people experience this side of heaven.** Peter knew the struggles that Christians face. But Peter also had seen Jesus. As one of the Lord’s disciples, he was an eyewitness to Jesus’ teachings, his miracles, his death and resurrection. Those who received his letters did not experience that same benefit. And neither do we.

So Peter provides this encouragement, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8,9). We don’t see Jesus with our physical eyes, but we love him because he first loved us. His love fills us with joy that is beyond words. Not only do we have a peace that calms our weary and anxious hearts, but our lives have direction!

A deep focus on the tasks in front of us might cause us to lose sight of our goal. We become engrossed in what we can see, what we can touch, what we can hold. Yet what we cannot see truly brings joy. The goal of our faith—the salvation of our souls—is complete. The perfection of heaven awaits.

Did you happen to notice that Peter uses a present-tense verb? “You are receiving the end result of your faith.” Our goal is so certain that the Bible tells us it is already ours. Jesus finished the payment; he burst forth from the grave. Your eternal goal is accomplished through Christ.

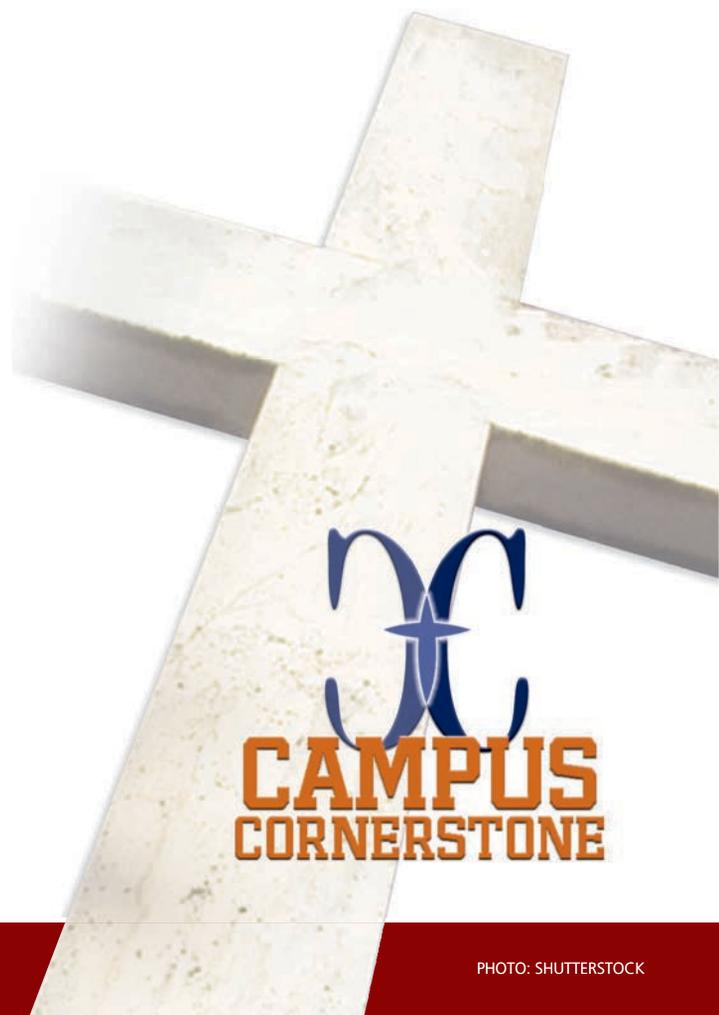
**Then what about our earthly goals?** What about the trials we experience? What about the anxiety we feel when preparing for and taking exams? Jesus invites us to cast anxieties on him (1 Peter 5:7). He promises that he has plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11). He reminds us that nothing can separate us from his love (Romans 8:37-39). Jesus assures us that we are never alone (Hebrews 13:5).

When concerns about our earthly goals arise, we remember that the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls, has already been accomplished by Jesus. Paul reflected, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

So take a deep breath and let it out. Jesus has got this.

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*Jonathan Bilitz is pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wisconsin.*



**CHANGES IN MINISTRY****Pastors**

**Fischer, Wayne**, to Beautiful Savior, Bella Vista-Hiwassee, Ark.

**Haldorson, Jeffery**, to Shepherd of the Hills, Greeley, Colo.

**Pagels, Steven**, to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis.

**Sadler, Benjamin**, to Victory of the Lamb, Franklin, Wis.

**Schumacher, Raymond**, to Trinity, Waukesha, Wis.

**Speidel, Thomas**, to retirement

**Starr, Richard**, to Mighty Fortress, Hiram, Ga.

**Zaferos, Peter**, to Mt. Olive, Suamico, Wis.

**Teachers**

**Biedenbender, Amy**, to Prince of Peace, Taylorsville, Utah

**Chandonnet, Emily**, to Kettle Moraine Lutheran High School, Jackson, Wis.

**Cook, Amy**, to Christ-St. John's, West Salem, Wis.

**Emmrich, Sara**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

**Evans, Matthew**, to California Lutheran High School, Wildomar, Calif.

**Evers, Bradley**, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.

**Foxen, Matthew**, to Fox Valley Lutheran High School, Appleton, Wis.

**Fuerstenberg, Kari**, to Divine Savior Lutheran Academy, Doral, Fla.

**Halter, Ryan**, to Kingdom Prep, Wauwatosa, Wis.

**Heuer, Melissa**, to St. Marcus, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Klammer, Emily**, to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.

**Knittel, David**, to Trinity, Brillion, Wis.

**Leistekow, Calista**, to Peridot-Our Savior's, Peridot, Ariz.

**Luebke, Christopher**, to East Fork, Whiteriver, Ariz.

**Luebke, Kathryn**, to East Fork Lutheran High School, Whiteriver, Ariz.

**Mays, Tabitha**, to Samuel, Marshall, Minn.

**Ninmann, Karen**, to Bethlehem, Menomonee Falls, Wis.

**Price, Debra**, to Northland Lutheran High School, Mosinee, Wis.

**Proeber, Megan**, to St. Paul, Lake Mills, Wis.

**Rixe, Ethan**, to Mt. Calvary, Waukesha, Wis.

**Rockhoff, Kristin**, to St. John's, Newburg, Wis.

**Schiferl, Kathryn**, to Trinity, Marshfield, Wis.

**Schramm, Benjamin**, to Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis.

**Schultz, Daniel**, to Good Shepherd, West Bend, Wis.

**Strong, Abbie**, to Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

**Vogt, Darren**, to St. Mark, Citrus Heights, Calif.

**Wentzel, Brittni**, to Christ Our Savior Academy, Columbia, Tenn.

**Zilisch, Jeffery**, to Wisconsin, Racine, Wis.

**Zimmerman III, Frederick**, to St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis.

**Zimmerman, Sarah**, to St. John-St. James, Reedsville, Wis.

**ANNIVERSARIES**

**Fort Atkinson, Wis.**—St. Paul school (150). May 19. Festival service and alumni reunion.

Worship, 1:30 P.M.; school open house and cornerstone opening follows. All alumni invited. 920-563-2263. Website, stpaulsfort.org.

**Spearfish, S.D.**—Hope (50). June 2. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal and fellowship to follow.

605-722-3857. Website, hopelutheran.us.

**Prairie du Chien, Wis.**—Grace (40). June 9. Worship, 9 A.M.; meal and fellowship to follow.

608-326-4899. Website, gracepdc.net.

**Birmingham, Ala.**—Our Savior (50). June 23. Worship, 4 P.M.; catered meal to follow.

205-677-8642; pastor@oursaviorbirmingham.com. Website, oursaviorbirmingham.com.

**Henry, S.D.**—St. Paul's (125). June 30. Worship, 10 A.M.; catered meal, noon; program and socializing to follow. RSVP requested.

Cindy, cindyfrederick18806@gmail.com; Terry, terry@datatruck.com.

**Martinez, Ga.**—Prince of Peace (40). July 14. Special worship, 10 A.M. Website, princeofpeacemartinez.com.

**Grant Park, Ill.**—St. Paul (150). July 28. Special worship, 4 P.M.; meal to follow.

RSVP requested. 815-466-0093; pastor@stpaulgrantpark.net.

**Baxter, Minn.**—Christ (50). Sept. 8. Worship, 9 A.M.; program and meal to follow.

RSVP requested by Aug. 11. 218-829-4105; office@christbaxter.com.

**Ann Arbor, Mich.**—St. John's (150). Sept. 15. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; meal, noon; worship, 2:30 P.M. RSVP requested by Aug. 15. 734-761-1740; stjohsnorthfield2015@gmail.com.

**COMING EVENTS**

**Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee spring concert**—May 5. 2 & 4:30 P.M. St. John, Wauwatosa, Wis. Website, lutheranchorale.org.

**Life-A-Thon**—May 11. WELS Lutherans for Life. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Website, welsrc.net/event/2019-life-a-thon/.

**WELS Campus Ministry staff conference**—May 20–21. Holiday Inn, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/events.

**Retirement service**—June 2. For Pastor Thomas Wilsman. St. John, Waterloo, Wis.

Worship, 9 A.M.; awards and potluck to follow. gwblking@frontier.com.

**Apologetics course**—June 10–14. Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis.

“Practical Apologetics: The Defense of the Faith” is a one-week course ideal for those

who wish to be better equipped with grace and knowledge to win souls for Christ.

On-campus housing is available. Website, wlc.edu/apologetics.

**Retirement service**—June 23. For Pastor Karl Gurgel. St. Matthew, Winona, Minn.

Worship, 9 A.M.; brunch and short program to follow. RSVP by June 2. robbedbrown@hotmail.com; 507-454-3083.

**WELS EdTechLead Summit 2019**—June 25–27. Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, Wis. Registration open. Website, welsedtechlead.com.

**Lutheran Women's Missionary Society convention**—June 27–30. Des Moines, Iowa. Registration open. Website, lwms.org.

**WELS Night at Miller Park**—July 12. Brewers vs. Giants. Miller Park, Milwaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/event/brewers2019.

**WELS Women's Ministry conference**—July 18–20. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. Registration open. Website, wels.net/wmconference.

**Reunion**—July 19–20. For Martin Luther Academy class of '74. Dubuque, Iowa.

Larry Schultz, lrschultz@comcast.net.

**WELS 65th Biennial Synod Convention**—July 29–Aug. 1. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. Theme: “For generations to come.”

Website, wels.net/2019synodconvention.

**NAMES WANTED**

**Online adjunct instructors**—Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., is seeking individuals qualified and willing to serve as

online, part-time adjuncts in the master's degree programs. Such instructors will

teach a course once every few years from their homes. No job change or move is

required. Qualified instructors are WELS/ELS members who possess a doctoral degree in

the area of education, especially educational technology, early childhood, and special

education. Send names to the MLC director of graduate studies, Prof. John Meyer, meyerjd@mlc-wels.edu.

**Dean of the College of Adult and Graduate Studies**—Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wis., is seeking candidates for

the next dean of the College of Adult and Graduate Studies (AGS), beginning with

the 2019-2020 academic year. Nominate a qualified WELS/ELS individual at wlc.edu/

nominate. Or contact the Office of the Provost, joni.panitzke@wlc.edu.

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.

## Hope after the storm in Puerto Rico

Three visitors! No big deal on some Sundays . . . lost in the crowd at some churches . . . a below-average turnout on many occasions. It's nothing to write home about (or for *Forward in Christ*).

But this is different. There hadn't been one single visitor at *Cordero de Dios* (Lamb of God) Lutheran Church in Puerto Rico for months. In fact, there hadn't even been a worship service there for almost a year and a half!

When Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in September 2018, it devastated much of the Island of Enchantment. Buildings were destroyed, power grids were damaged, and cell phone towers were knocked down. Lives were lost. Morale deflated quickly. As months passed with no electricity, water, internet, or cell phone service, tensions started to rise, hope began to depart, and a feeling of helplessness set in.

Our brothers and sisters who are members of the three congregations of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church in Puerto Rico were also affected. While one church building was damaged, another wooden chapel was completely destroyed. Worship services at *Cordero de Dios* in Humacao stopped. There was no place to gather!

As news of the devastation spread, WELS members responded quickly in love. Generous donations were received for hurricane relief. WELS leaders visited Puerto Rico and assured our fellow believers that we would walk through this together. WELS Christian Aid and Relief provided short-term help and a longer term plan of assistance. Retired Pastor Larry Schlomer and his wife, Marlene, spent several months in Puerto Rico coordinating relief and reconstruction efforts. Volunteers came to lend a hand. Pastors and leaders and church members worked together to rebuild homes and churches—and hope.

On Feb. 10, the newly rebuilt (in concrete) chapel in Humacao was dedicated to God's glory. Members from

the three island congregations gathered together to thank God and celebrate his goodness. During the service, long-time member and seminary student Kelly Alvarez was ordained and installed as pastor of *Mi Dios Verdadero* (My True God) Lutheran Church in San Juan. The message from God's Word that day included the reminder that we are a holy temple in the Lord, being built up together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:21,22).

What will happen next in Puerto Rico? Two pastors currently serve in the town of Guayama. One pastor and one student pastor serve in San Juan. A rotation of pastors leads worship in Humacao. There are still jobs to finish, but now plans for gospel ministry can be worked out in order to share the good news with those visitors as well as to reach out to those who likely won't come on their own.

What can we learn from all this? God in his wisdom allowed Hurricane Maria to pass through Puerto Rico, but the Lord will not abandon his people or his church. In fact, he often creates opportunities out of challenges. Think of those visitors who saw the work on the church progressing, shared the excitement, and wanted to be part of that special day. People do notice the fruit of our labor, but they need encouragement. Let's keep on encouraging, inviting, and pointing others to Jesus.

What can we do now? Please pray for those three visitors in Humacao. Pray for our three congregations, which still face challenges. Pray that the gospel might be preached and believed, to God's glory.

*Rev. Timothy Satorius  
WELS liaison to the Puerto Rican church*

Learn more about WELS Christian Aid and Relief at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief). Read about a family affected by another storm on p. 30.



(Top) After Hurricane Maria destroyed the chapel in Humacao, Puerto Rico, in September 2018, donations to WELS Christian Aid and Relief helped fund the rebuilding effort. (Middle) WELS President Mark Schroeder (second from right) attended the February dedication service for the rebuilt chapel. He is standing with (left to right) Sergio Cortijo, national pastor; Kelly Alvarez, who was ordained as a pastor at the service; and Missionary Larry Schlomer. (Bottom) Besides members from all three congregations in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Church of Puerto Rico, three visitors also attended the service.

## Obituaries

### Arlyn L. Schmeling, 1930–2018

Arlyn Schmeling was born Jan. 26, 1930, in Minneota, Minn. He died Dec. 10, 2018, in Sun City, Ariz.

A 1956 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Grace, Sioux City, Iowa; St. Paul, Oconto Falls, Wis.; Our Savior, Two Rivers, Wis.; King of Kings, Alexandria, La.; Living Shepherd, Scottsbluff, Neb.; King of Kings, Little Rock, Ark.; Zion, Torrance, Calif.; Zion, Springfield, Mo.; Faith, Columbus, Miss.; and Ascension, Macomb, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Evelyn; 3 daughters; 2 sons; 26 grandchildren; 45 great-grandchildren; 6 sisters; and 1 brother. He was preceded in death by one son, one daughter, and two brothers.

### Douglas J. Stindt, 1931–2018

Douglas Stindt was born Apr. 14, 1931, in Bay City, Mich. He died Dec. 12, 2018, in Saginaw, Mich.

A 1954 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Our Savior, Bylas, Ariz.; St. John, Manitowoc, Wis.; and St. Paul's, Saginaw, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Loraine; two daughters; and two sisters.

### Rebecca E. Lussky, 1959–2018

Rebecca Lussky (née Madson) was born Apr. 27, 1959. She died Dec. 16, 2018, in La Crescent, Minn.

She taught at Luther High School, Onalaska, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, Glenn; her parents; one son; two daughters; nine grandchildren; three brothers; and one sister.

### Elaine K. Timm, 1941–2019

Elaine Timm (née Salinger) was born Aug. 24, 1941, in Milwaukee, Wis. She died Jan. 1, 2019, in Milwaukee, Wis.

She taught at Palos, Palos Heights, Ill.; Christ, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Atonement, Milwaukee, Wis.

She is survived by her husband, David; two sons; one daughter; eight grandchildren; two brothers; and one sister.

## Finding a spiritual home in Atlanta

Spenser hadn't been to church in years. He found himself wandering in faith and unsure of his beliefs. Moving to the city of Atlanta had provided him with a great job, but it did nothing to fill the spiritual void in his life.

Then one weekend late in August, Spenser attended a free community festival in the neighborhood of Grant Park. As he walked through a long line of booths selling cotton candy and offering face painting, he saw something that caught his eye. It was a booth sponsored by our volunteers from Intown Lutheran Church in Atlanta. Spenser spun our prize wheel and won a free pair of sunglasses. He also received an invitation to our worship grand opening in just two weeks. Spenser had been Lutheran at one point in his life, and the people at the booth were friendly. He decided to go.

On Sept. 9, 2018, Spenser stopped by the Elevator Factory event space with nearly 60 other people to kick off worship at Intown Lutheran. About one-third of the people in attendance were unchurched prospects, many of whom had found out about Intown Lutheran from the Summer Shade Festival. Spenser enjoyed coffee and mingling with everybody. He enjoyed the worship service and the Bible-focused message. During the post-service announcements, Spenser heard about our new Bible Basics class starting soon in a local coffee shop. He decided to give it a try.

Three months later, Spenser joined our church as an adult confirmand. The Holy Spirit had worked powerfully on his heart through his in-depth study of God's Word.

"Bible Basics opened my mind and heart to better understand my faith," says Spenser. "Through this course I was able to learn, ask questions, and grow as a person."

Today Spenser remains an active member of our growing congregation. By God's grace, he has found a spiritual home in the city.

Intown Lutheran hosted a booth at six different festivals in 2018, gaining dozens of prospects and worship visitors in the process. We've gained several members and prospects through the Summer Shade Festival in particular, including three more families who recently finished Bible Basics and joined our church. All costs for the 2018 Summer Shade Festival were paid for by the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society's First Public Service Fund. We are so thankful for all who contributed to this generous gift so that people like Spenser can find a spiritual home in the city.

*Rev. Lucas Bitter  
Intown Lutheran, Atlanta, Georgia*

To learn about other home and world missions supported by the Lutheran Women's Missionary Society, attend the group's national convention in Des Moines, Iowa, from June 27–30. To learn more, visit [lwms.org](http://lwms.org).



Volunteers from Intown Lutheran, Atlanta, Ga., manned a booth at six local festivals in 2018 to promote this new WELS mission. Spenser Emerson (right) learned about Intown Lutheran at the Summer Shade Festival in August 2018.

## A new voice for WELS Daily Devotions

The audio version of the WELS Daily Devotions now features a new voice: Zach Steinke.

“We are thrilled to have Zach as our new narrator for the WELS Daily Devotions,” says Eric Roecker, director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism. “His experience and expertise will be a blessing to the thousands of souls who listen each day.”

Steinke, a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., has prior experience in the radio communications industry. Before he decided to become a pastor, he produced shows and commercials for four local radio stations for five years. During this time, he took on leadership roles in his home congregation, Peace, Granger, Ind., including serving on the Board of Education, writing for the church newsletter, and leading worship in his pastor’s absence. He had considered the ministry in the past, and as time passed he believed the Lord was calling him again. So he left South Bend to pursue the ministry.

Narrating the Daily Devotions was an unexpected opportunity. Donn Dobberstein, director of the WELS Commission on Discipleship, was teaching one of Steinke’s classes recently and mentioned that WELS was seeking a new narrator for the Daily Devotions. Dobberstein asked the students to take turns reading portions of some devotional material, and Steinke’s abilities captured Dobberstein’s attention.

“When it was my turn, I read my paragraph,” Steinke recalls. “Then Pastor Dobberstein asked me to read the next one . . . and the next one.”

Afterward, Steinke shared his voice demos with Dobberstein and other WELS staff. He was quickly brought on board.

“I was not planning to audition myself as a candidate, and Pastor Dobberstein was not necessarily looking for a ‘voice’ from the classroom that

day,” Steinke explains. “However, the Lord brought this all together, so to him be the glory.”

Steinke replaces Mike Hintz, retired director for the WELS Commission on Evangelism, as the narrator. Coincidentally, Hintz was once his pastor. Steinke sees this connection as another example of God’s hand in shaping this opportunity.

“It just shows you that this is something only the Lord can plan and work out,” Steinke says. “I am surprised and honored to be succeeding Pastor Hintz.”



Before pursuing the ministry, Steinke worked in several aspects of radio communications. Steinke records the narration for Daily Devotions in his home studio.

In 2018, the Daily Devotions had nearly 11,000 subscribers in more than 15 different countries. Thousands of listeners tune in each day.

“The Lord has already blessed this ministry exponentially,” Steinke notes. “I pray that I’ll be a good steward of this ministry and that God continues to make it fruitful through me and the many writers of the Daily Devotions.”

For listeners of the Daily Devotions, Steinke shares this message: “As you incorporate these devotions into your day, may the Holy Spirit strengthen your faith as God speaks his gospel comfort to your heart. I’d also like to challenge you to think of people in your life who need to know such comfort. Share these devotions with them so they can know Jesus, their Savior, and how precious they are in his sight.”

To read, listen to, and subscribe to Daily Devotions, visit [wels.net/daily-devotions](http://wels.net/daily-devotions).

## Let your light shine

When Herbert Justman, a member at Zion, Allenton, Wis., learned about the opportunity for WELS to establish a theological training facility for Hmong pastors in Hanoi, Vietnam, he said he jumped for joy.

This ministry touches his heart because he has a special connection to Vietnam—he served his country there for eight months during the Vietnam War.

Justman served as an Army cook and truck driver outside the town of Quinhon. His company was responsible for hauling airline fuel. He says the area he was stationed in was in a “safe zone” so he had many opportunities to interact with the local villagers.

But his experiences also put him in many dangerous situations. He shares that on his first day there, he had to ride “shot gun” to a nearby Marine camp to pick up water for his unit. He saw the chaplain giving Marines last rites before they went into the jungle as well as Marines carrying rifles with them to the showers. “You never know when you will be attacked by the Viet Cong,” he says. “I was scared, but the Lord was watching over us.”

His parents had impressed God’s Word on him since he was little. “They always made sure we had the Word of God not just in our minds but in our hearts as well,” he says.

About four months after Justman arrived in Vietnam, he was sent home for a 30-day leave because his mother died. While he was home, his father died as well. Justman returned to Vietnam but was granted an early release just a few months later.

“I served my country and helped our brothers and sisters with the love of Christ,” he says. “I made a lot of friends there. I loved the country, and the people were so great. Loving! I’d love to go back to see them again but the money is not there. I’ll just pray for them.”

Now besides praying for them, Justman is also supporting a way for God’s Word to be spread in Vietnam. “I knew we did not fight this war for nothing,” he says. “My Pastor Bode



Herbert Justman was just 22 years old when he was drafted by the US Army on April 1, 1964. He served in Vietnam in 1965–66.

always says, ‘Out of something bad, something good will come.’ God made sure of it. I love God for that.”

Besides supporting numerous WELS ministries, Justman volunteers at the local nursing home, bringing people in wheelchairs to weekly chapel services. He also is known as the “card man” because he sends Christian get-well cards to members who are sick. “I look for opportunities to talk to people about Christ,” he says. “It’s our job to do that. We’re supposed to be missionaries right here at home.”

Justman also talks about grace to the fellow Vietnam veterans whom he meets. He says that after they greet each other and share their experiences, he always tells them, “By the grace of God, we came home alive. Isn’t God great?” He says some agree and some walk away. “But that’s the point I want to get across,” he says.

And now, as he thinks about the unexpected and unbelievable opportunity to reach out with God’s grace in Vietnam, he says he can just sit back and say, “Isn’t God great!”

Learn more about the opportunities to build a training center in Vietnam at [wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach](http://wels.net/vietnamhmongoutreach).



**SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS THAT INSPIRE A LIFELONG JOURNEY OF SERVICE AND OUTREACH.**



## ESCONDIDO, CALIFORNIA

This past February, 11 members from Resurrection and Life, Rochester, Minn., traveled to Ascension, Escondido, Calif., to assist the congregation with local outreach. Together, they canvassed the neighborhoods of Escondido and San Marcos, Calif., sharing the gospel in nearly one thousand homes and inviting many people to Ascension’s Neighborhood Safety Night. Though the task seemed intimidating at first, the volunteers from Resurrection and Life, led by their pastor, Joseph Koelpin, were encouraged by the experience. “I was reluctant to go, but Rev. Koelpin asked that I pray on it,” says Lisa Fabian, one of the volunteers. “A couple weeks later, I decided, after prayer, that I would go. It was the best decision I think I’ve ever made.” Koelpin saw the experience as a valuable blessing to both congregations. “Our people were encouraged by God’s Word and by the opportunity to serve not only the community but also one another,” he reflects. “Our group shared an experience to bring back to Rochester and infuse some excitement and enthusiasm into our congregation as well.”



## Spreading special ministries to Ethiopia

With many prayers, support from WELS members, and a partnership with WELS Special Ministries, the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia (LCE), WELS' sister synod, is now the owner of a Braille embosser to help the many visually impaired people in Ethiopia learn about Jesus.

It started when Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu from the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia attended the 2017 WELS Synod Convention, where the two church bodies declared fellowship with one another. After founding a confessional Lutheran church in Ethiopia in 2012 and opening a seminary there to teach others confessional Lutheran doctrine, Kebede learned about the opportunities to reach more of the population with the saving gospel message through WELS Special Ministries. God used Kebede's meeting with Jim Behringer, director of the WELS Commission on Special Ministries, to open more ministry doors in Ethiopia.



When Rev. Dr. Kebede Yigezu from the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia was at the synod convention in 2017 (pictured), he learned about WELS Special Ministries and its work with the visually impaired and those in prison. With help from WELS, Kebede has started these ministries in Ethiopia as well.

Kebede was particularly interested in the Ministry to the Visually Impaired (MVI) and Prison Ministry.

“Right there in the convention during a break, I got the opportunity to talk with the leader of the WELS Special Ministries about how we can get resources for these two special ministries,” recalls Kebede. “He promised to consider ways in which we in Ethiopia could receive the hard copies of books for prison ministry and a Braille machine for ministry to the visually impaired in Ethiopia. Some months later in 2017, he sent a package of Prison Ministry booklets with the answer sheet, which we are in the process of translating into two languages (Amharic and Afan Oromo), which is spoken by about 70 percent of the population of Ethiopia. Then we started communicating about the Braille machine with Brother Larry Povinelli and Brother John Roebke of the One Africa Team. With prayers throughout the next year and a half, the Braille machine for the ministry in the LCE became a reality.”

Povinelli, a member of the WELS Ministry to the Visually Impaired as well as the National Federation for the Blind, is well positioned to know what questions to ask about needs, language, and specifications to help pick out the right Braille embosser. Roebke serves on the One Africa Team, and coincidentally, was Povinelli's pastor previously in his ministry. God was working to bring all the right people together.

These people include a member of Kebede's growing church. Truye has a master's degree in foreign literature, has taught English, has translated English-language news into three different languages spoken in Ethiopia, and has even taught advanced English and academic writing at the LCE's Maor Lutheran Theological Seminary. She is also blind, knows Braille, and can use a Braille embosser.

“She can teach writing and reading Braille and has a good network with the visually impaired population [850,000 to 900,000 individuals in Ethiopia]. She uses English, Amharic, and Afan Oromo very well,” explains Kebede.

The LCE's first project for the new Braille embosser will be Luther's Small Catechism. The church wants to produce Braille versions in English, Amharic, and Afan Oromo. It also is planning audio versions, so the visually impaired can listen on their mobile devices. Next the LCE is looking at reproducing Prison Ministry booklets in Braille and the three languages to help the visually impaired and others learn the basics of Christianity.

“For the Lutheran Church of Ethiopia, this means reaching people who are undermined and left because they are physically impaired and because the only prison ministry is run under the church in Ethiopia,” says Kebede. “These resources will help not only those who are in prison physically and blind physically; these resources also help free people who are in prison spiritually and blind spiritually. Furthermore, we hope that God can use these ministries to reach the families, relatives, and friends of the prisoners and visually impaired with the gospel of our Lord.”

He continues, “These resources are giving us opportunities to work more on translation, communication, and publication projects, which are strengthened by the collaborative efforts of WELS Multi-Language Publications, the LCE, and our Maor Lutheran Theological Seminary. We would like to say ‘thanks’ to our WELS brothers and sisters for your prayers, encouragement, and gifts, which have meant a lot to us.”

Learn more about the work of Special Ministries at [wels.net/special-ministries](https://wels.net/special-ministries).

## District news

### HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

MN—The 2018–19 school year marks the 40th anniversary of **Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School, New Ulm, Minn.** The school celebrated this milestone throughout the year with the theme “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy” (Psalm 126:3).

SEW—On Dec. 2, Mount Calvary, Waukesha, Wis., celebrated the 40th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **Michael Turriff**.

### SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

On Feb. 25, high winds toppled the steeple of **St. John, Burlington, Wis.** Overnight, the 18-foot-long steeple fell from its perch, tumbled onto the

roof, and rolled to the ground, causing minor roof damage.

From March 15–17, WELS high school students from across the country attended the **WELS National Band Festival** at Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.

### DAKOTA-MONTANA

On Feb. 26, a pipe in a fire suppression system broke at **Shining Mountains, Bozeman, Mont.** Hundreds of gallons of water gushed into the church. During the clean-up process, the congregation is worshiping in a local middle school.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—Andrew Hussman; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NW—Dennis Kleist; SEW—Scott Oelhafen; WW—Brett Brauer.

### NORTHERN WISCONSIN



Grace, Crivitz, Wis., hosted a vacation Bible school with a Winter Olympics theme on Feb. 16. The day included outdoor Olympic games and then indoor Bible story time and treats.

### WESTERN WISCONSIN



The first- and second-grade class from St. Paul, Ixonia, Wis., knitted hats for newborns and donated them to a local hospital.

### SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN



On March 4, 24 high school students from five different schools attended a taste of ministry event at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. The students toured the campus, attended classes (pictured), and spoke with Paul Wendland, president of the seminary.

## WELS news briefs

### WELS SPECIAL MINISTRIES

414-256-3241;  
specialministries@wels.net

A **new video resource and discussion guide** about being a recovery friendly church is now available. This half-hour interview with Phil Merten, a chaplain with Institutional Ministries, is intended to help congregations better understand the spiritual struggles and other dimensions of recovery for people who want to free themselves of addiction. It also will help churches evaluate how their ministry can communicate a welcoming message to those suffering from addictions—both members and others in the community. “Jesus said that it is not the healthy that need a physician but the sick, and Christian congregations are uniquely positioned to serve people who have been broken by addiction,” says James Behringer, director of WELS Special Ministries. Find the resource at [welscongregationalervices.net](http://welscongregationalervices.net), under Compassion Ministry modules.

### WELS MISSIONS

414-256-3237;  
missionspromotions@wels.net

WELS Missions will offer the **first annual Taste of Missions event on July 13** at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. Attendees can sample ethnic cuisine from WELS mission fields, enjoy fellowship and presentations from current and past home and world missionaries and committee members, view displays, participate in family-friendly activities coordinated by the missionaries, and ask questions about the ups and downs of mission work during a panel discussion. The event will conclude at 4 P.M. with a special worship service celebrating the blessings the Lord has showered on WELS Missions. Registration is \$5 per person, with children under the age of five attending for free. Learn more and register at [wels.net/tasteofmissions2019](http://wels.net/tasteofmissions2019).



# AMBASSADORS

LET THEM SEE JESUS



## Face opposition with courage and confidence.

Eric S. Roecker

It was a fabulous fall day. The sun was shining. Brightly colored leaves were floating downward from the trees. The air had just a hint of the crispness that makes fall feel like fall.

It was a fabulous fall day. And I was doing what I loved—walking a neighborhood near our church, handing out invitations. Where there was no one home, I would leave the invitation at the door. But where someone was washing the car in the driveway or trimming the bushes, I would hand out an invitation and say, “Hi! I’m the pastor at the church down the road. I just wanted to invite you to visit us sometime. We would love to have you!”

Often people responded to my little speech with a smile, a nod, and a wary thank you. I could see in their eyes and in the way their body seemed to stiffen what they were thinking. I could read their thoughts as if I were reading a book. “I hope this guy isn’t going to waste the next hour of this beautiful day talking to me about religious stuff.”

But once in a while, the person lit up like a Christmas tree, eagerly taking the invitation and asking, “Where is your church?”

“Just down the road. The one with the tower.”

“Oh! Sure. I drive by every day on my way to work. It’s beautiful. I’ve actually thought about stopping in some Sunday. We haven’t been to church for a while and have been meaning to get back into it. So what kind of church is it?”

And we would be off and running. I would share information about the church. My new friend would ask questions. I would do my best to answer. Sometimes the conversation lasted five minutes. Other times it lasted an hour. Every time it was exhilarating.

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## Remember this the next time you face opposition when witnessing: You are not alone.

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So there was a bit of a bounce in my step as I made my way down the sun-drenched street of the subdivision that Saturday, looking forward to my next adventure. Whom would I meet? What would they say? What would they ask? Where would our conversation lead? God only knew.

I certainly didn’t know. And it is probably good I didn’t. Otherwise, I might have

been tempted to turn around, get back in my car, and head home for the day.

**He was standing in the middle of his front lawn, rake in hand.** There was nothing extraordinary about him. He was middle-aged, brown-haired, wearing khaki pants and a flannel shirt. He looked like he belonged there. Just your average middle-class American homeowner doing his weekend duty by taking care of his yard.

I approached cheerfully and began my now-familiar speech, “Hi! I’m Eric Roecker, the pastor at . . .”

I didn’t say another word for 20 minutes. I couldn’t. The air was too full of other words—his words.

He began with a general tirade against religion—all the evils it had brought into the world, all the cruelty, from ancient Christian crusades to modern Islamic terrorism, from the scandals of televangelists to the scandals of Roman Catholic priests.

I had heard his objections before—many times. What surprised me was the anger. I was completely unprepared for it. His voice grew louder and louder. This man was angry.

**What should I do? What would you do?** How should a Christian react when facing such opposition? Although the Bible does not give us a playbook that





## WHAT'S YOUR STORY

How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear from you. To whom in your life did you reach out? How did you speak the truth in love when you faced opposition? E-mail responses to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net) with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.

spells out the specific steps to handle an uncomfortable interaction with an unbeliever, it does tell us the following:

- "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). The red-faced man screaming at me in his front yard was loved by God—so loved that God sacrificed his Son to save that man's soul.
- "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Rather than hating this man for hating people like me, I loved him and wanted him to know the joy and peace and comfort I know because I know my Savior.
- "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15,16).

**So, what did I do? I listened.** By God's grace, I didn't get angry. I didn't shout back. I just listened.

Eventually, his tirade reached a kind of climax, and he began to speak more quietly. He was still angry and still attacking, but he was losing steam. Finally, he stopped. Now I was able to respond. I did not respond to everything he had

said. Instead, I decided to address the last point he had made to see where it might lead. He had pointed out that there were many different religions in the world and they all basically taught the same things. Christianity wasn't anything special.

"Well," I replied, "you are right, of course, that there are many different religions in the world. However, they are not all the same. Hinduism, for example, teaches that there are thousands of gods. Christianity teaches that there is only one God."

"So, who's to say Christianity is right!?" he shouted angrily.

"My point isn't that Christianity is right," I answered. "I am simply pointing out that Hinduism and Christianity cannot both be right. Either one is right and the other is wrong or both are wrong. But they cannot both be right."

He thought about that for a moment. His face was now closer to its original color than the crimson-red hue it had been for the past few minutes.

"I suppose that's true," he said.

"Obviously, as a Christian pastor, I believe that the Christian teaching about God is the true teaching about God. And that truth about God—who he is, what he's like, what he has done for you and for me—is incredibly comforting.

I don't want to take up the rest of your afternoon, but would it be all right if I very briefly shared it with you?"

He never did visit our church. But he did hear about Jesus that fine fall day. And where the good news about Jesus is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit of God is at work.

Remember this the next time you face opposition when witnessing: You are not alone. In the very last verse of Matthew's gospel, Jesus promised, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28:20).

I was not alone on that lawn. My Jesus was right beside me, giving me the love and patience I needed to tell this angry man that God loves him. And Jesus will be right beside you every time you tell others about him.

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*Eric Roecker, director of the WELS Commission on Evangelism, is a member at Pilgrim, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.*

This is the seventh article in a 12-part series on sharing your faith. Read more examples of people sharing their faith on p. 28.





# AMBASSADORS

## HOW I SHARED JESUS

Through several different series, *Forward in Christ* authors have been providing tips and encouragement from their own personal experiences about how to share God’s Word with people who desperately need to hear about God’s grace.

We asked for your feedback, and several of you have shared your own tips, encouragements, and outreach stories. Read on:

### A WAITING ROOM OPPORTUNITY



*Betty Pfeiffer, a member at Heritage, Gilbert, Ariz., shares her story of praying dangerously for the opportunity to tell someone about God’s love [“Praying dangerously,” Feb.].*

My husband needed an eye exam, and it was going to require dilation of his pupils. I went along to drive him home. I was in a hurry and walked out without a book to read. None of the magazines in the waiting area held any interest for me, so I sat there figuratively twiddling my thumbs.

Until an older man sat next to me and started a conversation. He asked me if I believed that the world is billions of years old.

I replied with a smile, “No. I’m a Christian.”

“Well,” he responded, “do you believe in spirits that live in heaven and come down to earth to inhabit earthly bodies?”

“No. I don’t believe in that either.” His premise was becoming clear to me. He was a Mormon. So I asked, “Are you a Mormon?”

“Yes, and we believe . . .” He started to tell me about the necessity of good works to get into heaven.

When he paused, I (more or less) responded, “I know that’s what you believe, but you see, I can’t find any scriptural foundation for that. Remember Christ said on the cross that it is finished. That is, he completed all that was necessary for the forgiveness of our sins.” I went on to quote the book of James that says faith without works is dead, but that means only that if we don’t love one another enough

to help them in ways we can, we don’t love Jesus enough to follow his commandments. Our works come from our faith, through our love. They won’t earn us anything more. Christ has done it all. To think we can add something more or better to our salvation than when he said “It is finished” is arrogant.

I quoted a couple more passages as the gentleman sat there quietly blinking. Then he was called in for his eye exam.

I have prayed that God would give me opportunities to share his good news, but I never really expected an encounter like this. Did I say anything that would change his beliefs? Only the Holy Spirit knows. But I am glad that I forgot my book.

### LESSONS FROM THE COUNTY JAIL



*Dan Krueger, a member at Mt. Zion, Kenosha, Wis., leads a Bible study in a county jail. He shares the following things he learned from his experiences:*

1. The men at the weekly meeting have different experiences than me, and not just because they spend their days and nights in a cavernous room of 70 bunk beds, a few tables, and a TV, with others who are accused of breaking the law. They ask my opinion about personal situations that are new to me. When you talk to other people, they may bring up something in their past that surprises or even shocks you. But it’s an opportunity to point out the biblical principles that address the situation. You can plainly state you don’t have a simple answer but offer to help them look at what God says.





2. The people you meet may not know their Bibles well. If you are talking to others about Jesus, look for opportunities to assist them in opening a Bible so they can read it for themselves.
3. In the county approved sessions, we have a strict warning to avoid doctrinal differences. Your unchurched friends may ask about something unique to their church background, but it's likely they are just trying to put things into perspective. You can stick to the basics of sin, grace, and peace in Jesus.
4. The faces at the prison Bible study can change each week. It can be daunting knowing that you may only get one meaningful conversation, one opportunity to tell them what Jesus has done for you and what Jesus can do for them. It's a good reminder that our task is to get involved and then let the Holy Spirit continue the work.
5. Feeding yourself at Bible study, especially at church, is huge. The pastoral insight on the context of passages and how they relate to our modern culture gives you confidence, credibility, and flexibility when witnessing. The other benefit is listening to the questions and answers of other members. Just like the unchurched people we want to reach, other members may view the question from a slightly different perspective or background than your own.

## COFFEE EVANGELISM



*Scott Albrecht talks about a unique evangelism program at Grove City, Ohio. He writes:*

Coffee Evangelism is a weekly meeting of evangelists at our local diner

where we fellowship over coffee briefly but then get it in to-go mugs as our meeting is half fellowship/half evangelism (half and half—I honestly didn't see that joke coming).

One of our members maps out a neighborhood near the diner. After our coffee, we hand out coffee sleeves to those who answer the door and leave them for those who don't. The sleeves have information about our church on one side and an invite on the other side to join us at the diner next week to learn more about our church—coffee is on us!

After a year we have visited over 1,600 households. Many friendships have been made, and visitors at our church are on the rise.

The level of skill or education to go door to door is not daunting. The presentation is easy: The ask is to have a cup of coffee for free with church members or attend a service if they do not have a church home.

I pray this idea may inspire others to come up with creative new ways to share God's message

## A MEANINGFUL DAY



*A story from Thomas Gumm, a retired pastor, shows that you will never know when God will give you an opportunity to proclaim his name. You just need to be ready.*

Yesterday I had a young man come in to get info on a storage unit. After talking with him, he told me he was a pastor's kid but was the black sheep. We talked for an hour. He was guilt-ridden and unable to forgive himself. This was causing great problems in his marriage. I took him for a walk to the cross. I explained God's forgiveness. I also explained that God loved him because God wanted to love him. Tears flowed a number of times. It was a very meaningful day.

## TAKING TIME TO REFLECT



In his article "KISS them" [March], Ken Brokmeier recommended that after an evangelism opportunity, we should take time to evaluate and reflect on the encounter.

Ann Behrs, a member at Christ Alone, Thiensville/Mequon, Wis., shares that she writes down a synopsis of each encounter she has. As part of her summary, she asks and answers some simple questions—questions ranging from How did the conversation start? to How did the conversation transition to something spiritual? "It's a great way to try to understand if the encounter was effective, what worked, and what didn't," she says. After she summarizes her experience, Ann says she prays to God to help her learn from this encounter as she prepares for new outreach opportunities.

What's your story? How have you shared Jesus? E-mail responses to [fic@wels.net](mailto:fic@wels.net) with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.



# Belief in the face of DISBELIEF

**Family members could not believe their eyes as they watched the flood waters rise, but their Christian faith moved them to action.**

Dayton Hamann

Simeon and Heidi Wolf live on a farm in Mazomanie, Wisconsin. In August 2018, heavy rains hit the area. Their fields, barns, and house unexpectedly flooded. Though the surrounding land occasionally pooled with rainwater in the past, no storm had prepared the Wolf family for this one.

When asked what emotions ran through their heads at the time, Heidi looked to Simeon and said, “Disbelief. Is that what you were going to say?”

Simeon replied affirmatively, “That’s what I was going to say.”

Thankfully, to pull them through this time of disbelief, the Wolfs had their shared belief in their Savior.

## THE FLOOD

On the night before the flooding, newscasts predicted heavy rains but gave little indication that the neighborhood near the Wolf property would be in danger. The next morning, Heidi drove into Mazomanie to see if other homes were affected. As

Simeon was preparing his breakfast back home, Heidi returned, simply saying, “Mazo’s under water.”

Simeon was skeptical. Yet he looked outside and saw the water rising, quickly approaching a nearby building. This worried him. “I thought to myself, *It’s never gotten that high.*”

Simeon, Heidi, and two of their children who were home from college began to take precautionary measures. They pulled bundles of shingles from their garage to create a makeshift barrier and hold back the water. They drove the family vehicles to higher ground. They gathered school supplies, family photos, and financial records from their basement just as its windows broke open and water poured into the house.

“It was total chaos. It was so surreal. We had no idea what was happening,” Heidi explains. “This was the last house to flood. They never said they were evacuating people from Mazo. The police didn’t come out this far. There were no tornado sirens to alert people. You think of all of the emergency systems that are out there to contact people, and here we felt like we were alone.”

The basement filled up with nine feet of water, the surface of the water within one inch of their home’s ground level.

“There was nothing we could do, and that was the most helpless thing for me,” Simeon says. “I usually have a ‘Plan A’ and a ‘Plan B’ for things that go wrong.

I had nothing. We just had to stand out on the road and watch.”

All of this occurred in a few hours.

## THE AFTERMATH

That evening, the Wolfs were able to return to their land and home. The basement was still submerged. Their farm’s irrigation system alone suffered thousands of dollars worth of damage. Two 250-gallon gas tanks along with other debris had drifted across their cornfield, breaking through a fence.

The Wolfs developed a plan and took action. The first step was to pump the water from the basement using seven sump pumps.

The next day, when only about a foot of water remained in one section of the basement, crews from WELS Christian Aid and Relief and the Wolfs’ church, St. Andrew, Middleton, Wis., arrived to help. Simeon, Heidi, their children, WELS volunteers, and members of the church tore out carpet and drywall and removed debris from the land.

“We had an army of people,” Simeon says.

“I can’t tell you who was here or how many,” Heidi explains. “People were just appearing to help us.”

The Wolfs weren’t the only family this crew helped. The weekend following the flood, more than two hundred volunteers donned neon-colored shirts



(Left) The Wolfs' land was surrounded by what they could only describe as a "lake" of floodwater. Their house is seen in the distance at the center of this image. (Above) On the weekend after the flood, members from St. Andrew, Middleton—including Heidi Wolf, second from the left, and Julia Wolf, far right—helped other residents of Mazomanie with cleanup.

that read "Sent 2 Serve" and helped residents all over Mazomanie. Heidi and her daughter, Julia, joined them to take a break from the recovery efforts on their own property.

"Sometimes it's easier to clean up somebody else's mess than your own mess," Heidi says.

Not only did they assist dozens of families across the city, but members of St. Andrew also were asked about their church and faith, providing them a wonderful opportunity to share the love of Christ with the troubled citizens of Mazomanie.

### THE REFLECTION

The Wolfs continue to receive support from St. Andrew through gifts of money, meals, and greeting cards. Meanwhile, they are helping fellow community members get back on their feet.

One Mazomanie gentleman needed to restore his home after the flooding, but he did not have family or friends in the area to assist him. Simeon repaired the man's drywall, trim, and floors, and Heidi painted. The Wolfs are just now starting repairs on their own home.

The entire experience has been all too familiar for Simeon. Through St. Andrew, he has assisted with flood relief efforts across the United States. After the Mazomanie flooding, his empathy for those affected by floods has only increased.

"I have a lot bigger understanding of what those people go through," he explains. "People talk about floods coming in and you think, *Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's just water. You can get over it.* Now I've got a new sense of respect for how much loss you have. Things aren't quite the same. It disrupts your whole life."

Both he and Heidi credit their faith for their resilient and loving attitudes during these difficult months.

"If I didn't have my faith, I would probably be going crazy," Heidi notes.

"We can't do anything without his help," Simeon continues.

When seeking comfort from God's Word, Heidi likes to turn to 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Simeon looks to Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Elizabeth Zambo of Christian Aid and Relief visited the Wolfs shortly after the flood. To her, their story is a testament to God's presence and work in tragedy.

"Simeon and Heidi have been shaken, but their faith in their Savior remains firmly on the Rock," Zambo said. "They allowed their love for Jesus to rule their hearts and minds and stepped out in faith to help those in need while putting their own needs on hold."

Zambo notes that there are opportunities to help others everywhere, not just in the wake of sudden devastation.

"For those interested in serving as a volunteer for WELS Christian Aid and Relief, I would encourage them to follow Simeon and Heidi's example and share Jesus' love through their actions," she explains. "But don't wait for a disaster to strike in another part of the country to begin serving. Pray for God, our heavenly Father, to open your eyes to the needs of those whom you come in contact with on a daily basis."

Unfortunately, the world will continue to face trials like those that Simeon and Heidi faced. Thankfully, God will also continue to work through his people, encouraging them to act with enthusiasm and kindness, just as he encouraged the Wolfs.

As she reflects on her family's efforts to assist others in Mazomanie, Heidi simply says, "To be there and to help people is totally amazing."

*Dayton Hamann, a staff writer for Forward in Christ magazine, is a member at St. Matthew, Marathon, Wisconsin.*



Learn more about the work of WELS Christian Aid and Relief at [wels.net/relief](http://wels.net/relief). Watch this month's edition of *WELS Connection* to see how volunteers are helping in Florida following Hurricane Michael.

# Embracing a double standard

Earle D. Treptow

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We are to go  
out of our way  
to ask others to  
help, and yet we  
are to help others  
without waiting  
to be asked.

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“I would have been happy to help, but no one ever bothered to ask me.” Comments like that illustrate the importance of the personal touch in encouraging people to serve.

People desire to serve in important ways, to help with tasks that fit their talents, experiences, and resources. But if no one takes the time to approach them directly with a request for assistance, they conclude that their help isn’t needed or the project isn’t important.

Some respond to that reality by longing for the good old days, when an individual could count on others to serve without being asked. There was no need to approach people on a one-on-one basis to ask them to help. People saw a need and acted. In fact, going directly to a person to ask for assistance may have been considered an insult.

Maybe that was the case at one time. Maybe. We sometimes portray the past idealistically. Longing for the good old days does not help us at all. We end up frustrated with others and complaining about them.

We would be wise to let the good old days be the good old days and to choose to work within the current reality. People want to be asked to help, no matter how obvious the need may seem to us. So we ask. If, in humility, we consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3), making a personal request will not seem like a stretch. If we charitably assume that they are already using their God-given resources and abilities in many ways, asking them personally to help in another way seems like the right thing to do.

The old self is quick to draw a conclusion about this. “If I’m supposed to ask others personally to help, then people ought to do the same for me. If they don’t, they are not showing the respect God tells them to demonstrate, so I don’t have to help, and I shouldn’t.” The old self has it

all wrong, because she thinks only about one person: herself.

The new self thinks about it differently. She reflects on how the Lord chose to operate.

He did not wait for sinners to ask him to help. He entered this world uninvited by human beings and opted to live and die on their behalf to rescue them from everlasting punishment. The individual that the Holy Spirit brought to faith through the gospel, without her asking, no longer wants to insist that people must ask her to help. Instead, she desires to imitate God in eagerly serving others.

We need not wait until someone personally asks us to serve. In fact, we must not, because our brother Jesus is always asking us to serve, wherever we find ourselves—at work, at school, in the neighborhood, or at church. In the needs that surround us in our callings in life, none other than the Savior himself is asking, “Please help.” The Savior asks us to be a blessing to others. He asks us to pray for them and to assist them with the resources he has put at our disposal.

We are to go out of our way to ask others to help, and yet we are to help others without waiting to be asked. That seems like a double standard, which we have been taught to avoid as unfair and onerous. In this case, however, we embrace the double standard. It’s what our Savior personally asks us to do.

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*Contributing editor Earle Treptow, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, is a member at Christ Alone, Mequon, Wisconsin.*



# A GOSPEL-FILLED LIFE

## Prayer comes from the heart

Jeffrey D. Enderle

Once preschoolers have acquired the ability to talk, their words just pour out. What tumbles out of their mouths can be a source of great entertainment. What might be slightly embarrassing for parents is mildly amusing to grandparents. Nonstop chatter around exhausted stay-at-home moms converts into a delightfully endearing experience at the infrequent visits with grandparents. Grandparents can't get enough. They soak up every word. They cherish every moment they get to spend with these wide-eyed explorers. While grandparents appreciate the childishness of grandchildren, they still cheer for their growth and work to develop their maturity.

### PRATTLING OUR CHILDISH PRAYERS

Christians can appreciate our relationship with our God in the same way. Our Father loves to hear from his children. He is always available. He invites us to come to him whenever with whatever is on our minds. He cherishes our time with him.

Yet our sinner-saint status distorts even our devotional life. Our natural, default mode for prayer is to approach God to get things we want in life. We blurt our verbal vomit, foaming up out of our feelings about what we think we need.

Hearts filled with pain overflow to express our suffering before God. Anxious, wondering minds prattle incomprehensibly. Awestruck shock at life's unexpected plot twists leaves us open-mouthed and speechless before our Creator. Unexpected joy runs over in blathering ecstasy, unleashing giddy ramblings to our all-knowing God.

Through it all, God delights to hear from his children. Yet our childishness in prayer reveals more about our own hearts than it does about God. We assume we know what is best for God to give us without first consulting God himself. We struggle to find the right words but know exactly what we expect in return.

### DEVELOPING A CHILDLIKE FAITH

Skim through the book of Job. After repeated examples of venting frustration at God's silence (Job 7:11), Job gets a dose of humility. When God finally answers (Job 38,39), Job becomes aware of the childishness behind his arrogance. God-granted humility strips him of his assumed certainties. Job was made to stand dumbstruck in silence before the awe-inducing omniscience of the Lord (Job 40:4,5). He matured. Childlike trust developed where there had been childish demands to God.

Reexamine some of your most cherished psalms. King David and other psalmists express themselves to God, pouring out their souls, exposing the raw emotions of their hearts (e.g., Psalm 4:1; 5:1; 12:1,

2; 13:1,2; 60:1-12; 70:1,2). Yet as we work our way through their poetic outpourings, they take us on a journey of faith development. God directs the psalmists back to his promises. They come to understand that God is not removed from the pain of his children. He's not standing aloof from our concerns just because he isn't granting our every request. Neither, though, is God our personal assistant scurrying after our every whim, hoping his frantic positive responses will bring us the satisfaction we seek.

Prayers come from the heart. But devotional life centered on God's promises transforms our hearts. God's promises show us a Father who gave us his best when he gave up his Son for us. God's promises guarantee God's unconditional love for us through everything life throws at us. God's promises direct us away from the mess of our own hearts to see him as the true source of our joy and hope. As children of God, we come to our Father with childish prattle, looking for repeated assurances of his love. God gives us that assurance in his Word. That reorders our hearts. Prayer then becomes a response of faith to God's gracious words of promise.

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*Contributing editor Jeffrey Enderle is pastor at Christ the Rock, Farmington, New Mexico.*

This is the fourth article in a ten-part series on ways to enrich your personal devotional life.




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The gospel pits  
God's good against  
human evil—  
God's way against  
human dreams.  
The result is conflict.

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## Why?

From the beginning of his life, Jesus was the focus of opposition. Herod wanted to rid his little part of the world of this child whose birth had been announced by a star. Later crowds flocked to him with their diseases. They also came longing to hear the good news for their weary souls. They recognized that Jesus spoke with the voice of authority. Yet opposition persisted throughout his ministry. And we know his opponents orchestrated his crucifixion and unwittingly fulfilled God's plans for the world's salvation.

Jesus told his disciples they would experience the same kind of opposition because of their allegiance to him. He said that he was called a devil and told his disciples that they should not expect anything different (Matthew 10:25). He pointedly said, "You will be hated by all nations because of me" (Matthew 24:9). So it is.

Around the world each month, 255 Christians are killed, 104 are abducted, 160 are detained without trial and imprisoned, and 66 churches are attacked (Open Doors USA). The organization Open Doors ranks countries in the world that are the most hostile to Christians. North Korea has topped the list for 17 years, and countries dominated by Islam fill out much of the top ten list. These figures verify the warning of Jesus that the world will hate us because of him.

Why? Do we promote violence and unrest in our society or in the world? Do we teach hatred? Do we refuse to work or pay taxes? Are we diseased and require quarantine so others will not be infected? Are we somehow not human like other people? We bleed, laugh, cry, work, play, and feel emotions like everyone else.

Yet our Christian faith often creates anger, intimidation, and ridicule. Sometimes Christian students at universities are shamed for their beliefs. Many have felt tension and conflict from friends

and family members because they trust in the promises of Jesus.

Why the hostility on the part of some?

First, we should expect it. Jesus told us it would be our experience in this world just as it was his experience. Of course, that doesn't make it easier to endure. We are his disciples here and now, living where Jesus has placed us. So many Christians have come before us, and many will come after us. Some suffered more than we suffer, but they endured. Opposition persists.

Second, we have a message that the world does not consider important. We think it is. We treasure the message of God's love, Jesus, forgiveness, and eternal life. But the gospel is not friendly to the human heart that prefers to create its own gods and theology. The Christian message challenges the sin within the human heart and dashes the hope that some god accepts everyone no matter what they believe or how they live. The gospel pits God's good against human evil—God's way against human dreams. The result is conflict.

Why persist with this message of God's grace in Jesus? Because Jesus sent his disciples out as his witnesses. As his witnesses, they told what they saw and learned. They could not change what they shared. To change it would be to distort the truth. It might resolve some of the conflict and opposition, but they would be unreliable and unfaithful witnesses.

And why would they change their witness? Why indeed? It was and still is the Word of Life found nowhere else. We believe as those disciples on Ascension Day did—that Christian hope, joy, and peace transcend the understanding of the world (Philippians 4:7). Like them, we are his witnesses. May he help us remain faithful witnesses.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT: REVELATION 12 AND 13

Timothy J. Westendorf

Seven churches. Seven seals. Seven trumpets. The next grouping is comprised of seven mini-visions. They are recorded in Revelation chapters 12–15. We'll cover the first three this month.

### THE RED DRAGON

The first mini-vision plays out in three distinct but interconnected scenes. We see a woman, glorious, “clothed with the sun” and reigning “with the moon under her feet.” The 12 stars in her crown tell us that she represents the church, the bride of Christ, gloriously dressed in the shining righteousness of Jesus, living and ruling with him. Satan, the enormous red dragon, ferociously tried but could not defeat Jesus or derail God's salvation plan. So the dragon, hurled to the earth, turns his murderous attention to ruining the church.

The church seems anything but glorious and influential as she flees into the wilderness. It might even appear that she is abandoned by the Bridegroom and left to fend for herself. But no. She is taken care of by God in that place.

How? The next scene reminds us. The accusing dragon is powerless against the works and Word of Jesus. God's people are shielded from Satan's rage by the power of the Spirit in the gospel of forgiveness. While he has time during the New Testament age (42 months), the devil will try his worst, but armed with the gospel, the church will prevail.

### THE TWO BEASTS

The second and third visions remind us of Satan's two powerful allies. They are represented by a pair of strange-looking beasts. The first emerges from the sea. There is an unmistakable parallel between it and a vision seen by the prophet in Daniel chapter 7. This beast from the sea has characteristics of Daniel's four beasts, whom we're told represent four kingdoms of the earth. So we identify the first beast as representative of ungodly, anti-Christian government during the New Testament age.

All human government derives its ultimate authority from God. However, the prince of this world seeks to use God's gift for his own wicked purposes. Human governments often fall under Satan's evil influence, sometimes even using their authority to wage war against God and his church.

The second beast comes from the earth. It is lamb-like in appearance but dragon-like in speech. This second beast is closely connected to the first. It usurps and wields the power of the first beast; it works wonders to deceive the earth's inhabitants into worshiping the first beast and its image rather than God. Its infamous number is 666. This number seems to represent a counterfeit covenant, seeking to replace Christ and his Word but always falling short of his perfect covenant of grace.

This beast is deceptive and represents

false religions that claim a way to God through works, not Christ. It includes groups that claim to follow Christ but show a beastly character by teaching other than what Christ has taught. This beast includes the visible Christian churches that teach a false gospel based on human effort or righteousness. The preeminent example would be the Roman Catholic papacy, which claims to possess Christ's authority over all Christians. The beast appears innocent but points people to their own goodness and works for salvation. Ultimately the message of this beast drives people away from trust in Christ alone.

### REFLECT ON REVELATION CHAPTERS 12–13

1. Why do you suppose 12:10a is used in communion liturgy (*Christian Worship*, p. 34)?
2. How does chapter 13 help us better understand the past, present, and future when it comes to human governments and religious institutions?

*Contributing editor Timothy Westendorf is pastor at Abiding Word, Highlands Ranch, Colorado.*



This is the sixth article in a 12-part series on the book of Revelation. Find the article and answers online after May 5 at [wels.net/forwardinchrist](http://wels.net/forwardinchrist).

# Tidy up!

Our sinful flesh, with Satan's help, makes our lives messy.  
The Lord gives us the power to clean up.

Becky Schermerhorn

Have you seen Marie Kondo's new show *Tidying Up*? After watching the first show, my husband texted me from the living room, while I was in bed, telling me that this lady is "life-changing." He was mostly referring to her folding method, but either way, I didn't disagree.

The resulting weekend was exhausting and completely liberating. We cleaned out excess books, reorganized a closet, purged some décor items, and organized the kids' crafting supplies. Why did I have an entire box full of broken crayons? Why was I hanging on to sheets for a full-sized bed that we had gotten rid of over a year ago? Kondo's show really motivated me to make changes and restore some order to our home.

However, there was one big hindrance to this. Roommates. Tiny little pack-rat roommates.

Those of you with children surely understand. While getting rid of nearly everything the kids have would spark the wildest kind of joy in my life, it certainly wouldn't for them. I had to wave good-bye to my sought-after, completely minimalist home.

Maybe I'm being a little bit extreme. But this whole ordeal sparked a thought

in my mind. We all have an annoying roommate: our sinful flesh, fueled by Satan. The two clutter up our lives, tripping us into sinning again and again.

What can we do? What can we do when we find ourselves hurting our spouses or friends? What can we do when we fall into our selfish ambitions? What can we do when we find ourselves sharing just that little bit of gossip? What can we do when the devil wins again?

How can we as Christians try to purge our evil desires and sin out of our lives? How do we make choices that will set us up for success? How can we resist temptations?

## **FIND OUR WAY BACK TO JESUS!**

We know Jesus and his forgiveness. We need to turn back to him and repent of our evil desires and sin. Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

## **PRAY ABOUT IT!**

Self-control is not easy. The roommate within is strong. We want to do what is right, but then we struggle. So we pray as Jesus told us, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

## **REVEL IN OUR FORGIVENESS!**

The love of Jesus and his forgiveness put joy in our hearts: "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13,14).

## **BE STRONG IN THE LORD!**

Jesus gives more than joy. He gives power and strength: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10,11).

Unfortunately, on this side of heaven we will never be able to evict our sinful flesh or its ally, Satan, from being unwelcome, cluttery roommates. But thanks be to our heavenly Father for sending Jesus, who forgives us when we fail, and the Holy Spirit, who helps lift us up and strengthens us to resist Satan's temptations.

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